

Early Childhood Care and Education

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Abbreviations

ADM	Area Development Management
CCC	County/City Childcare Committee
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
DCRGA	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Science
DELG	Department of Environment and Local Government
DFin	Department of Finance
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECDU	Early Childhood Development Unit
ECEA	Early Childhood Education Agency
EOCP	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
EYDU	Early Years Development Unit
FETAC	Further Education Training Awards Council
HETAC	Higher Education Training Awards Council
HSE	Health Service Executive
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPA	Irish Pre-School Playgroups' Association
LDSIP	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCCC	National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee
NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association
NCO	National Children's Office
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NCVA	National Council for Vocational Awards
NFQ	National Framework for Quality in ECCE
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Preface

The overwhelming research evidence at international level on the importance of early childhood care and education was one of the reasons why the NESF decided to evaluate the implementation of policy in this area. A variety of valuable official reports that have been prepared in recent years have, however, had only limited impact to-date. The challenge now is to have these implemented as effectively as possible for the benefit of all our children, families and society at large.

This will require leadership and sustained effort, at both political and administrative levels, to put in place the necessary structures to drive forward the process of change and ensure that the necessary momentum and co-ordination of services are maintained into the future.

The attached report was prepared by a Project Team that the NESF established specifically for this purpose. The Team was drawn from the NESF's four main membership strands as well as a number of outside experts with particular knowledge and experience of the policy issues under examination.

More effective and integrated policies are long overdue. These will also need to be under-pinned with the provision of much greater budgetary resources – international comparisons show that we spend less than 0.2% of our GDP on early education and care, compared to the OECD average of 0.4%. Our unprecedented high levels of economic growth in recent years now provide us with a major opportunity to fill this gap.

In-line with its extended mandate from Government, the report was discussed and widely supported at an NESF Plenary Session in June that was attended by a wide variety of invited guests representing Government Departments and State Agencies (such as the National Children's Office, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme Directorate, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, City and County Childcare Committees, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, the Health Service Executive and some of the former Health Boards), and those who made submissions to help us in our work (over

50 of these were received from childcare providers, voluntary and community groups, individual parents, teachers, etc.). All those involved are listed in an Annex of the report.

The report has also been designed to complement a number of other issues relating to childcare policies and the alleviation of child poverty that are currently under examination in other fora such as the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, the NESF and the Special Initiatives under Sustaining Progress.

Finally, the NESF wishes to record its fullest appreciation to the members of the Project Team for all their hard work, commitment and giving so freely of their time. A special word of thanks is called for the Chair, Professor Emeritus John Coolahan, for his outstanding contribution in ensuring that all voices were heard and for bringing the work to a successful conclusion as well as to the NESF Secretariat.

NESF Management Committee

July 2005

Executive Summary

Why a NESF Report on ECCE Now?

This NESF Report is presented following a sequence of major reports on early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland over recent years. It might well be asked why there is a need for another report and what is distinctive about its approach? The answer to this question centres on the very inadequate implementation of policy which has occurred and the very insufficient financial investment in the education and care of our younger citizens. It was in this context that the terms of reference of the NESF Project Team on ECCE were devised as follows :

- To identify what progress has been made in relation to the implementation of recommendations in recent reports and policy documents;
- To develop a coherent policy framework for ECCE; and
- To set out an implementation process with key targets and objectives to be achieved at policy level, within an appropriate time span.

The Team adopted the OECD definition of ECCE which includes “... all arrangements providing care and education of children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content ... it was deemed important to include policies – including parental leave arrangements” (OECD, 2001, p.14).

The Project Team has engaged in multi-faceted action in processing its work. It prepared a detailed analysis and evaluation of relevant reports and policy documents, with a particular emphasis on evidence of implementing policy decisions or recommendations. Team members engaged in dialogue with a host of departments and agencies which have responsibilities for aspects of ECCE. The Project Team also received oral presentations from Irish and international personnel with special expertise and experience regarding ECCE. In response to a request to the public, the Team received 54 written submissions, which it analysed and discussed. The Team also commissioned a research paper to give an up-to-date interpretation of the economic perspectives of investment in ECCE, drawing on available research studies.

Perspectives on Childhood in a Changing Society

In setting the contemporary context for a proactive policy on ECCE, Section II of the Report highlights some of the key socio-economic and cultural changes which have greatly altered the configuration of Irish society since the early 1990s. This Section also emphasises the paradigm shift in Irish public policy and attitudes towards children and it is now better understood that early childhood care and education form the indispensable foundations for achieving the national goal of lifelong learning. Among landmark initiatives and reports in this regard are Ireland's ratification of the *UN Convention on Children's Rights* (1992), publication of the *Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations* (1996), *Strengthening Families for Life* (1998), *Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education* (1998), *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (1999), *National Childcare Strategy* (1999), *National Children's Strategy* (2000), National Children's Office (2000), Children's Act (2001), Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (2001), Children's Ombudsman (2003), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (2003), OECD's *Review of ECCE Policy in Ireland* (2004), Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education's (CECDE) *Insights on Quality* (2004), and *Making Connections* (2004).

It is clear from this selective listing of reports and initiatives that a rich base of ideas, understandings, recommendations, research findings and records of good international practice is available to Irish policy makers. The research and consultative base has been both wide and deep. What is now needed, however, is a comprehensive, co-ordinated and streamlined policy implementation process which will establish high quality ECCE provision for children in those vital formative learning years from birth to six years of age. When viewed from the economic, educational, cultural and social justice policy perspectives, the time is now ripe to take such action.

What Progress has been made on Implementing ECCE Policy?

Section III of the Report is devoted to a policy audit of recommendations made in key policy reports on ECCE. Drawing on the European Commission Network on Childcare and the OECD's *Starting Strong* report a framework of analysis was operationalised under the following seven headings:

- Expanding provision towards universal access,
- Promoting coherence and co-ordination,
- Raising the quality of provision,
- Improving staff training and conditions,
- Adequate investment,
- Developing appropriate pedagogies and
- Engaging families and communities.

Central to all of these issues is the needs and rights of children. A summary of the issues/recommendations from the policy documents since 1998, are included in Annex 3.1 to this Report.

Overall, it is concluded that Ireland rates 'low' in its investment in ECCE and in its commitment to implement policy and improve its international comparative position. Among the characteristics of low investment in ECCE, the OECD identified such factors as:

- National early childhood policies have been weak.
- Several departments share responsibility for policies affecting young children.
- The childcare sector is weakly regulated and conceived as a service for working mothers.
- Public investment is less than 0.5% of the GDP (in the case of Ireland it is less than 0.2%).

The policy audit commends the work of the EOCP, the NCCA and the CECDE on ECCE initiatives. It also recognises the dynamic, "bottom-up" vitality of the voluntary and community sector in ECCE provision, which bodes well for the future. However, the Project Team remarks "we have seen little progress in relation to the implementation of the policy decisions set out in the Government White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999)". The conclusion of the policy audit was that it paints "a picture of inaction, peripheral implementation and drift" despite some worthwhile investment and initiatives over recent years.

What are the Views of Providers and Users of ECCE?

An analysis of the written submissions made to the Project Team is contained in Section IV. These indicated a high level of public interest in ECCE, a comprehensive and focused view of the issues involved and an informed awareness of the policy context and documentation. It was noted that there was a strong convergence of views between the submissions and policy debates in recent years on what is emerging as positive in the provision of ECCE, in what is being criticised as unsatisfactory and in recommendations for improvement. There is, thus, a strong consensus between the views from the research, policy and provider perspectives. The most striking feature which has emerged from the audit of policy (Section III) and this review of submissions is that of a great vacuum in policy implementation, even on issues that have been agreed on by Government.

This Section gives a detailed and up-to-date insight on how agencies and practitioners evaluate the current situation of their proposals for reform. Delivering policy changes and action in the main areas identified in the submissions was considered by the Project Team to be critical to work on improving the design, delivery, implementation, availability and standard of ECCE services and facilities in Ireland.

What are the Economic Gains from Investment in ECCE?

Section V presents a summary of the research on the economic perspectives in ECCE that the Project Team commissioned from the Geary Institute in UCD. One of the leading researchers in the field, Nobel Laureate James Heckman, who presented a paper to a conference in Dublin on 22nd April 2005 reported that ability gaps open up early long before formal schooling begins, and that the highest returns are on early interventions that set the stage for and nurture the abilities needed for success in later life. Most notably, Section V of this report states:

“An important lesson to draw from the Perry Pre-school programme, and indeed from the entire literature on successful early interventions is that the social skills and motivation of the child are more easily altered than IQ. There also tends to be substantial improvement in the children’s social attachment. The social and emotional skills acquired in these types of programmes affect performance in school and in the workplace. The evidence from the Perry Pre-school Programme and the evidence summarised in Carneiro and Heckman (2003) reveals that early intervention programmes are highly effective in reducing criminal activity, promoting social skills and integrating disadvantaged children into mainstream society”.

Following a wide-ranging review of research evidence the conclusion is that :

“The key element from the earlier sections in this paper are that in terms of outcomes for children, ECCE matters. The returns are unquestionable. ECCE provision for all children clearly deserves to be an issue of high political priority”.

This Section also provides a cost-benefit analysis (presented in Annex 5.1) which sets out the net costs of providing a universal pre-school service against the long-term benefits that would accrue. These range from a net benefit return of €4.60 to €7.10 for every Euro invested, depending on the assumptions used.

A Policy Framework and Recommendations for ECCE in Ireland

The Project Team is of the view that this is a time of unique opportunity in relation to ECCE policy in Ireland to harvest the extensive efforts of recent years and to bring together the main components of development into a coherent and logical whole. This will require looking at the care and education needs of young children in a more enlightened way, identifying and removing inadequacies and rigidities of existing provision and providing greater investment to ensure the implementation of policy in a streamlined way. If the opportunity is taken it will be a landmark in Irish social and educational history and will yield dividends, in a variety of ways, to the betterment and quality of life of *all* children.

The Project Team recommends in Sections VI and VII a policy framework and implementation plan for ECCE to cover a ten-year period. This is divided into two phases of five years. At the end of the first five-year period a formal evaluation/ review of progress should take place, the lessons from which should inform the plan for the second five-year period. The aim would be that by the target year of 2015, a comprehensive system of ECCE would be in place, based on best practice principles, as a framework of support for future generations of our youngest citizens.

The policy framework is structured with a vision statement for ECCE “Young children should have access to, and participate in quality education and care services and supports of an internationally accepted standard through a plan implemented over the next ten years (2005-2015).”

The following five principles for ECCE policy are proposed to underpin this framework:

- Valuing children’s competence and contribution.
- Holistic support for young children’s well-being, learning and development.
- Universal access to ECCE for all children, and targeted interventions.
- Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision.
- Building on existing partnerships.

Key objectives are set out in relation to the achievement of these principles and the key actions needed over the next five years are detailed. These form the majority of the recommendations of the Project Team as follows :

PRINCIPLE 1

Valuing children's competence and contribution

- A renewed commitment to implementing the National Children's Strategy should be given by the Government for the remaining five-year period of the Strategy.

PRINCIPLE 2

Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development

- Departments and agencies with responsibility for child and family policy should work together to ensure more effective design and delivery of services. At local level the work undertaken by the County and City Childcare Committees in conjunction with the HSE should be continued and enhanced.
- Child-birth related leave should be provided for the baby's first year of life.
- The period during which Maternity Benefit is paid should be increased incrementally so that by 2009 women will be entitled to the payment for 26 weeks.¹ The cost of this proposal is €100 million (see Section VII).
- For those parents who do not wish to stay at home for the baby's first year, access to a quality early childhood education and care service should be provided.
- The school age childcare policy developed by the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee should be implemented. Key steps to be taken should include supporting the existing community- and school-based infrastructure to provide school age childcare, developing a suitable programme with a strong emphasis on play and design and delivery of training for staff working with children up to the age of 14. Legislation should be drafted/amended to ensure regulation of the school age childcare sector.

¹ Employer representatives on the Project Team were unable to support this recommendation.

PRINCIPLE 3**Universal access to ECCE for all children**

- A National Early Age Development (NEAD) Programme should be developed to support the needs of all children. Core dimensions of the Programme would be :
 - Quality, choice and diversity of provision and seamless delivery of services particularly for the younger age groups. The stock of ECCE places available through full-day, sessional and family day care (childminding) settings should continue to be developed and enhanced so that they can provide quality services for those children from 1 year up to when they are eligible for a free pre-school place.
 - A State-funded high quality ECCE session – 3.5 hours per day, five days a week for all children in the year before they go to school. The cost of this proposal is €136 million per annum (see Section VII).
 - The NEAD Programme should continue the EOCP’s work on enhancing the childcare infrastructure and supporting the work of the County and City Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.
 - Childminder networks should be developed and enhanced to support those who currently provide services and to link with centre-based services.
 - Childminders should be required to register and be accredited like other providers as should providers of school age childcare.
 - Significant reforms of the present infant class system in primary schools should be undertaken urgently. Reforms are needed in physical infrastructure, staffing, reduced adult/child ratios of 2:20, equipment and resources, facilities for play and facilities that support after school care.
 - Serious consideration should be given in new primary schools to campus style developments to incorporate the whole range of ECCE services.
 - Child and Family Centres should be established at local level to provide integrated services to disadvantaged children and their parents.
 - A phased transition should be put in place for Traveller children, to move from segregated services to more mainstream provision.
 - The ‘éist’ programme developed by Pavee Point should be used as a model for training and for working in the areas of diversity and equality within early childhood settings.
 - The National Council for Special Education should work collaboratively with the proposed new early years unit (see below), to develop paths to implementation for children in the 0-6 age group.

PRINCIPLE 4**Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision**

- The NCCA's work on a framework for early learning should be expedited and a detailed resource audit should be undertaken with ECCE providers (including parents) to ensure its satisfactory implementation.
- The Department of Health and Children should put in train the legislative changes required to the Child Care Act 1991 to include childminders and regulation for school age childcare and to develop a system of registration for providers. The ECDU when established should be responsible for implementing this system of registration.
- A unitary inspection and evaluation process for ECCE providers should be developed.
- The CECD's National Framework on Quality should be streamlined with existing regulations so as to develop a single set of standards.
- A national training audit should be undertaken to establish, in more detail, the current state of training in ECCE.
- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, in conjunction with the accrediting bodies should give active consideration to the particular training and accreditation needs of the ECCE sector and the Model Framework developed under the EOCP should be used as a basis for this work.
- A minimum standard of training for ECCE staff should be agreed and phased in over the next five years.
- Community Employment (CE) workers should be well-supported in ECCE settings with mentor-style training by qualified ECCE mentors. To achieve this, the skills base of mentors in ECCE needs to be expanded. In the longer term, CE places in childcare should be replaced by a social economy type model that supports essential services in the community.
- A national pay scale should be established for ECCE workers as a matter of urgency by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
- Measures to address the under representation of men in ECCE settings should be encouraged through active recruitment policies and through networking to support those already in the sector.

PRINCIPLE 5**Building on existing partnerships**

- The Department of Education and Science through its regional structures should encourage schools to develop links with the community-based ECCE infrastructure through the CCC network to plan and develop more integrated delivery.
- The CECDE should bring forward proposals for the more active engagement of parents in the planning and delivery of ECCE.
- In the upcoming talks on a successor to *Sustaining Progress*, active consideration should be given to the employer's role in assisting ECCE.

Implementing the ECCE Policy Framework

- The overall responsibility for the development of and implementation of ECCE policy should reside in one Government Department. The designation of the most appropriate Department is a matter for Government.
- Once departmental responsibility has been agreed, an Executive Office should be established within this Department, under the direct responsibility of an Assistant Secretary. The Office should be called the Early Childhood Development Unit (ECDU). Its responsibility should be to act as the driver for change and to implement the blueprint for action developed in this report.
- An investment envelope for ECCE should be ring-fenced by the Department of Finance and a capitation grant provided to support a free pre-school service.
- ADM should continue to act as the main support agency in the rolling out of a future ECCE programme.
- The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations should be resourced to continue to provide support from a national perspective and to work with its members locally on continued quality development in service provision.
- The City and County Childcare Committees should be strengthened or reconfigured to continue their role as the agents of ECCE at a local level.
- To support implementation, clear indicators should be identified and data collection on provision and outcomes should be developed. Research dedicated to ECCE issues should also be undertaken to get a clear picture on which to base future policy developments.

Finally, the proposed ECCE package will call for significant increases in public expenditure but this can be readily justified as the costs involved will be more than offset by the resulting benefits. Estimates are provided for some components but the cost of the total package will depend on the details of the Government's decision and on the phased introduction of the services proposed by the Project Team.



Introduction

Introduction

- 1.1 ● The unprecedented attention to early childhood care and education (ECCE), which has been evident in a whole range of reports over the last decade or so in Ireland, when contrasted with Ireland's very weak action in this area relative to our international competitors, prompted the NESF to convene a Project Team with the aim of stimulating an action plan for more effective implementation of policy in this area. The NESF is convinced that this is a matter of priority and that current circumstances favour successful action.
- 1.2 ● A key aim of this report is to move the discussion beyond the narrow conception of 'childcare' as a means of facilitating labour force participation by women, to a more inclusive understanding where the central focus is on child development and where care and education are 'inextricably linked' (White Paper on Early Childhood Education, 1999). Heretofore, 'care' and 'education' of children have been treated separately in the policy domain. While the emphasis is on child development outcomes, the report recognises the associated contribution that investment can make to addressing socio-economic disadvantage and women's labour force participation and, in the longer-term, to the substantial economic and social benefits for children, families and society as a whole.

Terms of Reference of the Project Team

- 1.3 ● The Project Team was established by the NESF in October 2004. The main aim of the Team was to develop a long-term vision for the provision of integrated early years services for children from birth to 6 years. The Team had three objectives :
 - To identify what progress has been made in relation to implementing the recommendations of recent reports and policy documents;
 - To develop a coherent policy framework for ECCE; and
 - To set out an implementation process with key targets and objectives to be achieved at policy level over the next five years.

Working Definition of Early Childhood Care and Education

- 1.4 ● The Project Team agreed at the outset that its working definition of ECCE should be inclusive of the broad range of services that are provided for children and families. In this respect, it agreed to adopt the OECD definition which describes ECCE as “... all arrangements providing care and education of children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. ... It was deemed important to include policies – including parental leave arrangements – and provision concerning children under age 3, a group often neglected in discussions in the educational sphere” (OECD, 2001, p.14). Its focus, therefore, was on all children aged from birth to six years and concentrated, for the most part, on education and care services for children outside their own homes.

Rationale for ECCE Policy

- 1.5 ● From the research undertaken into ECCE, it is evident that countries differ in their rationale for developing ECCE services and in the consequent policy objectives that they set. Broadly speaking, the objectives that determine decisions about investment in ECCE can be driven by the economic, the social or educational agendas or a combination of these.
- 1.6 ● The economic rationale for ECCE is based on the benefits to children, families and to society by comparison with the costs incurred (we return to this in Section V). It is also concerned with the longer-term benefits that accrue to societies that invest in ECCE and the “substantial payoffs” (Lynch, 2004) that result in areas like reduced crime, productivity of the workforce and strengthening of the economy. A recent paper presented in Dublin by the Nobel Laureate James Heckman (Heckman, 2005) noted that ability gaps open up early, long before formal schooling begins and that highest returns are on early interventions that set the stage for, and create the abilities needed for success in later life. Without this intervention, the costs to the State can be considerable. For example, recent figures presented to the Dáil Committee on Public Accounts, showed that the average cost of keeping a child for a year in a place of detention is €368,000. A shift in the balance of resources to interventions at earlier stages has been shown to have a marked beneficial impact in other countries.

- 1.7 ● The other compelling argument is the evidence that high quality ECCE is good for children's development. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project in the UK – the first major European study of child development between the ages of 3 and 7 – is a recent testimony to the importance of ECCE. It concluded that the following effects of education in the pre-school period were :
- pre-school experience (at ages 3 and 4) – compared to none – enhances all-round development in children;
 - an earlier start (under age 3) is related to better intellectual development;
 - disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where there is a mix of children from different social backgrounds;
 - good quality can be found across all types of early years setting; however, quality was higher overall in settings integrating care and education;
 - high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children;
 - settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress; and
 - where settings view educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance, children make better all round progress (Sylva *et al.*, 2003).
- 1.8 ● In the United States, longitudinal studies of child development programmes have provided considerable data supporting the positive impact of ECCE. The programmes we know most about like the Chicago Child Parent Centre Programme, the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Perry Pre-School Project in Michigan and the Headstart programme all present considerable evidence to make the case for investment in the early years. The most recent results from the Perry Pre-School Project shows that the life chances of those who participated in the initial pilot phase have improved relative to those who did not participate (Schweinhart, 2004). The experiment identified the short- and long-term effects of a high-quality pre-school education programme for young children living in poverty. It followed the progress of those who participated back in the late 1960s; the most recent findings relate to the original group at age 40.

- 1.9 ● The major conclusion is that high quality pre-school programmes for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance and reduced levels of crime in adulthood. The most recent findings show that these benefits extend to adults in midlife – in relation to issues such as crime prevention, health, family and children. It confirms that “long-term effects are lifetime effects. The cost-benefit analysis showed a \$17 dollar return on each dollar invested” (Schweinhart, 2004).
- 1.10 ● Other positive outcomes for children who attend quality early childhood programmes have also been recorded in a wide range of other international research in this area. These outcomes include being better prepared to make the transition to school (Howes, 1990), being less likely to drop out or repeat grades (Reynolds *et al*, 2001; Campbell, 2002), showing greater sociability and having greater access to health care and improved physical health (Mc Key *et al*, 1985).
- 1.11 ● Another important dimension of ECCE services is that they can produce a multiplier effect on the families of the children and on their communities. For example, studies have shown that mothers whose children participated in quality early child development programmes display lower levels of criminal behaviour and less behavioural impairment due to alcohol and drugs (Olds, 1996). From an ideological perspective, care of children has been regarded – particularly in the Irish context – as a private family issue and not something the State needs to support.
- 1.12 ● The objective of tackling child and family poverty is a recurring feature of many ECCE interventions. For example, in the UK, the Labour Government set out to end child poverty within 20 years mainly through its National Childcare Strategy (launched in 1998) and through initiatives like Surestart². There was an overall expansion of services for all children as part of the recognition that universal access to ECCE would ensure that all children would benefit. Most recently, the Government there has also agreed to support the development of Children’s Centres to provide integrated services for children (we return to these in Section VI).
- 1.13 ● Recent figures on child poverty in rich countries (Unicef, 2005) show that the proportion of children living in poverty has risen in 17 of the 24 OECD member states since the early 1990s. In Ireland 15.7% of children live in relative poverty, a rate that is fifth worst in the countries examined (Mexico, US, Italy and New Zealand being the worst). Rates of child poverty for Denmark and Finland are the lowest at 2.4% and 2.8% respectively. It may not be coincidental that these countries invest heavily in ECCE. The study’s findings also suggest that government interventions (including ECCE) reduce the rates of child poverty; this has been borne out in the UK – the country that experienced the biggest drop in child poverty (-3.1%) since the 1990s and the largest investment in children in this period.

² Surestart is an area-based initiative concentrated in disadvantaged areas in the UK. Its aim is to improve the health and well-being of families and children from birth to 4 years.

Methods of Work

- 1.14 ● With the international evidence in mind, the NESF Project Team agreed on a focused period of investigation drawing from a range of sources. It initiated a call for submissions from the public in October 2004. A total of 54 submissions were received and these are summarised in Section IV of the report.
- 1.15 ● The Project Team also engaged in wide-ranging consultation with a broad spectrum of individuals and organisations from Ireland, the UK and from the international perspective. Details of those consulted are contained in Annex 1.2 and the information obtained has been used to develop the Team's thinking on a range of issues.
- 1.16 ● As part of its work the Project Team also commissioned a paper on the Economic Perspectives of ECCE. To date there has been insufficient Irish-based research on the net economic costs and benefits of investment in ECCE. The findings of the paper are presented in Section V of the report.
- 1.17 ● The Project Team presented its final draft report at a Plenary Session of the NESF in June which was attended by a wide range of interests. The Session – at which the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanifin T.D. gave the keynote address - provided very valuable feedback to the Team on many issues and helped to shape the final report. A list of those who attended is presented in Annex 1.3.

Project Team Members

- 1.18 ● The Team was representative of a broad range of interests and organisations. Its membership was as follows:

CHAIR Professor Emeritus John Coolahan

Carmel Brennan Macra na Feirme

Catherine Byrne INTO/Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Pat Carey T.D. Fianna Fáil

Audry Deane Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Gráinne Dooher Department of Education and Science

Damien English T.D. Fine Gael

Constance Hanniffy General Council of County Councils

Noírín Hayes Children's Rights Alliance

Maura Keating Area Development Management

Hilary Kenny Children's Rights Alliance

Sylda Langford Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Mary Lee Stapleton National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative

Pauline Moreau Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Robert O'Shea Chambers of Commerce of Ireland

Willie Penrose T.D. Labour Party

John Quinlan Department of Education and Science

Heino Schonfeld Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

Sarah Craig NESF Secretariat

Outline of the Report

- 1.19** ● Section II presents an overview of the changing perspectives on childhood in a changing Irish society. Section III presents an audit of policy documents that have been produced since the National Forum on Early Childhood Education was convened in 1998. The main issues highlighted in the submissions process and in other consultations by the Team are presented in Section IV. Section V sets out economic perspectives on ECCE as developed for the Team by the Geary Institute in UCD. In Section VI we present the policy framework agreed by the Project Team and in Section VII we outline an implementation schedule for the next five years as well as the mechanisms required for successful implementation.



Changing Perspectives on Childhood in Ireland

Introduction

- 2.1 ● Traditionally, Irish society paid little public or official attention to the education and care needs of early childhood. However, due to increasing research and knowledge on the significance of ECCE, wide ranging socio-economic and cultural change in our society and the example of other developed countries, this earlier tradition has been changing rapidly over recent years. It is now recognised in a range of official documents, including the Government's White Paper '*Ready to Learn*' (1999) that good quality ECCE is of pivotal importance to the well-being of individuals and society. Many reports and initiatives over the last decade bear testimony to this new interest and policy concern. This forms part of a paradigm shift in public policy and attitudes towards children and in policy where it is now understood that early childhood education and care form the indispensable foundations for achieving the educational goal of lifelong learning.
- 2.2 ● However, following what might be termed this transition process, the key challenge which now faces Irish society is the conversion of the policy aspirations and objectives into implementation strategies which can give Ireland a coherent and well-structured framework for the delivery of ECCE services which would satisfactorily serve the needs of this and future cohorts of young citizens and their parents. The achievement of this would be a landmark in the social and educational history of the State.
- 2.3 ● A host of factors indicate that the time is ripe for a co-ordinated effort by all stakeholders to bring about this most desirable of social objectives. A failure to take action at this historic juncture is likely to be judged very unfavourably in the future, but would also be very costly in terms of human resource development and social cohesiveness.

Some Features of a Changing Society

- 2.4 ● When major policy initiatives are undertaken, they are usually responsive to new changes, needs and developments in the wider social fabric. Ireland provides a very good case study of a society experiencing accelerated socio-economic change, within a concentrated time-span, which requires new policy initiatives such as that on early childhood to support and facilitate the developing needs of that society.
- 2.5 ● The following are key features of our recent socio-economic and cultural changes:
- The latest Census of Population showed that Ireland had achieved its highest population level since 1871 at just over 4 million. The early childhood sector (0-6 years) comprised almost 10% of the total (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Children under 6 years in Ireland, 2002

	No.	% of total (0-6 years)
Under 1 year	54,499	14.2
1-2 years	111,709	29.0
3-4 years	111,422	29.0
5-6 years	107,082	27.8
Total (0-6 years)	384,712	100.0
Total Population	4,043,800	9.6

Source : CSO, National Census of Population 2003.

- The birth rate has been increasing, both in terms of actual numbers and per 1,000 of population since 1994. It rose from 47,929 (representing 13.4% per 1,000 of the population) in 1994 to reach 61,517 births registered in 2003 (representing 15.5% per 1,000 of the population). The population has increasingly become urbanised, with 60% urban based in 2002 and the greater Dublin area comprising 26% of the total population. The percentage of children born to lone mothers is now over 30%.
- Traditionally, Ireland experienced high levels of emigration but this trend has been reversed in recent years. Figures released in 2002 showed that there was net inward migration of 150,000 since 1996. Thus, Ireland has become more multi-cultural and multi-ethnic than formerly, with consequences for a wide range of policies and practice.

- Socio-economic planning has been buttressed by a sequence of social partnership agreements within which ECCE has featured, including *Partnership 2000* and *Sustaining Progress*. The current agreement contains a special initiative on caring, including caring for children.
 - From the early 1990s, Ireland has been experiencing a period of unprecedented economic growth, well ahead of other OECD countries. For example, between 1995 and 2003 Ireland has benefited from an 8% average per annum growth rate. Reversing the earlier tradition of high rates of unemployment, the country has moved to a position of virtually full employment with an active recruitment policy for migrant workers. Inflation rates are now at 2.1% and interest rates are also at a low of 2%. In 2003, Ireland had the second highest GDP per capita within the enlarged EU, which was almost one-third higher than the EU 25 average (CSO, 2005a).
 - The pattern of women's participation in the labour force has been changing. The number of women at work outside the home rose from 483,000 in 1995 to 771,000 in 2004, an increase of 60%. The participation rates for younger women in the 25-34 age group is now well over 60%. Fifty-four per cent of women with a child under 5 years of age are employed. A survey by the ESRI in 1998 revealed that 38% of all parents with children aged 4 years and under rely on some form of paid childcare arrangement. It is estimated that about 200,000 children need childcare to support parents in the labour force. This major and ongoing change in the make-up of the workforce has implications for traditional child-rearing practices. The incidence of both parents wage-earning has become a regular pattern of family life.
- 2.6 ● While the Irish economy experienced very high growth rates, at a broader level, society experienced very compacted and accelerated social change over recent years. The family as a social institution is evolving and was subject to much change including :
- Legalisation of divorce, increased incidence of breakdown and separation, increases in lone parent families and increasing incidence of cohabitation by unmarried partners.
 - Wide-scale publicity on cases of child abuse, including sexual abuse, shocked the body politic and highlighted the need for greater care and protection of children.
 - The apparent influence of established authority agencies such as the churches, the politicians and Gardaí on young people has been reduced. This, coupled with general tendencies towards a more secular society, increasingly influenced by the media and pervasive advertising, has changed the character of society. Consumerism and material possessions have become higher priorities for many citizens. The impact of the ICT revolution has had a permeating influence on work patterns and leisure activities.

- 2.7 ● Many of the elements which can make for a strong, progressive, socially cohesive society are in evidence in Ireland. It is also the case that its social capital is still strong (NESF, 2003) with a good tradition of community activity and local ownership. There is also a great spirit of generosity towards societies less fortunate and developed. There is a strong commitment within the caring professions. There is also a growing concern for the national heritage and the natural environment. Creativity is alive and well with great dynamism in the arts in all their forms – literature, drama, art, music, dance and film. Sport, in all its many manifestations is highly prized, both from a participative and spectator point of view. At the same time, however, Irish society has much potential and need for more development in improving the quality of life of all its citizens.
- 2.8 ● Yet the economic affluence of modern Irish society did not remove poverty for a significant minority of the population. According to recent figures for Ireland, produced as part of the EU Survey in Income and Living Conditions in Ireland (CSO, 2005b) relative income poverty was 23%. Poverty has major effects on children and their educational life chances. High rates of poverty among women are often associated with their caring responsibilities and consequent inability to participate not only in the labour market but in all aspects of society. ECCE has been a priority concern for many of the intervention strategies for disadvantaged areas. It is recognised that early intervention is of crucial importance if children are to move from a disadvantaged status. It is also seen as a response to a multitude of family and community needs to counteract the impacts of poverty. It is also understood that the early years experience of young children in chronically disadvantaged families is greatly impoverished. Support programmes for parents, particularly mothers are also central to successful intervention.
- 2.9 ● A key category for improved policy implementation and support is those most dependent and least able to help themselves, namely children. Their childhood experiences are very important for themselves at this very formative stage, but it is also the case that the young generation represents the seed-corn of the future. Now that a vast array of research and experience emphasises the value of public investment in ECCE, the Ireland of today has the resources to face up to its responsibility and implement policy measures that shape a new future, with beneficial effects for these citizens and society.

Landmarks in the Changing Perspectives on Children and Childhood

- 2.10 ● In moving more directly into the implementation of policy phase, Ireland has a valuable and credible range of reports and initiatives from recent years to draw upon (Box 2.1 below sets these out in chronological order).

Box 2.1

Core Developments in Relation to Children, 1989–2004

- 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified in 1992)
- 1996 Pre-School Regulations
- 1998 *Strengthening Families for Life*
- 1998 *Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education*
- 1999 *National Childcare Strategy*
- 2000 *National Children's Strategy*
- 2000 National Children's Office
- 2003 Children's Ombudsman
- 2004 *NCCA Towards a Framework for Early Learning*
- 2004 *OECD Review of ECCE Policy in Ireland*
- 2004 *CECDE Insights on Quality and Making Connections*

- 2.11 ● Such reports and initiatives serve as striking landmarks of a changed outlook on childhood, including early childhood, by Irish society. However, the import of such initiatives indicates that the change of attitude has been a change in kind rather than in degree. Political and social will is now required to carry the reform perspectives towards their proper conclusion in policy implementation. Those who have the understanding, vision and courage to act will now be working with the current of public opinion, which has been better-informed by the work of many groups since the early 1990s. It may be helpful to outline the main stages in this development of improved attitudes towards childhood, and to follow two strands of thought; one on childhood in general and, the other on educational policy for early childhood.

- 2.12 ● Among key landmarks was the ratification by Ireland in 1992 of the *United Nation's (UN) Convention on Children's Rights*. This historic document may be regarded as the Magna Carta of childhood, and as of utmost significance. In 1993 the Children's Rights Alliance was formed to support the implementation of the Convention in Ireland. Ireland cooperated with the UN Visitation Committee which sought to evaluate Ireland's implementation of the Convention when it reported in 1998. A further report on progress is currently being prepared.

- 2.13 ● In 1991, the *Childcare Act* was passed, with Part VII relating to notification and inspection of pre-school services, becoming operative from 1996. The first Minister of State for Children was appointed in 1994. In 1995, the Children’s Centre (now the Children’s Research Centre) – the first university-based centre with a focus primarily on children was set up. The Ark Children’s Centre also came into existence in 1995 as a cultural centre for children and the arts. In 1995, the Commission on the Family was established and presented its report, *Strengthening Families for Life*, in 1998, including recommendations on ECCE. The *Partnership 2000* Expert Group on Childcare was set up in 1997 and published its report, *National Childcare Strategy* in 1999. In 1999 the document *Children First – National Guidelines* was issued.
- 2.14 ● In the millennium year, 2000, a high level group, with senior representatives from nine Government departments, following a wide-ranging consultation, produced Ireland’s first National Children’s Strategy, *Our Children Their Lives*. This is a strategically important document for children in Irish society and, unusually for such a document, included sections entitled “Ensuring Implementation” and “Monitoring Implementation” in its contents. Also, in 2000, the National Children’s Office was established. The following year, 2001, the Children’s Act was passed. In 2003, the Children’s Ombudsman, which had been promised in 1996, was established. Following the establishment of pilot projects for day care provision for disadvantaged children in 1994, and a small programme of supports for the childcare sector, the supply side recommendations of the *National Childcare Strategy* underpinned the creation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP), under the *National Development Plan* (2000-2006). This is operated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to facilitate parents and especially mothers engaging in the workforce and in training/education. This involved expenditure of €235 million in the period 2000-2004 and it is now planned to spend a further €490 million from 2005-2009 on the Programme. City and County Childcare Committees were established to develop locally focused Childcare Strategies and to support delivery of services at local level.
- 2.15 ● While concerns about care and education for early childhood featured in most of the reports mentioned above, there was also a sequence of developments, which focused more directly on the education issue. During the first half of the 1990s, a major re-appraisal of education policy was undertaken. However, this concentrated on the traditional mainstream system of first, second and third levels. The Green Paper of 1992 and the White Paper of 1995 only paid cursory attention to pre-school education, and then only from the perspective of the disadvantaged. Yet it should be noted that Ireland made provision for children from 4 to 6 years of age in its primary school system dating from early in the nineteenth century. Up to recently, Ireland operated its education system on a limited legislative basis. However, this has greatly changed and, among other legislative enactments, the Education Act 1998 provided a modern articulation of purposes, rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the education

process. It also provided statutory status for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and among its functions was to provide curriculum guidelines for early childhood education, aligned to the revised Primary Curriculum of 1999.

- 2.16 ● With the formal adoption by Government of a lifelong learning policy in 1996, more attention was focused on early childhood and on adult learning. In 1998 a National Forum on Early Childhood was established. Its report (Coolahan, 1998) set out “a way forward” to put early childhood education and care “on a new footing” in Ireland. The Government issued its White Paper: *Ready to Learn*, on early childhood education in 1999, setting out its policy in this area. However, the implementation “Next Steps” section of the White Paper, confined to seven lines, indicated that the implementation would be the task of the Early Years Development Unit (EYDU), but since this has never been established it was not a good augury for progress on implementation.
- 2.17 ● An initiative arising from the White Paper was the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), by the Department of Education and Science, which was officially opened by the Minister for Education and Science in October 2002. Its tasks have been to develop a quality framework for ECCE, to develop initiatives for children who experience educational disadvantage, for children with special needs (see CECDE, 2004a) and to prepare the groundwork for the Early Childhood Education Agency (which was proposed in the White Paper). Among its other activities, the Centre has published two other informative reports – *Insights on Quality; An Audit of Policy Practice and Research (1990–2004)* (CECDE, 2004b) and *Making Connections; A Review of International Policies, Practices and Research* (CECDE, 2004c).
- 2.18 ● In 2000, and again in line with the recommendations of the National Childcare Strategy, the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee was established by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to provide a forum linking Government Departments, Agencies, the social partners and the childcare sector to oversee the development of childcare in Ireland including the delivery of the EOCP and other Government initiatives which support the sector. In 2002, the *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning; Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development of the ECCE Sector* was developed by the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee, with a special emphasis on professional workers in the field. The Revised Primary School Curriculum of 1999 was more cognisant of the early childhood dimension than had formally been the case, and gave useful guidance in this area.

The NCCA has produced a special consultative document *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (2004). It is now developing a curriculum for early learning which aims to provide all children with appropriately enriching, challenging and enjoyable learning opportunities from birth to six years. Other publications of relevance include the recent work on a developmental welfare state (NESC, 2005) where the benefits of a concentration on early childhood are articulated (p.216). The work of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) on the Workplace of the Future (NCP, 2005) also acknowledged that the provision of early childhood care and education is a critical factor in the development of Ireland's workforce of the future (p.87).

- 2.19 ● Prompted by the “surge of policy attention” on ECCE in OECD countries, the OECD, in 1998, launched a thematic study on the issue. Its Report, *Starting Strong* was published in 2001, and drew together a very rich compendium of perspectives and recommendations for action. In the following Section of the Report we explore some of the policy trends that are evident in other countries and how Ireland fares in relation to these. In 2001, Ireland asked for an OECD “short review” focusing on access, quality and co-ordination of ECCE services, as part of a second round of OECD reviews. The OECD report, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland* was published in autumn 2004. This Report makes many valuable observations on its three terms of reference, and also on “financing new measures”.

Towards a Better Future

- 2.20 ● Even from the above outline of reports and initiatives on ECCE which have become available over the past decade, it is clear that a very rich base of ideas, understandings, recommendations, research findings and recordings of good international practice is available to Irish policy makers. The research and consultative base has been both deep and wide. The rationale for further action is well established. What is now needed, however, is a comprehensive co-ordinated and sustained policy implementation approach which, over time, will build on developments to date and establish an enhanced system, for the education and care of all Irish children in these vital, formative years of development and maturation from birth to six years of age.
- 2.21 ● Ireland is now regarded internationally as a developed country with a sophisticated and good quality education system. However, a great weakness in this profile is the gap which exists in our ECCE provision compared with most other developed countries. Despite our impressive economic growth, a range of comparative graphs from sources such as the OECD's *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2004) indicates how relatively poor Ireland's performance on ECCE is – it spends less than 0.2% of GDP on ECCE which is significantly below the 0.4% average across OECD countries (see also Table 3.4). This is also confirmed by the recent OECD review on Irish ECCE, which

states unambiguously, “it is clear that national policy for the early education and care of young children in Ireland is still in its initial stages”. It is time to move beyond this and get an exemplary system well established.

- 2.22 ● Our commitments on ECCE go wider than the national level. Ireland is a party to the EU Barcelona Objectives (2002), which committed countries to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between three and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years of age. If such targets are to be reached it is more than timely to initiate more serious action. In *The Competitiveness Challenge*, 2004, the National Competitiveness Council remarks “pre-primary development is a key determinant of performance at all levels of education” (p.16), and highlights research findings which stress its great importance for cognitive and social development. It concludes, “it is of concern, therefore, that Ireland’s level of investment in pre-primary interventions and early childhood development is lower than nearly every other country benchmarked in the Annual Competitiveness Report ... greater investment now in pre-primary interventions will, over time, result in savings in other programmes designed to address educational disadvantage and participation in later years” (p.18).
- 2.23 ● Thus, when viewed from the economic, social, educational, cultural and social justice policy perspectives, it is clear that it is now time for Ireland to put in place an effective and co-ordinated system of ECCE, now regarded as essential for its national well-being, and to bring Ireland in line with its international obligations and best practice.



Audit of Policy Implementation on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1998–2005

Introduction

- 3.1 ● This Section presents an audit of Irish policy on early childhood care and education (ECCE). It examines the policy documents that have been produced in this area over the last number of years and establishes what has been achieved in relation to implementing the recommendations that were made. The particular aim of this exercise is to benchmark how far we have come in relation to the development of policy on ECCE since the Forum on Early Childhood Education considered it back in 1998³. This synopsis is designed as a dynamic policy backdrop to inform and enlighten the implementation of policy.

Policy Outline

- 3.2 ● As outlined in Section II, a number of key documents have helped to shape the current state of ECCE policy in Ireland at present. Taken chronologically, these are:
- *Forum Report on Early Childhood Education (1998)* – which was the first opportunity for representatives of the major agencies involved in early childhood education to discuss the key issues involved in the education of young children; thirty-three organisations with links to ECCE attended, discussed and consulted on many relevant themes and made recommendations for action.
 - *White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999)* – which sets out Government policy on all issues relating to early childhood education; following on from the work of the Forum on Early Childhood Education, the then Minister for Education, Mr. Micheál Martin T.D. gave a commitment to develop an overarching policy framework which would build on existing provision and improve the extent and quality of service provided. The White Paper was designed to present this framework.

³ Between 1980 and 1998 a range of legislation, reports and initiatives also focused on ECCE. These are presented in summary in the National Childcare Strategy (1999).

- *National Childcare Strategy (1999)* – presents a strategy to integrate the different strands of the then current arrangements for the development of childcare and early educational services; in Social Partnership agreements there was a recognition of the need for childcare services to facilitate an increase in the size of the labour market, increased female participation in the labour market and equality of opportunity between men and women. An Expert Working Group on Childcare was established in 1997 and produced its report, the National Childcare Strategy in 1999.
- *National Children’s Strategy (2000)* – sets out a series of objectives (including ECCE) to guide children’s policy over the next ten years; for the first time, the State presented an overall commitment to children and to the services that they need. The Strategy outlines a “whole child perspective” which recognises the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them. It proposes a more holistic way of thinking about children which reflects a contemporary understanding of childhood; and
- *OECD Review (2004)* – which presents a thematic review of early childhood policy in Ireland. It identifies core features of the Irish ECCE system and proposes areas of change as well as presenting examples of successful ECCE policy in other countries.

Framework of Analysis

- 3.3 ● The Project Team agreed that it should look beyond the Irish context to frame the audit of policy. It examined the forty targets set by the European Commission Network on Childcare (1996) which set out proposals for developing quality over a ten year period. It also examined the work undertaken by the OECD in its ‘Starting Strong’ initiative, which reviewed ECCE policy in twelve countries. At present another round of reviews is underway and a second publication is imminent. This work has helped to raise the profile of ECCE generally and articulate the key aspects of policy and practice that result in good systems. Drawing on this, the Project Team report sets out seven current cross-national policy issues that provide a useful framework for evaluating ECCE policy. These issues are:
1. expanding provision towards universal access;
 2. promoting coherence and co-ordination;
 3. raising the quality of provision;
 4. improving staff training and work conditions;
 5. adequate investment;
 6. developing appropriate pedagogies; and
 7. engaging families and communities.

3.4 ● In the remainder of this Section we use these issues as the international benchmark against which to measure how far we have come in relation to the recommendations made in policy documents over the last 7 years and to progress our thinking on what changes are required. While we use these to structure our analysis, the Project Team wishes to emphasise that underpinning its discussion is the centrality of the child and his/her development. We present best practice in an international context and then we comment on how we fare in relation to these areas in Ireland. Table 3.1 in Annex 3.1 presents a summary of the key recommendations in each of these policy documents that have been published since 1998.

1. Universal Access and Provision

3.5 ● Improving access has become one of the key concerns of policy-makers in the design of ECCE policies. Accessibility incorporates a number of dimensions including availability in rural and urban areas; affordability; length of operation throughout the day/year and availability for children with additional needs. The current EU and international trend is to provide at least two years of publicly-funded care and education before beginning compulsory schooling. In countries like the UK and the US where, in the past, the approach was to limit public provision to those children considered ‘at risk’, there is increasing support for more universal access. This is often in the context that ECCE is viewed as part of the wider education system. UNESCO in its International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 1997), for example, sets out a classification of education levels. The first level, Level 0 is the pre-primary stage which is designed for children 3 years and up and aims to introduce very young children to a school-type environment. Provision can be school-based or centre-based.

3.6 ● Tables 3.2 and 3.3 set out the levels of access to publicly-funded services in Ireland and how we are doing in relation to the Barcelona Objectives. It should be noted that in Ireland, data about children are very difficult to access because they are collected in different ways by different Departments. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Table 3.2 Estimated Participation in Government-financed Services (full and half-day)

	Ireland	Barcelona Targets
0-3 years	10-15%	33%

Source : OECD, 2004.

- 3.7 ● By comparison with other OECD countries, ECCE provision in Ireland has remained relatively static in the period from the 1970s (when other countries were expanding provision for 3 and 4 year olds).

Table 3.3 Participation in Full-time Education by Age 2002/03

	Ireland		Barcelona Targets
	No.	%	%
3 years and under	960	1.7	
4 years	27,043	47.5	
5 years	55,465	99.6	
Participation rate			
3-6 years		49.6	90.0

Source: Department of Education and Science, 2004.

- 3.8 ● Consequently, we have by far the lowest rate of enrolment of three year olds in State-funded ECCE by comparison with other countries. About 16,400 pre-schoolers (aged 3 to 5 years) are attending childcare services which have received support under the EOCP and the Programme also caters for about 6,000 younger children. We are still, however, far from the targets set in the Barcelona Objectives.
- 3.9 ● There is a degree of ambiguity about what constitutes ECCE in the Irish context. We have a State-funded service for 4-5 year olds through the State's infant sections of the primary school. What we know from the data available though, is that enrolment rates for 4 year olds is only about 50% "a surprisingly low enrolment rate by OECD standards given that provision is free of charge" (OECD, 2004b). This may be due to a number of factors including :
- (i) Parents do not regard infant classes in primary schools as the most appropriate setting for their children.
 - (ii) The short duration of the infant class day is not suitable to the needs of working parents who require full day provision.
 - (iii) The enrolment process which takes place once a year cuts off access for those whose 4th birthday comes shortly after that but are deemed ineligible.
- 3.10 ● It is likely that all three of these factors militate against higher participation rates of 4 year olds at present.

- 3.11 ● The move towards universal access to early years services has not been a key part of Government policy commitment to ECCE, despite the current trend in other EU countries to work towards this objective. The main intervention models are the EOCP and provision for children in primary school (as well as some provision for children with special educational needs or who are disadvantaged). There is not, as yet, the comprehensive coverage that would be required if a seamless delivery of provision for all children were to result.
- 3.12 ● The National Childcare Strategy is focused on childcare provision and the development of quality and is driven by i) the demands of the labour market and ii) equality for women. The EOCP places a special emphasis on parents who are economically active or who may be preparing to rejoin the labour force through training or employment. However, the separation of care and education creates a lack of synergy at policy level which is then mirrored when it comes to provision on the ground.
- 3.13 ● The National Childcare Strategy proposed a number of measures to improve supply including grants for providers, tax relief for employers to provide childcare for their employees and broadening provision for low income families. While the EOCP has, to end 2004, delivered 24,600 new centre-based childcare places and is expected to deliver about 12,500 further places by the end of the current Programme in 2007, issues of affordable access still apply particularly in areas of highest disadvantage. The Childhood Development Initiative/Dartington Social Research Unit research carried out in Tallaght, for example, showed that there were only 300 pre-school playgroup places for 3,000 children aged 0-4 years in Tallaght West.

Addressing Disadvantage/Special Needs

- 3.14 ● As noted earlier, research in the US and in other jurisdictions has found that the children of parents in disadvantaged communities greatly benefit from ECCE and opportunities for participation in pre-school care and education equips them better for school and for life. In the Irish context, existing policy provides for childcare and family support in disadvantaged areas, Traveller pre-school children and children with special educational needs. The EOCP makes staffing grant supports available to community-based not-for-profit childcare services which offer childcare at reduced cost to families where the parents are disadvantaged and are in employment or are preparing for labour market participation through education or training. A small number of 3 year olds in disadvantaged areas are also catered for in the Early Start Programme. While the Traveller pre-schools have been evaluated (as recommended in the Forum Report) areas for change highlighted in the evaluation have not yet been followed up on and the OECD in its 2004 report concludes *“the further development of early intervention programmes ... for Traveller children ... will be the acid test of national policies to combat poverty and achieve social inclusion”* (p.80).

- 3.15 ● The OECD recommends that the issues raised in the Forum Report in relation to children with special educational needs should be implemented. These include early identification and intervention, support for the ECCE sector and training. The White Paper contains a significant number of recommendations in this area but the focus is mainly on the early years of primary school. However, some of the key aspects of pre-school provision include supports for those who run pre-school services for children with disabilities and access to an early education expert and this has not been followed through on.

2. Coherence and Co-ordination

- 3.16 ● One of the issues in ECCE policy internationally is the need for coherence and co-ordination of policy. Experience has shown that this is facilitated by integrated administrative responsibility at national and local levels particularly in relation to issues such as a child's transition from ECCE to school, and in the support for holistic service provision for families and children.
- 3.17 ● In Ireland, lack of co-ordination is an underlying systemic feature of policy development in the ECCE sector. This was a key concern of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education and the White Paper. One commentator noted, "*... the fact that policy is being driven by different agendas, under the direction of different government departments, continues to hinder the development of an integrated policy for the support of high quality early childhood services for all young children*" (Hayes, 2002). It was also an issue in the National Childcare Strategy and led to the formation of the CCCs under the EOCP. In 2004 the National Children's Office established a High-level Group of senior officials to look at the issue and to report to the Cabinet Committee on Children and the results are awaited.

Central Level

- 3.18 ● Most of the policy documents reviewed (see Table 3.1) call for the integration of policy into a single Government department or agency. However, what we have is ECCE policy shared across a number of Departments. Both the Forum Report on Early Childhood Education and the Government White Paper call for the establishment of an Early Years Development Unit in the Department of Education and Science (DES) (or as a shared initiative between the Departments of Education and Science and Health and Children in the case of the Forum). However, this has not been put in place despite calls by the OECD for specialist expertise in the ECCE area to be located within the DES.
- 3.19 ● Similarly, the Early Childhood Education Agency, as proposed in the White Paper has not been established. Its aim was to act as the executive and administrative centre for early childhood education provision including inspection and evaluation. Instead the Department set up the CECDE as the forerunner to this Agency.

- 3.20 ● Efforts to improve co-ordination have also been a core feature of the National Childcare Strategy and the EOCP. A National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC) was established by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to oversee and to advise on the EOCP. A mid-term review of the EOCP (2003) recommended that the role of the NCCC should focus on issues around future strategy and policy development within the childcare sector. Its achievements to date include the development of equality and diversity guidelines for the CCCs and the Model Framework (see below).
- 3.21 ● In the National Childcare Strategy a National Childcare Management Committee was proposed which, although having the same focus as the NCCC, would serve as a more powerful executive structure. The OECD report concluded similarly that the NCCC should be transformed to become a National Policy Committee for Early Education and Care. An Interdepartmental Committee and an Advisory Expert Group – both of which were proposed in the White Paper have also not been put in place. What we see then at national policy level is a failure to engage coherently with ECCE policy and a lack of systems at the institutional level to translate policy into practice. Even with Government agreement, as expressed in the White Paper of 1999, six years ago, implementation of the agreed policy initiatives on co-ordination has not happened.

Regional and local level

- 3.22 ● The Forum Report on Early Childhood Education recommended that capacity building should take place at a local level. Some of this work is evident in the work of the community and voluntary sector. At a more structural level, the County and City Childcare Committees (CCCs) are now in place to deliver and to co-ordinate services at a local level. The structures were specifically established in 2001 under the EOCP and have been assigned as the key local component in the development of a co-ordinated approach to quality childcare in Ireland. Thirty-three CCCs have been set up around the country. Each Committee has approximately 22 members who are representative of the key stakeholders in each county, including:
- Parents
 - Childcare Providers
 - Farming Organisations
 - Employers
 - Community and Voluntary Sector
 - National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
 - Trade Unions
 - LDSIP and Community Partnerships
 - Statutory Bodies/Government Departments
 - Other Relevant Stakeholders

⁴ An interdepartmental Childcare Synergies Committee does, however, exist to advise the NCCC and to develop co-ordination between relevant Departments.

3.23 ● The main focus of CCCs is to co-ordinate the advancement of quality childcare provision within the county. To enable this to happen, each CCC developed a five year Childcare Strategic Plan (up to 2006) based on a shared vision and analysis of the needs within the county. Each CCC receives funding from the EOCP for the operation of the Committee allowing them to employ staff and implement actions contained in their Strategic Plans. The role of CCCs is in addition to other existing support and advisory services (statutory and non-statutory) and is there to reinforce, enhance and provide a coordination mechanism at county level. Chairs of the CCCs are now *ex officio* members of the County Development Boards which enables the CCC to ensure that childcare is positioned as a key issue in forward planning for individual counties. The OECD proposed that these CCCs should become County Early Education and Childcare Committees and that planning and management of ECCE services would be decentralised. The report also proposes the establishment of 50 or so Child and Family Centres (we return to this in Section VI).

3. Quality of Provision

- 3.24** ● International research has shown (see for example, Melhuish, 2004) that investment in the following aspects of quality have the greatest benefit:
- well-trained staff that are committed to their work with children;
 - facilities that are safe and sanitary and accessible to parents;
 - ratios and group sizes that allow staff to interact appropriately with children;
 - supervision of staff;
 - staff development that ensures continuity, stability and improving quality; and
 - provision of learning opportunities for children.
- 3.25** ● A recent review of the international experience of quality in ECCE by the CECDE (2004c) identifies the factors that are important. The key to ensuring this is a co-ordinated and integrated policy framework for ECCE.
- 3.26** ● The most significant indicator of quality is the ECCE workforce. High levels of staff turnover and problems of retention are frequently a feature of practice in the ECCE. This is largely a result of unfavourable terms of employment linked to the issue of training and qualifications (see below) and the low status that has been afforded childcare in the past. This needs to become a policy focus. The National Childcare Strategy set out clearly its recommendations relating to staffing and qualifications. In particular, the recommendation that a national pay scale be developed for childcare workers has not been implemented.

- 3.27 ● Before the National Childcare Strategy there was limited debate about quality ECCE in Ireland. However, since then, we have seen :
- Commitment of EOCP funding (€85 million) for quality initiatives mainly to support the work of the CCCs and the NVCOs as well as capital investment to improve the physical infrastructure.
 - Work by the CECDE on quality which includes a countrywide consultation on quality issues (CECDE, 2003), a national review of quality in ECCE (CECDE, 2004b), an international review of quality (CECDE, 2004c) as well as an international conference held in Dublin on ‘Questions of Quality’ in September 2004.
- 3.28 ● Taken together, they represent significant progress in relation to our understanding of quality in ECCE and what is needed in an Irish context for quality to be an integral part of all ECCE services.
- 3.29 ● The OECD Review proposed the development of national goals and a quality framework to improve early years provision in Ireland. The need for a national standard was also highlighted in the White Paper and it proposed the development of a Quality in Education (QE) mark. Without such measures of quality it is difficult to assess where we stand with regard to good practice. The National Childcare Strategy also acknowledged that high quality is crucial to the future development of ECCE and under the EOCP quality issues are supported through the work of the NVCOs and the CCCs and through a number of innovative projects. These initiatives include supports to networks of providers to ensure that they address issues of quality collectively with a view to informing practice. As a result, there has been an increase in the publications on quality by the voluntary childcare providers (see CECDE (2004a) for a detailed overview).
- 3.30 ● One of the key developments in quality is the work by the CECDE on developing a National Framework on Quality for ECCE (2005, forthcoming). When in place this will provide guidelines and standards for quality provision in the early years. We discuss this in more detail in Section VI.

Inspection and Regulation

- 3.31** ● Much of the international debate on quality highlights the need for standards in provision and for a process of regulation and ongoing inspection and review. In the Irish ECCE system there are two forms of inspection – one for the 4-5 year olds in Primary Schools (through the DES Inspectorate) and one carried out by Health Boards on childcare facilities (under the Childcare [Pre-school Services] Regulations 1996). Calls for a system of registration have been made in most of the policy documents. The benefits of registration are that it puts an onus on the State to licence a service. It also empowers the State to refuse/revoke registration (see National Childcare Strategy, p.23). The White Paper proposed that the Early Childhood Education Agency (ECEA) would be set up to inspect services and to recruit its own inspection staff but that the Schools Inspectorate would remain in place. The ECEA has not been established and consequently this proposal has not been acted on.

4. Staff and Working Conditions

- 3.32** ● A great deal of the research on ECCE shows a strong link between well-trained and supported staff and the quality of the services delivered. Moss (2000) identified the problems posed by the diverse levels of training in the ECCE sector, the value placed on this work by society generally and its impact on retention rates of staff.
- 3.33** ● A specific target on levels of training has been set by the European Commission Network on Childcare. This states that the future development of the ECCE sector should aim for a minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children to have grant-eligible training of at least 3 years (Target 26 of the European Commission Network on Childcare Action Programme, Quality Targets in Services for Young Children).
- 3.34** ● All of the Irish policy documents highlight the need for a training and qualifications framework to identify the core competencies required for ECCE. Recommendations have been made in the Forum report and in the OECD Review on the need for review and reform of teacher training so that greater priority is given to the ECCE aspects of the training and that the option for specialising in the ECCE area becomes a reality. Support for Early Start staff is also recommended in the OECD report as well as the establishment of a networking system between Early Start projects.
- 3.35** ● The existing Child Care Regulations, when introduced in 1996, did not include any reference to qualifications of childcare workers or what the desired level of training should be. Despite that, there was an increase in numbers on the then NCVA (now FETAC) Level 2 training. However, at present, opportunities to take up training are limited and distance learning, e-learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning are in short supply. While our consultations indicate some improvements, the scale of the changes needed has not been addressed.

⁵ At present childminders are exempt from notification except in cases where they mind more than three children (not including their own).

- 3.36 ● Under the EOCP, the NCCC produced a Model Framework for Training in ECCE in 2002. A wide range of interests and groups inputted into the process. The main features of the framework are identified in Box 3.1 below. The implementation of the NQAI's National Qualifications Framework offers a major opportunity for this work to be progressed as it provides the structure for ensuring coherence in relation to all education and training.

Box 3.1

The Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development for the ECCE Sector

This Model Framework sets out the occupational profiles and core skills of those working in the sector (with children aged from birth to 8 years). The critical purpose of the framework is to allow those working in this sector to identify clearly where they are located in terms of their own professional development and to make decisions about future professional development.

The Framework was designed to demonstrate flexibility with regard to progression and the document states that mechanisms for recognising and accrediting learning are key to ensuring that the framework becomes a reality. The Framework is based on a series of core values and core standards for the ECCE sector. Core knowledge and skills in six areas – child development, personal and professional development, social environment, health and hygiene, education and play, communications, administration and management are set out in the Framework.

A key challenge in the Model Framework is to make training and qualifications accessible to practitioners. Converting existing qualifications and experience into an agreed qualifications currency is also of major importance. The Framework proposes a flexible modular structure. The importance of procedures which facilitate the award of credit for prior learning is also highlighted as is quality assurance.

Source : Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2002.

5. Adequate Investment

- 3.37 ● In market-driven economies, the question – why governments need to be involved at all in financing ECCE services and supports for children and families – is frequently posed. Cleveland and Krashinsky (2003, pp. 25-26) identify two reasons why this should be so :
- to transfer resources to families with young children as this recognises the high cost of raising young children; and
 - ECCE policies must provide incentives and financial support to make decisions which are most positive for the long-term interests of children, families and society. This may involve the provision of accessible, quality services with or without parent fees.

- 3.38** ● The OECD acknowledges that adequate funding is essential to ensuring that all children have equitable access to quality ECCE and that their parents should have a choice in selecting services. However, the experience of investment levels across countries varies significantly. In the OECD's *Starting Strong* review the following issues about funding were highlighted :
- in almost all countries reviewed, the governments paid the largest share while parents contributed about 25-30%;
 - direct provision through services and schools makes up the bulk of government assistance; and
 - a range of financing mechanisms have been adopted to improve affordability including direct funding, fee subsidies, tax relief and employer subsidies.
- 3.39** ● Without adequate investment in ECCE, it will continue to be a much neglected area of policy. The EOCP provides substantial funding for investment in developing and supporting childcare but overall investment in early childhood education remains relatively low by comparison with other funded aspects of education. Table 3.4 below shows expenditure on educational institutions for a range of OECD countries including Ireland. As can be seen from the figures presented, the level of ECCE expenditure in Ireland is negligible compared with expenditure at other levels, and the rate for pre-primary education recorded for Ireland at less than 0.2% of GDP differs greatly from that of 0.7% for Norway and 0.8% for Denmark. Ireland's expenditure on pre-primary education also falls short of the 0.4% OECD mean.
- 3.40** ● The OECD and the Forum reports both advise a sharing of costs across Government Departments. In addition, the OECD recommends a rationalising of services using the local school as a focal point. None of this work has taken place to date.

6. Developing Appropriate Pedagogies

- 3.41** ● The most significant development in relation to pedagogy (which refers to the theory of teaching) is the consultative document '*Towards a Framework for Early Learning*' which the NCCA produced in 2004. This work stemmed from the recommendations in the White Paper on Early Childhood Education that there should be a specimen curriculum for pre-school children and a less formal curriculum for children from birth to three years (we return to this later in Section VI).

Table 3.4 Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP (2001) in selected OECD countries

Country	Pre-primary (3 years plus)	Primary/ Post-primary	Third-level
Austria	0.5	3.9	1.2
Denmark	0.8	4.3	1.8
Germany	0.6	3.6	1.0
Ireland	<0.2%	3.1	1.3
France	0.7	4.2	1.1
Poland	0.4	4.0	1.1
Portugal	0.3	4.2	1.1
United Kingdom	0.5	3.9	1.0
United States	0.5	4.1	2.7
Country mean	0.4	3.8	1.3

Source : OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2004.

3.42 ● In the infant classes in primary schools, the key recommendation to improve quality of service – which permeates most of the policy documents – is the reduction in the teacher : child ratio. In addition, the OECD proposes that a more active pedagogy should be developed for the younger classes so that learning is not ‘didactically imposed’ on young children. As one research paper puts it “the fact that teachers appear to see play as a discrete classroom activity rather than an all-pervasive methodology, for example, is a weakness of our infant school system” (Murphy, 2005). This is a serious concern as play is the way that children learn in the early years.

7. Engaging Families and Communities

3.43 ● Trends internationally are towards the development of partnerships between parents and care-givers and also for a wider relationship with the local community where the service is located. Many countries now recognise and encourage the development of links between the home and the ECCE setting and some programmes encourage home visits.

3.44 ● All of the policy documents are agreed on the need for parental engagement in the provision of ECCE. This means not only the active involvement of parents in the services that are provided for their children but also parenting education. The OECD recommends that the CECDE should carry this forward but little has happened in this area to date.

Research and Information

- 3.45 ● In addition to the above issues, the policy documents are also agreed on the need for research on and data for ECCE. At present in Ireland there is a lack of uniform data on which to base policy decisions. **To support implementation, clear indicators should be identified and data collection on provision and outcomes should be developed. Research dedicated to ECCE issues should also be undertaken** to get a clear picture on which to base future policy developments.

Where we Stand

- 3.46 ● Overall, Ireland rates lowly in relation to its investment in ECCE and in its commitment to implement policy to improve our international position. When the OECD came to address the Project Team, this was clearly the message that emerged from the typology of early childhood systems presented (see Box 3.2 below).

Box 3.2

Typology of Early Childhood Systems

High Investment Public Provision Model : Is found essentially in the Nordic countries. Children's rights to society's resources are widely recognised. Investment is over 1% of GDP. Programmes are designed to support the developmental potential of young children and the needs of working parents. Little difference is made between care and education services and investment patterns across the age group 1-6 years are continuous and integrated.

Low to Mid-Investment Pre-primary Model : Is found in most European countries (outside Nordic group). Government provides large-scale educational services from 3 or 4 years to compulsory school age. Political discourse focuses on learning and laying the foundation for literacy and numeracy. Public investment is 0.4 –1% of GDP.

Low public investment, Mixed Market Model : Found in **Ireland**, Australia, Canada, Korea and the US. High value is placed on individual family responsibility for young children. National early childhood policies have traditionally been weak. Several departments share responsibility for policies affecting young children. The childcare sector is weakly regulated and conceived of as a service for working mothers. Public investment is less than 0.5% of GDP.

Source : Bennett, 2005.

Conclusion

- 3.47** ● From the audit of policy and the literature on ECCE, it is clear that much can be learned from the experience of other countries. There is an emerging consensus that a number of conditions are needed at policy level if we want to ensure that quality delivery of ECCE services is to be the end result. We return to these issues in Section VI when we present our recommendations.
- 3.48** ● The audit shows little progress in relation to the implementation of the policy decisions set out in the Government's White Paper, particularly in relation to the structures that are needed to facilitate greater levels of integration of care and education. Aspects of the National Childcare Strategy have been implemented mainly through the EOCP and these are to be welcomed, particularly the work on quality, childcare supply and the establishment of CCCs. However, clearer direction is needed to integrate the strands of service that make up the ECCE area.
- 3.49** ● Overall, we see a picture of relative inaction, peripheral implementation and drift. This policy drift and inaction in this crucial area of national importance should not be continued. It is now time that policy decisions and authoritative recommendations should be considered by the responsible Departments and agencies with a view to their effective implementation, monitoring and regular evaluation.

IV

Summary of Submissions made to the Project Team

Introduction

- 4.1 ● The Project Team instigated a number of initiatives, designed to collect information from a broad range of sources. Of particular relevance to its work, was the submissions received from organisations and individuals. A summary of the issues contained in the submissions is presented below. The submissions are complementary to, and equally indicative of, issues raised in the audit of policy documents outlined in the previous Section.

Overview

- 4.2 ● In October 2004, the Project Team placed a call for written submissions on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the main national newspapers. This resulted in a total of 54 submissions from a range of individuals and organisations with an interest in or experience of this area. The vast majority of these were from voluntary organisations working with or on behalf of children and their families. Submissions were also received from a number of individuals, statutory agencies, schools/colleges and local services. A list of those who made submissions is presented in Annex 4.1.
- 4.3 ● It should be noted that the Project Team agreed, in issuing the call for submissions that the focus should be, not on policy *per se* but on the everyday delivery of services and the issues that face local providers, parents and children.
- 4.4 ● While the majority of the submissions received were broadly focused on a range of issues relating to ECCE, some focused on particular thematic areas, e.g. health and nutrition, while others focused on children with additional needs, e.g. children with learning difficulties, children from ethnic minorities, and children from low income families.

Current State of Service Provision

- 4.5 ● The vast majority of submissions described current ECCE services and provision as comprising a strong community early years sector, with dedicated and committed staff. Many submissions welcomed the

recognition now being given to ECCE in official documents because this has raised the profile of ECCE and laid the foundations for enhancing the quality of existing services and provision. One submission identified a range of developments as making a significant contribution to national policy on ECCE, as follows:

“Increasing funding through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, the return/entry of increasing numbers of women to the labour market, the launch of the Primary School Curriculum, the establishment of the County Childcare Committees and the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education have contributed to the elevation of early childhood education to the national policy agenda.”

- 4.6 ● Support was also expressed for the safeguards provided by existing legislation, for example:

“Current services are subject to legislation and to various rules and regulations. These incorporate statements about standards and quality and provide an important safeguard to service users.”

- 4.7 ● Considerable attention was drawn to the contribution made by the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) in terms of understanding the childcare needs of working parents. The EOCP grants have also meant significant improvements, particularly in terms of the quality of premises and equipment available for childcare services. The work of the City and County Childcare Committees was also welcomed in many of the submissions received. One submission put it as follows:

“[They] ... offer a diverse range of much needed support to Early Years Providers/Practitioners working on the ground. The considerable expansion in service provision since 2000 is largely due to the steadfast work of the County Childcare Committees.”

- 4.8 ● The fact that certified training in childcare is now much more widely available was seen as a positive development, although many submissions recognised that much more work remains to be done in this area. Submissions also highlighted the progress being made by services to address quality issues and, in this context, made frequent reference to the introduction of pre-school regulations and the Quality Improvement Programme. Other positive aspects include the development of more collaborative approaches to delivering early years care and education, the increasing involvement of parents in ECCE and the increasing number of training, information and networking opportunities for stakeholders.
- 4.9 ● The growing level of importance attached to play-based learning was also described in a positive light, for example:

“I think that the focus on play-based learning for young children is now being recognised and re-valued through initiatives such as Highscope, I.P.P.A. Quality Initiative and other quality initiatives that aim to support practitioners.”

- 4.10 ● Positive descriptions of the various learning and development methodologies employed by pre-school services were noted. According to one submission:

“I think that the availability of different methodologies e.g. Steiner, Montessori, Highscope, playschool etc. is in children’s best interests as not all children blossom in the same way”.

- 4.11 ● Although there have been positive developments in the ECCE area, there was a general consensus across the submissions that current facilities and services for children aged 0-6 are inadequate to meet all of the needs of children, parents and the wider community. There was also a consensus in relation to the key problems affecting the delivery of good quality and accessible early childhood care and education in Ireland. A common point of concern was the State’s failure to commit to and invest in an appropriate pre-schooling system. One submission summarised the importance of investing in early childhood in the following way:

“Early childhood is a critical time for learning and development with both immediate and long-term consequences. It warrants investment over and above any other age group.”

- 4.12 ● Much criticism was levelled at the Government’s failure to deliver on many of the recommendations set out in the policy documents that have been produced over the last number of years.

- 4.13 ● Submissions questioned the level of Government commitment to primary schooling compared to that of early years care and education. Many highlighted the gaps in service provision for children aged 0 to 3 years. One submission summarised the problem for children in this age range in the following way:

“... present provision comes under the auspices of the voluntary agencies and as outlined previously, there is no national plan for the delivery of optimum models of early intervention. Therefore this leaves the voluntary agencies, in many cases, in an ad hoc position. The quality of early intervention services lies at the mercy of the individual agencies ...”

- 4.14 ● Government policy for children in the 0-3 age range was also strongly criticised, for example:

“We are also concerned that many children can only access a service while their parents are involved in courses etc. and must relinquish their place when the parent moves on. At present, childcare funding focuses on supporting parents in returning to work and training. We need to ensure that funding also considers the needs of children and is designated to ensure continuity of care for the most vulnerable children.”

- 4.15 ● While the submissions welcomed the Government’s commitment to supporting women to return to the labour market, they argued that this should not be the underlying principle in the design, delivery and orientation of early childhood care and education services. Here emphasis was placed on the need to develop a more child-centred early care and education system because, as one submission put it:

“... children have needs and rights of their own separate from that of the labour force and ... we need to act on what we know currently is in children’s best interests when designing how services will develop into the future,”

- 4.16** ● Another consideration was that there are too many Government departments involved in designing and delivering ECCE policy. According to many of the submissions, this has led to a lack of consistency and co-ordination across services, insufficient and unreliable funding, and an unnecessary and burdensome amount of bureaucracy for service providers. One submission simply said:

“Childcare falls between too many departments and is funded in a haphazard way. Services for children under 6 should be a basic provision from the State.”

- 4.17** ● Current services and facilities were also described as being affected by inconsistencies in Government policy, reflecting the involvement of a range of Government departments and a lack of coherence and coordination across these departments. For example, it was stated that while the Department of Health and Children pre-school regulations requires a ratio of 1 member of staff to 3 babies, the required number of staffing grants to meet this quota is affected by a strict cap within bands set by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- 4.18** ● Other points relating to current services and provision for children aged 0-6 focused on the cost of services, access and availability, funding and resources, training and qualifications, and inspection and regulation.

Cost of services

- 4.19** ● According to the vast majority of submissions, the cost of accessing early childhood care and education in the private sector is either too high or prohibitive for many families in Ireland. It was suggested that parents spend an average of 20 per cent of their earnings on childcare, compared to an average of 8 per cent in other European countries. A number of submissions noted that these high costs discriminate against people from disadvantaged backgrounds. One submission captured the consequences of this in the following way:
- “... by excluding children from disadvantaged backgrounds, inequality in education becomes evident “at the starting gates of school” (OECD, 2004:7), and is perpetuated through lower educational attainment at each schooling level.”*
- 4.20** ● The escalating costs of providing community-based services were also identified as being problematic, particularly where parents are required to bridge the funding deficit between grant allocations to services and their running costs. This problem was seen to be exacerbated by the short-term nature of the funding awarded to community groups working in this area and also by restrictions on income generated from fees. A number of submissions remarked the differences in the costs associated with availing of community-based services and the costs of delivering these services. Concerns were expressed about the fact that service-users contribute to a

relatively small proportion of the cost of providing childcare services and that childcare grants from training institutions (e.g. VTOS and FÁS) fall considerably short of the total cost of providing the places.

Access and availability

4.21 ● The submissions highlighted a range of problems relating to access and availability of early childhood care and education services. Reference was made to the many gaps in service provision around the country and it was noted that even where services are available, demand often exceeds supply. This has resulted in a shortage of places in a range of childcare, pre-school (including Traveller pre-schools) and out of school services. In essence, it was felt that there are not enough services to meet demand and that access is all too often determined by ‘ability to pay.’

4.22 ● Access and availability of services for children aged 0-3 was identified as being particularly problematic. Concern was also expressed about the deficit in service provision for children living in rural areas, Traveller children, children from asylum seeking families and children with special/ additional needs. In relation to children who are deaf, for example:

“There is no accessible service based on Irish Sign Language (ISL) and bilingual formats available in primary schools, crèches, nurseries ... with [the] exception [of] the Model School for the Deaf Project (MSDP), the only pre-school facility that caters [for] the bilingual education of Deaf Children.”

Funding and resources

4.23 ● Frequent mention was made of the short-term nature of funding available to community-based services for children and the impact that this has on their delivery and sustainability. It was felt that long-term funding is critical to allow services to plan ahead, recruit appropriately qualified staff, invest in staff training and ensure continuity of care.

4.24 ● Many submissions referred to the high costs associated or these services and highlighted difficulties in paying for basic running costs, such as stationery. Inadequate funding and resources were also said to be compromising quality standards. One submission noted:

“Some services are operating in unsuitable premises, i.e. community halls where materials still have to be put away at the end of each session, rooms that do not provide adequate space for children and adults to move freely ... Often ... there is no space to store materials.”

4.25 ● Inadequate funding was also linked to problems of recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff. Low rates of pay in the childcare sector added to this problem. According to one submission:

“... many pre-schools and day care centres operate under conditions of uncertain financial support and future sustainability. These services are also characterised by high staff turnover, which has negative consequences for children’s well-being and which makes short- and long-term planning and development extremely difficult.”

Training and qualifications

- 4.26** ● There was considerable comment on the training and qualifications standards within ECCE. Many submissions welcomed the increasing number of people undertaking training, but added that there remains a scarcity of qualified staff in this area. According to a number of the submissions received, staff in early years services, such as crèches and pre-school playgroups do not all have appropriate early years qualifications or adequate training.
- 4.27** ● Reference was also made to the reliance on untrained staff within community-based organisations. Some submissions expressed concern about the practice of engaging untrained staff from Community Employment (CE) Schemes, for example:

“Services have provided a base for CE workers and many have emerged as qualified and effective childcare practitioners and managers. Many remain untrained and some either have no real interest in working with children or difficult life experiences and life circumstances prevent them from working in a supportive way with children and families.”

Key Considerations

- 4.28** ● The submissions identified a broad range of factors as being important to the design and delivery of services for children aged 0-6. Top of this list was ensuring that services are child-centred, flexible, affordable, and accessible. It was also considered critical that these services emphasise children’s health and well-being. Recognition of the importance of play to childhood development was highlighted, as was the need for services to provide outdoor activities for children.
- 4.29** ● Securing Government commitment and investment in early years care and education was identified as a particular priority, with many submissions calling for core funding for ECCE. Much reference was made to the importance of coordinating ECCE services and promoting the development of cross-departmental linkages to ensure that policies and services are developed in a cohesive manner.
- 4.30** ● Many submissions highlighted the need to improve the overall quality of provision by developing national guidelines on premises, introducing official standards on staff recruitment, training and qualifications, and enhancing inspection policies and procedures. A regulatory framework which focuses on the educational needs of children was also prioritised.
- 4.31** ● Other key considerations highlighted in the submissions included the following:
- promoting the development of locally-based services;
 - enhancing parental involvement in ECCE;
 - seeking the views of children in relation to their needs;

- ensuring that services take account of ethnic and cultural diversity and are suitable for children with additional/special needs;
- improving the current adult/child ratios in pre-school and primary school settings;
- developing a national curriculum for pre-schools, including play as a form of learning;
- introducing a standardised pay scale for staff working in the sector and ensuring that staff are appropriately remunerated;
- providing ongoing staff training;
- developing and monitoring in-service training;
- developing specialist parent/educator training for children with special needs;
- promoting better inter-agency working between all relevant organisations;
- enhancing the Home Visiting Family Support Services;
- supporting people who wish to provide childcare services in their homes;
- examining the feasibility of providing pre-school facilities at national schools;
- identifying gaps and mainstreaming diversity and equality training at pre-service and in-service levels;
- promoting employment of ECCE workers from a variety of cultural contexts and backgrounds; and
- examining the feasibility of childcare facilities in the workplace.

Provision for Special/Additional Needs

- 4.32** ● While a relatively small number of the submissions focused exclusively on ECCE provision for children with special/additional educational and learning needs, the vast majority of them drew attention to this issue. In so doing, they made reference to the challenges of working with children with mental and physical disabilities, children from low income families, children with psychological difficulties, children in care, and children with learning difficulties and children from Traveller and minority ethnic groups.

4.33 ● One submission drew on data from the National Intellectual Disability Database to draw attention to the number of children with special/additional needs attending some form of development and/or education provision. This showed that there are approximately 2,000 children with special/additional needs availing of ECCE services and provision in Ireland. It was noted, however, that this figure does not capture the total number of children who are actually in need of such services. The Children’s Research Centre in Trinity College is undertaking some research in relation to special needs provision in County Roscommon but more information and research is needed in this area.

4.34 ● In overall terms, the submissions were critical of existing services and provision for children with special/additional needs. One of the major problems cited was that of the different frames of reference within which this problem is understood and addressed. For example:

“The concept of ‘special needs’ is sometimes treated as an education issue, other times is considered with a medical or a health focus and on other occasions is viewed as an equality matter. These three viewpoints are closely reflective of the divisions which in practice operate across the Departments of Education, Health and Justice.”

4.35 ● While the recent Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 was seen as a positive development in that it provides a clearer frame of reference for coordinating services across the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science, submissions acknowledged that considerable work remains to be done in this area. In relation to children who are deaf, for example, it was felt that there is a lack of understanding of their particular needs and experiences by officials within the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science and that this is reflected in the level and type of services and supports that they receive on the ground.

4.36 ● Criticism was also levelled at the ‘one measure fits all’ approach to service provision in the general ECCE area. Many individuals/organisations expressed serious concern about the inability of many service providers to respond to the individual or specific needs of some children. According to one submission:

“As a result of the social circumstances many children are born into, and through no fault of their own, increasing numbers need appropriate specialist intervention in order to compensate for significant ‘gaps’ in their lives. [Specialised support for children with special needs] cannot be achieved through a system of token inclusion, which lacks the backup support structure and resources to allow any real change in the lives of those children.”

4.37 ● Much reference was made to the many policy documents which have been produced by the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. However, much criticism was made in relation to the significant number of recommendations that have not yet been realised.

Suggested Improvements

4.38 ● Individuals and organisations were asked to put forward their proposals on how existing services and provision in ECCE could be improved. A range of recommendations were outlined, many of which were informed by the weaknesses highlighted above. In general terms, the submissions stressed the need for a comprehensive review of national and international legislative policy on ECCE.

4.39 ● Once again a key factor was the Government's commitment to providing pre-schooling for all children. As one submission put it:

“A commitment to pre-schooling for all children in Ireland will be a big step forward for Irish education. Up to now, the State has shown very little interest in pre-schooling, though educationalists everywhere stress its vital importance in child development.”

4.40 ● Thus, a very strong and clear recommendation from the submissions was that the Government should affirm its commitment to pre-school care and education and deliver on the recommendations included in official policy documents relating to ECCE. For many, Government's commitment to ECCE should go hand in hand with the design and delivery of good quality, accessible and affordable services for children aged 0-6. In this context, many submissions called for universal provision. One submission recommended providing free universal early education provision to children aged 3 and above in line with many other European countries. According to another submission, however, the solution is in the provision of a mix of services and a combination of supports for childminders, full-day care centres and the extension of parental leave.

4.41 ● Many of the remaining recommendations included in the submissions fell into a number of distinct but interrelated categories, as follows:

Quality of services

4.42 ● A major priority for those who made submissions is to address problems relating to the quality of existing services and procedures. A clear message was that this requires a national high quality service intervention plan. Many submissions argued that the implementation of this plan should be put on a legislative base. A further recommendation was the development of guidelines to monitor progress in accordance with a clear set of quality indicators.

- 4.43 ● Reference was made to placing greater emphasis on the provision of supplementary and integrated services which meet the developmental potential of children with additional educational needs, including psychological, language and disability services. Thus, a key recommendation for improving the quality of services was to develop a specific code of practice for meeting special educational needs.
- 4.44 ● Further recommendations for improving the quality of services included addressing current problems relating to adult-child ratios in ECCE settings and refocusing services on the needs and rights of children. One submission simply said:

“ [What is needed is] a move from a labour market perspective as being the primary driving force for the development of services to a refocusing on the needs and rights of children in their own right.”

Funding and resources

- 4.45 ● Recommendations called for ongoing Exchequer support to guarantee the sustainability of early childhood care and education in disadvantaged areas. Some submissions argued for free pre-school provision or at a minimum, tax credits to support families to avail of services. One submission suggested exploring funding possibilities through the tax and benefit system, drawing on the experiences of other European countries.
- 4.46 ● On the whole it was felt that an appropriate benchmark cost per place in community childcare needs to be established and adequate funding put in place to meet these costs. One submission recommended the introduction of a means-tested subsidy (payable to either parents or to the childcare facilities) based on a sliding scale of rates calculated on the basis of net disposable household income, family size and the number of dependent children in the household. Another submission recommended the introduction of a capitation grant of €2,500 per annum per childcare place and suggested that this grant should be paid directly to childcare providers on an annual basis through a relevant refund scheme. Another proposal was that 1% of GDP should be invested in childcare.
- 4.47 ● Submissions also referred to inequities in grant-aided funding and stressed the need to introduce consistent and transparent funding procedures. One organisation argued for the introduction of more rights-based funding to ensure the inclusion of children with special/additional needs. Another submission was concerned about small scale applications having to go through the same lengthy funding procedures as major grant applications. This organisation recommended devolving grant-giving authority for small applications to the City and County Childcare Committees.

Training and qualifications

- 4.48 ● A clear message from the submissions was the need to develop a high quality and nationally accredited education and training standard for ECCE practitioners. It was recommended that education and training should include clear progression routes from Level 2 upwards for all childcare practitioners and service workers. One submission stated the following:

“Once a person has acquired FETAC Level 2, the way forward is to provide FETAC Level 3 in Institutes of Technologies, and provide childcare workers with the option of progression to attend Universities to degree level. Part of the course should include work experience in a quality, accredited community childcare facility.”

- 4.49 ● In-service training and ongoing professional development for early years practitioners was also identified as a priority. It was further recommended that courses should incorporate equality and diversity training, as well as modules on working with children who have special/additional education and learning needs.
- 4.50 ● According to a number of submissions, Community Employment (CE) and Jobs Initiative (JI) should no longer be used as a core resource for childcare programmes. However, one submission recommended the establishment of a special childcare CE scheme.

Staffing

- 4.51 ● Many submissions stressed the importance of introducing financial incentives to facilitate services to expand. It was recommended that the EOCP cap on staffing grants should be removed. As an alternative, one submission suggested replacing these caps with a scale that is directly related to the number of places being created by service providers and takes account of the reduced income opportunities for childcare services operating in disadvantaged areas. A further recommendation was that staffing grants should take account of national pay awards. It was also recommended that services be sufficiently resourced to incorporate increments and other rewards for staff.
- 4.52 ● The submissions encouraged the Government to fully implement recommendations regarding adult/child ratios in ECCE. They also recommended that there should be no more than 20 children in each junior infant class and that there should be a qualified permanent teaching assistant in each junior infant setting. This would assist teachers to adapt and implement the curriculum and increase the time available for documentation, training and planning.

Coherence and coordination

- 4.53 ● Problems relating to the coherence and co-ordination of ECCE services and provision were highlighted throughout the submissions, with many calling for greater continuity between homes, crèches, pre-schools, primary schools, and health and social services. One submission stated:

“Communication and co-operation between all these is vital for the optimum development of each child’s potential, and this is especially true in the case of children with special or additional needs.”

- 4.54** ● Some concern was expressed about the fact that the educational and care strands of ECCE have become segregated. One submission quoted from Dr. Kelleghan to highlight the limitations of this situation, as follows:

“It is perhaps unfortunate that childcare and educational programmes have grown independently of each other and that communication between the two traditions has been rather limited since, viewed from the child’s point of view, it is unlikely that either type of programme on its own can fully meet the needs of the child.”

- 4.55** ● Almost all of the submissions called for the integration of policy into a single government department or agency:

“There is a need for an integrated funding and support strategy which creates linkages across relevant government departments, or places all responsibility in one department; which prioritises disadvantage, which provides an appropriate level of capital and revenue funding for services and which includes the provision of ongoing support and development structures.”

- 4.56** ● However, the submissions varied in their views as to which department should take on responsibility for ECCE. The majority felt that it should be the Department of Education and Science, with a smaller number identifying the Department of Health and Children as the most appropriate location. Instead of assigning responsibility to a single department, one submission proposed establishing an Inter-departmental Policy Committee on ECCE with a rotating chair from each Government department.

- 4.57** ● Approximately one third of the submissions suggested establishing a lead national agency with overall responsibility for services for young children. One clear suggestion was that the National Children’s Office (NCO) should be assigned the role of coordinating Government departments’ involvement in early childhood care and education. As part of this role, it was stated that the NCO could link with relevant services on the ground through close liaison with the City and County Childcare Committees. Other proposals were that increased powers should be given to the City and County Childcare Committees on policy development and that a representative council should be established for workers in the ECCE sector.

Research

- 4.58** ● A number of submissions also highlighted data and information gaps in the early childhood care and education sector and recommended that further research and evaluation work be undertaken to fill these gaps and to identify strategies for future development within the sector.

Conclusion

4.59 ● An analysis of the submissions indicated the high level of public interest in ECCE, an overall and comprehensive and focused view on the issues involved and an informed awareness of the policy context and documentation. There is a remarkable convergence of views between the submissions and policy debates in recent years on what is emerging as positive in the provision of ECCE, on what is unsatisfactory and on recommendations for improvement. There is, thus, a strong consensus between the views from a research and policy perspective and a practice perspective. **The most striking feature which has emerged from the audit of policy (Section III) and this review of submissions is the identification of a great vacuum in policy implementation, even on issues that have already been agreed by Government.**

4.60 ● Delivering appropriate changes in each of the areas set out above was considered to be critical to improving the design, delivery, implementation, availability and standard of ECCE services and facilities. In summing up, one submission said:

“Ultimately, high quality services need funding and mentoring. For parents, services must be affordable and accessible, for management, resources must be adequate, dependable and easy to access and account for, and for the funders, they must be satisfied that the returns are value for investment. For children, services must enhance childhood and reflect the importance of the early identity-forming years.”

V

The Economics of Early Childhood Care and Education

RESEARCH PAPER FOR THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM
BY THE GEARY INSTITUTE, UCD

Introduction

Economic Arguments Underpinning ECCE Investment

- 5.1 ● Human capital is acquired through the innate ability of the individual, other characteristics associated with the acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, but also family characteristics, including income and education. The differences in human capital between individuals observed later on in life can stem from variations in any of these factors. Policies can impact on all of these but most have focused on easing financial constraints by, for example, providing free schooling or creating educational institutions and structures and ensuring their quality. Remedial policies are usually targeted towards individuals whose low levels of human capital prevent them from participating in the labour force and integrating into society more generally. While these policies may be politically desirable there is a case that they may not be the most efficient or cost-effective and economists have increasingly put the case forward for early intervention. A central conclusion of a vast body of research summarised in, for example, Carneiro and Heckman (2003), is that in most countries efficiency in public spending would be enhanced if human capital investment were directed more toward the young.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

- 5.2 ● Evidence supporting the effectiveness of quality early childhood education programmes for disadvantaged children is particularly convincing and, because the impact is higher for higher risk children, returns from a targeted pre-school programme are expected to be greater than that for a universal programme. Despite this, the advantages associated with universal provision are cited as good grounds for universal as opposed to targeted provision. As advantaged children are more numerous, even small gains can accumulate to substantial gains across the whole population (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005). Administrative costs determining eligibility are avoided, as is the potential for stigma associated with participation in a targeted programme. No child who might benefit is excluded either because he/she does not quite meet the criteria or because there is confusion regarding eligibility. Indeed political support

and the support of public opinion is often stronger for programmes available to all children, and this may also be instrumental in guaranteeing the required level of funding for a high quality programme (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

- 5.3 ● On top of the positive effects on child development, ECCE interventions can also have a direct impact on mothers which in turn impacts on the child. However, this indirect effect can have negative consequences on equality of opportunity as children of more educated mothers would as a consequence of the universal provision of childcare, live in a household with higher disposable income and have benefited from the positive effect of childcare. These two outcomes means that by providing universal childcare, the differences in child development between children born in advantaged households and those born in disadvantaged households would be increased. This policy would also be regressive as poorer individuals would, as a group, pay relatively more for childcare usage than the middle class. Other types of policies to foster child development which are linked to labour force participation, such as promoting family friendly employment, also have the potential to lead to increased inequality. For example, the UK Working Families Tax Credit by providing childcare for poorer working families could be considered to increase inequality between poor children whose parents work and those whose parents do not work. It may, therefore, be important to make ECCE compulsory, so that parents do not have the choice to opt out, and all children would benefit from the direct effect of ECCE.

Parental Influence and Life Cycle Perspectives on ECCE Investment

- 5.4 ● The economics of early intervention relies, to a significant extent, on the complementarities of formal and informal education. Children convert educational inputs into outcomes more effectively if parents reinforce the input by encouraging and motivating children. By contrast, job training programmes, whether public or private, work with what families and schools supply them and cannot remedy twenty years of neglect. The uncompromising evidence in the dialogue between James Heckman and Alan Krueger (*Inequality in America*, MIT Press, 2004) is that policy remedies later in life seem, at least in the US, to be taking on an almost palliative air – coping with the problem rather than moving the problem towards lasting solutions. A major lesson from recent research is that the skills acquired in one stage of the life cycle affect both the endowments and the technology of learning at the next stage. Human capital is not only a function of the initial stock the individual is born with (genetic luck) but is produced over the life cycle by families, schools, and firms, although most discussions of skill formation focus on schools as the major producer of abilities and skills. Their relative roles and complementarities are still widely debated and no conclusion has yet been reached.

5.5 ● Parenting also interacts with the schooling activity of the child. The path breaking work of Coleman (1966) first established this and an entire literature summarised in Heckman (2000a), Carneiro and Heckman (2003), or Heckman and Masterov (2004) emphasises the compelling evidence that schools can only work with what parents bring them. Moreover, educated parents put a higher value on education, are more active partners in the education of their children (Lareau, 1987) or are in a better position to assist their children with schoolwork, or securing access to better quality education. The most lasting influence of parents on the development of their children may be due to income effects where wealthier parents can afford goods and services which have a positive effect on the development of the child, while parents from lower socio-economic groups are financially constrained (Becker and Tomes, 1986). Despite similar returns to their educational investment, children brought up in less favourable conditions invest less in their own education (see Heckman and Masterov, 2004 for an extensive review).

Ability, Family Background and Adaptability

5.6 ● Important differences in ability across family types appear at early ages and persist. These are found in the UK (Vignoles and Galindo-Rueda, 2003; Feinstein, 2003), and in the US (Carneiro, Heckman and Masterov, 2003). Feinstein (2003) finds that there is a 13 percentile difference in an index of cognitive development at 22 months between British children from high and low socio-economic status (SES) families. By 118 months, this difference widens to 28 percentile points. Using data from the British Cohort Study, Feinstein (2003) finds that the percentile rank on the cognitive development index at 22 months predicts educational attainment at age 26 though scores at 46 months yield better predictions. Children from higher SES groups with low scores are much more likely to improve their scores than lower SES children with poor scores. Ability gaps open up early and persist. This is true for many other measures of verbal and mathematical ability. The ability that drives schooling participation is shaped early in life. The available evidence indicates that cognitive ability is relatively more adaptable early in the life cycle (see Heckman, 1995). Having access to more and higher-quality resources that contribute to improving cognitive ability early in life affects skill acquisition later in life.

Wider Concepts of the Economic Value of Children

- 5.7 ● The increased education levels that roll forward from the programmes discussed above lead to higher lifetime earnings for those who participated in the programmes. The social returns, often called “externalities” by economists, capture benefits to society beyond those benefits to private individuals. We will later discuss a cost-benefit analysis for a programme that attempts to capture some of the social benefits that result from investing in pre-school education. In summary, however, the argument is that a more educated workforce could have broader benefits to society beyond those already captured in the analysis above. This appeals to an extensive economics literature on the link between human capital – typically measured by education levels for a given country as a whole – and overall economic growth (for a recent review, see Krueger and Lindahl, 2001).

Consequences for Economic and Social Equality

- 5.8 ● In the last several decades, economic disparities have widened in the United States and Europe, including Ireland, with family incomes and worker earnings rising faster at the upper tail of the distribution compared with the growth in incomes and earnings at the lower tail (Burtless and Jencks, 2003). The rise in inequality has wider implications in terms of disparities that affect family functioning, neighbourhood quality, education, health, crime, and political participation (see, for example, the collection of studies edited by Neckerman, 2004). Much of the increase in income inequality is driven by rising inequality in earned income reflected, in part, in the widening wage gap by education level. Those with more education are able to earn increasingly more than their less educated counterparts, pulling the distribution of earnings and family income further apart. The relationship between education and socio-economic status means that as the returns to education increase, so do social gaps. The widening gap in earnings, in turn, is driven by technological change and, to a lesser extent, globalisation, which are increasing the demand for more-skilled workers faster than the supply has risen, thereby raising the premium paid to more-skilled workers.

Economics of the Childcare Market

- 5.9 ● Instead of heavy public investment in childcare as witnessed in many of our European neighbours, Ireland has relied, for the most part, on the markets to provide ECCE. The main factors in the economics of childcare is that the childcare process is justified either as it helps parents gain or return to employment while their children are young or it enhances the educational and psychological development of children. Given the focus of childcare need, the parents as consumers of childcare are facing conflicting sets of needs: those of their offspring regarding the quality of care and of their own needs for convenience, affordability and reliability. In this

process the providers of childcare are better informed about the quality of the care they provide than the consumers of formal childcare (referred to by economists as an information asymmetry), which leads to an unfair exchange (Akerlof, 1970). Mocan (2001), in a unique paper in the childcare literature, demonstrates the existence of both information asymmetry and adverse selection in the childcare market. Market competition does not seem to create childcare services of acceptable quality suitable to every family budget. This is the main motivation behind government intervention – it may be desirable in order to increase total social welfare. Different aspects of the childcare market that may be associated with market failure include the quality of childcare, accessibility to childcare and its cost.

Labour Markets and Childcare

- 5.10** ● Economists usually emphasise that young children impose high time costs increasing the opportunity cost of working for the main caretaker of the children, usually the mother. This in turn raises the reservation wage of the mother – the wage that needs to be offered to encourage a return to work by the mother. The increase in the reservation wage is at least partly due to the childcare costs that would be incurred if the women had participated in the labour force, hence lowering the participation probability. The labour force participation of women varies considerably between countries. Often countries with large public provision of childcare have a high proportion of women in the labour force (for other determinants of female labour force participation see, for example, Jaumotte, 2003). A good example of this pattern is provided by the Nordic countries. On the other hand, countries that rely less on public subsidies for childcare generally have lower female labour force participation rates.
- 5.11** ● Understanding the direct and indirect effects of children on labour supply is critical to a number of policy debates. Browning (1992) provides a comprehensive literature review on the effects of children on household economic behaviour. His conclusions include the finding that younger children are associated with lower labour supply by the mother. Furthermore, Voicu and Buddelmeyer (2003) find that the indirect effect or the time spent out of the labour force far outweighs the direct effect (i.e. reduced employment probability when children are present) of children on women's labour force participation dynamics when looking at the probability of a mother of a young child working full-time. Indeed, the time spent out of the labour force may provide one explanation for the commonly found family wage gap or the pay differential between women with children and childless women.

- 5.12 ● Research on the family wage gap has been conducted by, for example, Harkness and Waldfogel (1998) and Viitanen (2004) for the UK. Harkness and Waldfogel (1998) find that among a sample of seven countries, the UK displays the largest wage penalties to children, which is partly due to the higher propensity for UK mothers to be employed in low-paid part-time jobs. Career interruptions and the greater incidence of part-time employment due to childcare responsibilities may be reduced by a policy that makes childcare cheaper and more widely available to parents, hence leading to a reduction in the wage gap between women with children and childless women (for discussion, see also Jaumotte, 2003). The effectiveness of such a policy depends on how responsive the labour force participation of mothers is to the cost of childcare.

Supply of Childcare - Informal Care Providers

- 5.13 ● Informal childcare is most often provided by relatives such as partners, parents, and parents-in-law. In 1994 half of British working mothers with children less than four years old used informal care for their offspring (Finlayson *et al.*, 1996). Holloway and Tamplin (2001) estimate that the valuation of informal daytime care for British children under 8 years old as a percentage of GDP ranged from 4 – 6% between 1995 and 1999. However, in countries such as Finland with a large public childcare sector, the concept of informal childcare use for working mothers is virtually unknown. Most of the literature on informal childcare providers has been conducted in the US. Brandon (1995) examines kin-provided childcare in the US and concludes that it is an in-kind transfer. However, the choice to use kin-provided childcare is also affected by economic factors. He argues that policies aimed at reducing the cost of childcare may have unintended effects on the private provision of childcare within the families. For example, the kin who provided childcare in return for goods and services may suffer losses if childcare subsidies lead mothers to substitute market-provided childcare for their care. Thus in-kind transfer behaviour within families can weaken or reinforce the effectiveness of childcare policies.

Supply of Childcare – Formal Childcare Providers

- 5.14 ● The last 30 years has, therefore, witnessed a tremendous growth in demand for childcare. It is, surprising that the wages of childcare workers have grown barely above the rate of inflation (see, Mocan and Viola, 1997 for further details). This suggests that the supply of childcare labour is highly elastic. In other words, as demand grows, the quantity of labour supplied expands thereby dampening the tendency for the demand increase to drive up wages. Estimates for the elasticity of supply of labour to childcare for the US range from 1.2 to 1.9 (Blau, 1993) or 1.15 (Blau, 2001) i.e. a 10% increase in the wage rate of childcare workers, holding constant the wage rate in alternative occupations, would increase the total number of childcare hours worked by 11.5% accounting for both new entrants to the sector and increased hours by workers already in the childcare sector.

These estimates could explain why childcare workers' wages tend to remain unchanged in real terms despite rapid growth in the demand for childcare. Another possible reason is that providers have hired less-qualified staff. Walker (1992) finds that childminders in the US receive no returns to experience or to education. Hence, well-educated individuals have no monetary incentive to enter the profession and low-educated providers have no incentive to upgrade their skills. The increased educational requirements for the childcare profession, which are desirable to increase some aspects of the quality of care (see, for example, Currie and Hotz, 2001), may, therefore, have serious effects on the supply of formal childcare.

- 5.15 ● One potential explanation for the highly elastic supply of childcare labour may be the intrinsic value of the work. Mocan and Tekin (2000) find evidence that childcare workers often express that their work is important from society's point of view and that someone has to do it, even for a lower pay. However, the childcare sector suffers from a high rate of employee turnover, which may provide at least a partial explanation for the previously found elasticity figures (see Kimmel and Connelly, 2003 for US evidence). In the UK, similar issues are prevalent. In a survey of childcare students and workers, over 90% were committed to working in the childcare industry and report a high satisfaction with childcare work (Cameron *et al.*, 2001). However, the industry suffers from a high turnover: one-third of nursery schools had at least one vacancy and three quarters of nurseries had at least one member of staff leaving in the 12 months prior to the survey. Fourteen percent were considering leaving their work shortly because of the poor pay. However, the most commonly quoted reason for staying on in childcare is the satisfaction the work brings and commitment to it. However, only 48% saw themselves working in the childcare industry in five years time (Cameron *et al.*, 2001).
- 5.16 ● All the findings on the labour supply of childcare workers indicate that there exists a potentially large and committed labour force. However, for many potential childcare workers the low wage rate acts as a disincentive to continue to work in the sector.

The Quality of Childcare

- 5.17 ● Blau (2001) provides an extensive overview of the childcare market in the US with a large concentration on the issue of childcare quality. This has also formed part of the analysis in several pieces of economic research. The quality of childcare could have profound long-term implications for society if it has an impact on the child's emotional and cognitive development. Quality of childcare can be measured in two main ways:
- 1) process quality i.e. what actually occurs in childcare settings, for example, language stimulation, health and safety measures and
 - 2) structural characteristics, for example, child-adult ratio, training of caregivers and the group size.

- 5.18** ● Ideally, investment in childcare yields net benefits to society by enhancing the human capital of upcoming generations and reducing inequalities due to family background. Vandell and Wolfe (2000) and Waldfogel (2002) provide comprehensive literature reviews examining the effects of childcare on child development. However, none of the reviewed studies provide any definite answers. The main body of research has moved the focus from examining whether childcare and early maternal employment are detrimental to child development to assessing which type of childcare can provide most benefits to children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Blau and Mocan (1999) find that, on average, the parents of young children are unwilling to spend significantly more on formal childcare in order to obtain higher quality care. They find that the supply of quality is inelastic for both profit-making and non-profit firms. Blau (2001) reasons that parents may not value childcare quality in the terms defined by developmental psychologists or that they may simply not have enough information to assess the quality of childcare.
- 5.19** ● The traditional measures of quality, such as child-staff ratio or group size have in recent years come under attack in academic circles. Blau (1998, 2000, 2001) finds that easily observed inputs, such as group size, child-staff ratio and teacher qualifications, are correlated with childcare quality. However, there remains a lot of immeasurable (or more precisely unobservable) variability in the quality of formal childcare which could make public policy (through regulation and childcare subsidies) difficult to target in order to influence the quality of childcare. Furthermore, Mocan (2001) finds that parents do not utilise all the available information in forming their assessment of quality.
- 5.20** ● Overall, research on the quality of childcare has not reached any agreement. Blau and Mocan (2002) find that parents are unwilling to pay more for higher quality childcare, a result which reinforces the finding of Blau (2001) that the relationship between family income and quality of care is almost non-existent. None of the childcare literature has examined the overall costs and benefits to the society in terms of whether additional government expenditure on childcare is justified, given the magnitude and the nature of the social benefits they yield. The next section examines the arguments that have been put forward for governments to intervene in the childcare market.

Government Intervention in ECCE

- 5.21 ● Government intervention in the childcare market varies considerably between countries. The US and the UK follow the non-interventionist approach by allowing the market to operate freely and privately with only a few subsidies, which are mainly targeted at low-income households. The role of the State is limited to ensuring minimum quality standards among childcare providers. An example of the other extreme of government intervention in childcare is provided by the Nordic countries. There, the large public provision of childcare guarantees every pre-school child a place in a high-quality, low-cost childcare setting regardless of the family income. Bergstrom and Blomquist (1996) state that the differences in public policy configurations regarding childcare are due to the political climate of the country. In other words, the Nordic countries are more willing to accept a system of high taxes and redistribution than the US and the UK.
- 5.22 ● There are two main justifications for government intervention in the childcare market according to the basic principles of welfare economics. The first concerns inefficient resource allocation and argues that the government should intervene to correct any imperfections that prevent the childcare market from working efficiently and maximizing consumer welfare. Market failures in the demand for childcare services include information failures or imperfections in capital markets. In the former case, families fail to gauge the financial losses of career breaks and/or perceive the benefits of formal childcare. In the latter case, the cost of childcare might, in the short run, be greater than the immediate returns from employment. Hence, the laissez-faire approach to childcare markets might be improved by correcting some of the imperfections by intervention.
- 5.23 ● The second justification for government intervention in the childcare market concerns inequality. This provides a strong case for government intervention. This argument regarding inequality has two parts. First, there may exist inequality in the mothers' ability to participate in the labour force compared to women with no children. Second, intervention in the childcare market may be required to aid children to get an equal starting point in life regardless of the household financial status (see, for example, Duncan and Giles, 1996 or Carneiro and Heckman, 2003 for further details). In general, the Nordic countries have less child poverty, a smaller gender wage gap and more similarity in the educational outcomes between different socio-economic groups (see, for example, the PISA 2000 study by OECD) than, for example, the US or the UK.

- 5.24 ● Previous research indicates that there are large differences in the private returns on remaining employed between the interventionist and the laissez-faire approach. Gornick *et al.* (1998) find results that demonstrate a strong association between policy configurations regarding parental leave and childcare and the employment patterns of mothers. Out of the 14 industrialised countries analysed, wage penalties for mothers are the greatest in countries with the least-developed public policies for supporting the employment of mothers with young children, namely, the US, Australia, and the UK. These arguments point to the possibility that the outcomes of the free childcare market may have distributional implications that the society would prefer to avoid. Duncan and Giles (1996) further note that examining the reasons why the government would want to subsidise childcare helps in understanding which type of public policy might be desirable. Universal subsidies may result in high private and social returns; however, they are in general costly to the government and hence the tax-payers and, additionally, result in large dead-weight losses. In the end, the ideal balance in terms of economic efficiency is found by weighing both the private returns and the social returns and finding the balance between the extremes of public intervention and laissez-faire approaches to childcare.
- 5.25 ● It is possible that public subsidies for childcare “pay for themselves” by inducing higher labour force participation of mothers who then pay taxes that are more than sufficient to pay for the cost of the subsidies. The direction of the labour supply response to childcare subsidies is not clear. Subsidies increase the returns to every hour of paid employment, thereby improving the incentives for individuals to increase paid employment (the substitution effect) but they also reduce the number of hours of paid employment necessary to achieve a given material standard of living or the number of hours of childcare (the income effect). On the producer side, the supply side effects of childcare subsidies include the promotion of additional supply of childcare places depending on market conditions; for example, the consumers’ willingness to pay for care and existing competition from other providers and the barriers to entry. The impact of childcare subsidies on the demand and the supply side regarding the quality of childcare is unclear, as outlined earlier. The difficulty in measuring the quality of childcare may, therefore, favour the interventionist approach to childcare provision, rather than the free market approach due to problems of moral hazard and adverse selection (see Akerlof, 1970).

Parental Policies

- 5.26 ● Parental policies typically relate to parental leave and more specifically to maternal leave as women use most parental leave in the majority of nations (OECD, 2003). Evidence suggests that while there are good grounds for extending maternal leave from a child development perspective, this policy can have negative repercussions on labour force participation and other economic costs. As noted by Ruhm (1998), proponents of parental

leave believe this policy results in healthier children and improves the position of women in the workplace. Opponents stress the negative effects of restricted voluntary exchange between workers and employers, reduced economic efficiency and, in particular, adverse effects on women. In the following, more detailed, examination of these benefits and costs, we examine the impact of parental policies on child development, the economy and labour force participation.

Childhood Development

- 5.27 ● Research on early childhood development supports extended maternal leave as a beneficial policy for children and for mothers. Numerous commentators examine the effects of parental leave policies with respect to child health and development outcomes. Evidence from the US in Berger *et al* (2005) finds considerable association between early return to work and reductions in both breastfeeding and immunisations, in addition to increases in externalising behaviour problems. These results are found to be stronger for mothers who return to work full-time within twelve weeks of giving birth. Children whose mothers return to full-time work in their first year are at risk of reduced “well-baby” care. This suggests a causal link between maternal employment and child outcomes, and indeed a concomitant enhancement of children’s health and development with longer periods of maternity leave.
- 5.28 ● Gregg *et al* (2005), commenting on the effect of mothers’ return to work on child development in the UK, suggest that while their findings mirror that of the US – adverse effects on full-time working in the first year – overall, the size and scale of these effects are smaller. They suggest this is due to the greater use of part-time working and the lower incidence of return to work in the first 3 months as a result of better maternity leave rights. They conclude that, on average, it is only full-time work up to when the child is 18 months that has adverse effects on child cognitive development, with both part-time work and work after 18 months having no effect. Interestingly, their analysis examines the effect across subgroups of the population and finds that children of least educated mothers seem not to be disadvantaged by maternal employment. The negative effects then are concentrated among the children of more educated mothers. Theoretically this is explained by the possibility that earnings from mothers are particularly beneficial in low income families or that the quality of maternal care in disadvantaged families is less than or equal to the quality of alternative care used. In short, the interdependence of the relationship between quality of maternal care and quality of alternative care is stressed. In essence, whether a child is disadvantaged by maternal employment depends on the quality of the childcare received relative to that which would have been provided by the mother (Gregg *et al*, 2005), perhaps explaining the negative effects for more educated mothers. Finally, they stress that paid childcare, not unpaid care (friend, relative or neighbour), may protect against the adverse effects.

- 5.29 ● Tanaka (2005), examining the impact of extended parental leave on child health across OECD countries, finds that the extension of job-protected paid leave has significant effects on decreasing infant mortality rates. It is suggested that a 10 week extension in paid leave may decrease infant mortality rates by between 2-2.5%. (However it should be noted that as infant mortality rates are already small in absolute numbers, a large percentage change results in a small absolute effect). Worth mentioning here also are findings which differentiate between the effects of paid and unpaid leave, a significant decrease in infant mortality with paid leave is shown but no significant effect for other leave. It is concluded that parental leave-taking behaviour may not be very responsive without adequate payment and job protection, and may result in mothers' early return to work.
- 5.30 ● Maternal employment is also shown to have an effect on child education outcomes. Ruhm (2002) in a paper examining the effects of maternal employment on child development stresses the importance of parental investments at the beginning of the child's life and its significant role in fostering cognitive development. Early job holding, particularly in the first year, is estimated to have negative effects on reading and mathematics performance of five and six year olds. Noting the rise of female labour force participation for mothers of children 6 years and under in the US, coupled with no evident offset through a reduction in male work hours and a rise in one-parent families, Ruhm (2002) suggests that adults have less time and energy to invest in their children (parental time for children fell 22 hours per week or 14% between 1969 and 1999 in the US).
- 5.31 ● Examining the effects of maternal employment during the first 3 years of a child's life shows that there is a small deleterious effect on estimated verbal ability of three and four year olds and a larger negative impact on reading and mathematical achievement of five and six year olds. The consequences are worst when mothers either worked long hours or also held a job in the first year. However, favourable child development outcomes from part-time work, as opposed to full time work, are indicated. The author points to the possible benefits of promoting a gradual return to the labour market. Nonetheless, if extended leave results in adverse effects on maternal employment and career advancement, documented benefit of early parental investment might be partially or fully offset by a reduction in future income (Ruhm, 2002).

Economic and Social Impact

- 5.32 ● Parental leave policies are associated with both economic and social benefits and costs. Extended parental leave that results in positive effects for child health, education and development may have significant longer term benefits for the economy as a whole. Positive educational outcomes for children are associated with extended maternity leave, this finding coupled with that indicating (Ruhm, 2002) a strong relationship between early test performance and future educational and labour market outcomes, suggest effects translating into lasting economic benefits. As

strongly supported in the US literature, by Heckman (2004) and others, better educational outcomes lead to reduced costs for government and society in the form of grade repetitions, special education, juvenile crime, child welfare to mention but a few, (all examined later in our cost-benefit analysis – see Annex 5.1). In addition, this increase in skilled labour is vital for economic competitiveness and productivity. While parental leave results in costs for business, non-wage costs such as the hiring and training of temporary staff, the longer-run benefits are increased rates of return for women to the workplace and increased labour force participation, particularly important in a tight labour market. From a social perspective, maternity leave policies, by facilitating women to strike a balance between childbearing and work commitments, help promote gender equity in labour force participation. This is true, however, only if discrimination in hiring can be avoided.

Labour Force Participation

- 5.33 ● As it is generally women who take parental leave, there may be particular consequences for female labour force participation and outcomes. While the impact of extended parental leave on childhood outcomes is a positive one, both positive and negative effects of maternity leave on female labour force outcomes are reported. Research indicates that maternal leave may have negative impacts on female labour market participation and skills, long-term career advancement and earnings. Research by the OECD analysing the effects of certain policies on female labour force participation suggest that very long parental leave may make it more difficult to return to the labour market (OECD, 2003). Skill depreciation is also associated with employment leave and is particularly relevant where the period of interruption is great. Edin and Gustavsson (2004) estimate that a full year of non-employment is associated with skill losses that are equivalent to moving 5 percentiles down the skill distribution. Although while Gupta and Smith (2001) find that human capital theories of the depreciation of women’s labour market potential during career interruptions are supported, the negative effects are small over the entire career. They state the main effect seems to be loss of human capital accumulation during the leave period which may have knock-on effects for both career advancement and earnings. On the other hand, it is also argued that maternity leave helps women reconcile working and family life and actually boosts female participation (OECD, 2003).
- 5.34 ● Empirical evidence from the US indicates that maternity leave coverage strongly influences women’s return to work (Berger *et al*, 2005). Although maternity leave is associated with longer leave-taking (which may have certain economic costs) and may increase leave lengths up to a certain threshold, after a certain point evidence suggests it in fact facilitates increased returns – that is, return of mothers to work (Berger *et al*, 2005). It also argues that job security strengthens attachment to the work force. Ruhm (1998) in a study on the effect of paid parental leave on employment rates across nine OECD countries found an increased employment rate. According to the OECD, while extended leave is shown to have a negative impact on salaries of returning mothers by some commentators, a recent

study from Denmark report a (progressive) catch up of mothers' salaries to that of childless women (OECD, 2003). Ruhm (1998) finds that parental leave is associated with increases in women's employment, but with reductions in their relative wages at extended durations.

Policy Interventions

5.35 ● From the evidence presented, it is clear that maternity leave has significant benefits for strengthening female attachment to the labour force and increasing the rate of participation. However, it is shown that where leave is extended, particularly over one year, negative effects on hiring, skills, returns and career advancement may arise. The potential for harmful effects from maternal employment in early childhood is demonstrated (Ruhm, 2002; Berger *et al.*, 2005; Gregg *et al.*, 2005). However, it is recognised that policy interventions can manipulate the factors that lead to adverse effects for children. Early, full-time working in the UK is shown to be most problematic and as suggested by Gregg *et al.* (2005) policies encouraging adoption of flexible and part-time working practices, enabling mothers to remain at home for longer, will minimise the negative effects of maternal employment. In emphasising the difference between paid and unpaid care, they also note the importance of access to affordable child-care and in particular for very young children. Policy interventions such as flexible work-time scheduling, part-time work, home-based work or work-sharing are also possible solutions to combating the loss of human capital accumulation as highlighted by Gupta and Smith (2002). Finally, the role of fathers requires further consideration. Increased time investment by fathers might offset some of the negative effects of working mothers in a two-parent household and indeed policy prescriptions such as an extension of paternal leave schemes, with respect to earnings, for example, could help narrow the gender gap (Gupta and Smith, 2002).

Financial Support and Other Policies

- 5.36** ● Studies examining the impact of financial support find a positive effect on the employment probabilities for both single (Berger and Black, 1992) and married mothers (Powell, 2002). Subsidies targeted at formal care and unconditional childcare subsidies were found to have the greatest potential in terms of increasing employment. Furthermore, Leibowitz *et al.* (1992) find that greater financial support for childcare increases early return to work after childbirth in the US. Forth *et al.* (1997) find that family friendly working arrangements in the UK (for example, increased flexibility in childcare arrangements or a workplace crèche) have a positive influence on the rate of women's return to work after childbearing.
- 5.37** ● Childcare subsidies can be designed to encourage employment or to enhance the quality of childcare. These goals are generally in conflict: policies that encourage employment would allow parents flexibility in the choice of the quality of childcare and policies that are most likely to

encourage the use of high-quality childcare would not impose employment requirements. Blau (2001) believes that the main problem with the childcare market in the US is low quality. Hence childcare subsidies with an employment prerequisite are likely to worsen the childcare problem by increasing the use of low quality care.

- 5.38 ● The sharpest evidence on the impact of childcare provision policies is contained in Duncan and Giles (1996) which simulates the impact of a number of popular policy options on UK data, namely:
- childcare ‘disregards’ in the family credit system (deducting childcare costs from income before being means-tested for key benefits);
 - childcare vouchers (either an allowance per week for each child under 5 in the family irrespective of use for childcare or the same benefit which can only be paid when being used for childcare, or finally a variant of the benefit which only pays when other potential carers are working outside the home to focus the benefit on those in work)
 - full subsidy of all childcare costs effectively reducing costs to zero (variants include restriction of the subsidy to three and four year olds, or restriction to low net income families); and
 - tax relief for childcare against income tax.
- 5.39 ● The focus of Duncan and Giles’ research (1996) is a labour supply effect to generate the cost/benefit effect. Across the range of options simulated there are modest benefits making it extremely unlikely that the policy can pay for itself due to deadweight costs – the subsidy almost invariably gets spent on mothers who would have returned to work anyway, and those that would not return to work also receive the subsidy. Childcare disregards have the most benign outcome but only because the policy is so restrictive that only a fraction of mothers benefit. The more broad the subsidy – such as unconditional allowances – then the greater the expense with little additional benefit (measured, it must be reiterated, by tax and welfare benefit redistributions from changes in female labour supply). This to economists is unsurprising – a broad and universal benefit such as a full childcare subsidy will provide income irrespective of childcare need for employment choices and, therefore, provide a direct – and negative – income effect. Governments can limit schemes in some way and trade off some of the cost-benefit imbalances but this is not without costs. Schemes which focus on restricting the subsidy to those that work – such as the earnings disregard or tax relief – do maximize the benefit of labour supply (since anyone who remains outside of employment does not receive any subsidy) but in distributional terms this is less attractive as those that are in employment already are, in general, better off than those out of employment.

- 5.40 ● Rather than just focusing on simulations of impact, Duncan and Giles (1996) also examine policy shifts in the UK towards vouchers provided to parents of four year olds for spending on a place in the private or State sector. Parents using the private sector will receive up to the full subsidy but the provider must be validated by the government and this voucher covers costs of 5 sessions (or 12.5 hours per week). State or local authority provided places are costless but capacity constrained, thus the voucher increases the choice for parents by bringing the private sector into the choice set – where State places exist, the voucher can be used but the State withdraws the capitation grant from the provider. The parent in effect exchanges the voucher for a place that would have been free of charge, but the choice is empowered and the quality controlled. Short term effects of such a policy are almost fully dead-weight. Those in the State sector are unaffected while those in the private sector have a windfall gain and for some the transfer of funds could provide an income effect and an incentive to reduce hours. Similarly, the private provider could incorporate the voucher value into pricing, reducing some of its impact. In the longer term the private market may adjust to the increased resources and increase choice but fundamentally it seems unlikely that such a policy would ever escape from the dead-weight problems and therefore the distributional impact is limited. In other words, a childcare voucher is likely to channel funds towards those for which, as Duncan and Giles (1996) note, the case is weakest.
- 5.41 ● In summary, the position would seem to be that most of the externality arguments in favour of childcare subsidies are, in fact, limited in scope. It is not the case that parents or society have no interest in ECCE. Instead, it is an issue of access to, and affordability of, early childhood care and education. This is less an issue of market failure as an impetus for government subsidy and instead an argument that appeals to distributional concerns as outlined. Given limited resources and distributional concerns, and given the educational impact of early investment outlined earlier, a prioritisation of early investment, particularly among ‘at risk’ families, to give an equal start to educational and life development, would appear appropriate.

Evidence from Early Intervention Programmes

- 5.42 ● In this section we revisit, in some more detail, the benefits of ECCE. It is important to note, however, that our review of this evidence has focused on research based on experimental evaluation methods. For example, as noted in the Karoly and Bigelow (2005) work, and in the work of James Heckman, there is an extensive literature on the effects of early childhood programmes that serve children in the year or two prior to kindergarten entry. However, simply observing differences in outcomes among children who attend pre-schools versus those that do not does not necessarily identify the causal effect of pre-school. For example, children who attend private pre-school programmes tend to be children with fewer life risk

factors. If their outcomes after pre-school are better than those with no pre-school, it may be because they have other advantages that promote their success, rather than being attributable to pre-school attendance itself. However, most studies are not providing evidence of outcomes that could be considered definitive given their initial design and roll-out process, including Irish experiments in this field. (We only focus on research and evaluations based on experimental or strong quasi-experimental methodologies).

- 5.43 ● As an example, the Syracuse Pre-school programme provided family development support for disadvantaged children, from prenatal care for their mothers through to age 5 of the children's lives. Reductions in problems with probation and criminal offences ten years later were as large as 70% among children randomly assigned to the programme. Girls who participated in the programme also showed greater school achievement (Lally *et al*, 1988). Studies have found short-term increases in test scores, less in-grade retention, and higher high school graduation rates among children enrolled in early intervention programmes. Of those studies that examine delinquent or criminal behaviour, most have found lower rates of such behaviour among programme participants.
- 5.44 ● It appears that early childhood programmes are most effective in changing noncognitive skills, although they also raise achievement test scores (as opposed to IQ). We also note that eventual decay of initial gains in test scores, like those found in regard to the Head Start programme, were found for programmes like Perry Pre-school as well, but the long-term evaluations of these programmes are quite favourable in terms of participants' success in school and society at large. The fade-out effects in test scores found for the Head Start programme do not imply that participation in the programme has no long-term beneficial effects. Head Start may improve the lifetime prospects of its participants, despite yielding only short-term gains in test scores, which may not measure many relevant dimensions of social and emotional skills.
- 5.45 ● The Perry intervention affected both children and parents. Parents in the programme improved their education and labour force activity and reduced their participation in welfare. Successful enrichment programmes like Perry Pre-school also foster long-term improvements in the home environment that carry over to the child long after the programme has terminated. Head Start offers a much lower quality staff who are also paid accordingly, part-time classes for children, and limited parental involvement. The programme terminates without any substantial intervention into or improvement in the home environments of the disadvantaged children. Improvements in Head Start, proponents argue, are likely to produce effects closer to those observed in more-successful small-scale programmes. Given the potential for success of such programmes (as exhibited by the Perry Pre-school experiment), more studies of the long-term impacts of various types of small-scale and broad-based early intervention programmes are warranted. Calculations by Donohue and Siegelman (1998) indicate that if enriched early intervention programmes were targeted toward high-risk, disadvantaged minority male youth in the US,

the expected savings in incarceration costs alone would more than repay the substantial costs of these enriched programmes.

- 5.46** ● An important lesson to draw from the Perry Pre-school programme, and indeed from the entire literature on successful early interventions, is that the social skills and motivation of the child are more easily altered than IQ. There also tends to be a substantial improvement in the children's social attachment. The social and emotional skills acquired in these types of programmes affect performance in school and in the workplace. Academics have a bias toward believing that cognitive skills are of fundamental importance to success in life. Because of this, the relatively low malleability of IQs after early age has led many to proclaim a variety of interventions to be ineffective. Yet the evidence from the Perry Pre-school programme (Schweinhart, 2004) and the evidence summarized in Carneiro and Heckman (2003) reveals that early intervention programmes are highly effective in reducing criminal activity, promoting social skills, and integrating disadvantaged children into mainstream society. The greatest benefits of these programmes are their effects on socialisation and not those on IQ.
- 5.47** ● Drawing on evaluative evidence from another of these programmes, the Chicago Child-Parent Centre (CPC) programme, facilitates the construction of a cost-benefit model for an early childhood care and education programme. The programme itself, providing half-day services with well qualified staff and good child ratios, is a targeted one with many of the participants facing 'risks' to healthy development. Nonetheless, by incorporating a methodology established by Karoly and Bigelow (2005), the CPC levels of benefit can be adjusted to establish benefit levels for a universal programme, where care recipients are high, medium and low risk. In addition, it facilitates the calculation of costs and benefits of a universal programme in monetary terms. The cost-benefit analysis presented in Annex 5.1 draws on this methodology. Outcomes include increased reading achievement, reduced involvement in the juvenile justice system and better completion rates from high school. In conclusion, in terms of outcomes for children, ECCE matters. The returns are unquestionable. ECCE provision for all children clearly deserves to be an issue of high political priority.

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VI

A Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education

Introduction

- 6.1 ● We have entered a new stage in the development of ECCE services in Ireland and the Project Team firmly believes that there is considerable good will among stakeholders to respond to the changes that are necessary at the levels of policy and practice so that a new way forward will emerge. There is an enormous challenge facing policy-makers to ensure, in the future, a blending of services so that the best features of our well-established education system get transposed to our emerging childcare system and *vice versa*. This will require looking at the care and education needs of children in a new light, identifying and removing the rigidities and inadequacies of existing systems and greater investment to ensure that those who deliver services can do so in a streamlined way.
- 6.2 ● Clearly this is a time of unique opportunity in relation to ECCE policy – much of what has happened in the last seven years has begun to reap benefits; we now have a vibrant and diverse early years infrastructure, we have an emergent framework for early learning and are working towards a quality framework for the whole ECCE sector. This coming phase represents an opportunity to harvest the extensive efforts of the past few years and to bring together the main components of development into a coherent and logical whole.
- 6.3 ● The Project Team presents, in this Section, its framework for the future direction of policy in relation to ECCE. This framework has been developed in the light of the Team's appreciation of the issues emerging and its recognition that now is the time for garnering the rewards of the last phase. It represents a blueprint for action building on the insights and experience of recent years.

6.4 ● The framework consolidates the main dimensions of ECCE as outlined in previous policy documents. What we now need is a commitment to achieving these over a ten-year period. Specific targets are presented for the first five years. A review should then be undertaken to feed into the second five-year period (we return to this in Section VII below). The framework is structured as follows :

- A Vision for ECCE in the Future;
- Principles for ECCE Policy; and
- Key Objectives.

6.5 ● The framework is represented in diagrammatic format in Figure 6.1 below. While the principles and objectives are discussed separately for ease of explanation, they should be seen as a package of measures designed to address, in a seamless and co-ordinated way, the needs of children, families and society generally.

A Vision for ECCE in the Future

6.6 ● All young children should have access to, and participate in a range of quality education and care services and supports of an internationally accepted standard through a plan implemented over the next ten years (2005-2015).

Principles for ECCE Policy

6.7 ● The Project Team supports the following as the key principles that should underpin future ECCE policy :

- Valuing children's competence and contribution.
- Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development.
- Universal access for all children to early childhood care and education.
- Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision.
- Building on existing partnerships.

6.8 ● We spell out our recommendations in relation to each of the principles in the remainder of the Section.

Figure 6.1 A Framework for ECCE Policy



PRINCIPLE 1**Valuing Children’s Competence and Contribution**

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1.1	Secure commitment for the National Children’s Strategy
Objective 1.2	Promote the importance of children’s ‘here and now’ status and experiences

OBJECTIVE 1.1 Secure commitment for the National Children’s Strategy

6.9 ● The National Children’s Strategy was developed following public consultation and the cooperation of a broad range of stakeholders as well as nine Government Departments. It is a unique document in Irish social history as it provides a focal point of reference for child-related policies. The Strategy sets three national goals:

- that children will have a voice;
- that children’s lives will be better understood; and
- that children will receive quality supports and services.

These goals put children at the heart of policy planning so that their needs, interests and strengths and their views are paramount in the design and delivery of services. The Project Team supports the views expressed in the National Children’s Strategy that in the future development of ECCE services, the needs of children are central. It also supports the Strategy’s call for an ECCE sector “*comparable with the best of our EU partners, and services which adopt child development standards consistent with the requirements of a ‘whole child’ perspective*” (National Children’s Strategy, p.52). It endorses the view set out in the Strategy that achieving its goals and objectives will require changes to the way we plan and manage the delivery of services for children. **The Project Team recommends that a renewed commitment to implementing the Strategy should be given by Government for the remaining five-year period of the Strategy.**

OBJECTIVE 1.2 Promote the importance of children’s ‘here and now’ status

6.10 ● Childhood is valuable for itself, not least to children themselves who live in the present. Their day to day experiences need to be of such a range, variety and challenge that children experience the widest possible opportunities for play, discovery and consolidation of learning. Adults must be alert to the requirement to offer not just opportunities for growth and development but also chances to acquire dispositions to learn. Adults also need to be cognisant of the child’s right to express his/her preferences about all aspects of the settings in which his/her daily life is experienced.

PRINCIPLE 2**Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development**

OBJECTIVES

Objective 2.1	Meeting the needs of children and families in an integrated way
Objective 2.2	Extended parental leave in the child's first year
Objective 2.3	Out of school provision

OBJECTIVE 2.1 Meeting the needs of children and families in an integrated way

- 6.11** ● While our focus here has been on the needs of children from birth onwards, we recognise that investment is needed from the earliest stages, including the pre-natal stage and right through into the child's early years. Priority should be given to joined up, collaborative working with DHC, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and other relevant agencies to ensure that issues such as the intake of folic acid and avoidance of alcohol and smoking by expectant mothers are encouraged in accessible, appropriate ways. This collaboration should continue for families with young children to ensure, among other things, a focus on health promotion and healthy diets for small children.
- 6.12** ● The first year of life is the most vulnerable and dependent period. It is also the period of greatest intensity of learning capacity. Lack of opportunity and deprivation in early childhood has huge implications for the developing individual. Children's developmental drive should be supported, therefore, in a variety of ways. One way of doing this is to assist parents to stay at home for the first year of the child's life (see below). Other supports include training and educational support for parents, home visiting programmes with a holistic approach, and other models, all of which support, not just the child's development, but also the family, and particularly the parents. These programmes, which in some countries are allied with, and monitored by early childhood education and care settings, assume major importance for families, especially those experiencing particular difficulties. In recent years, there has been an expansion of these services, much of which has been developed and supported in a very organic way by communities and local providers.
- 6.13** ● To support a more integrated delivery, action is needed on a number of fronts. **The Project Team recommends that at central level, Departments and agencies with responsibility for child and family policy should work together to ensure more effective design and delivery of services.** The Family Support Strategy being developed by DHC in conjunction with other key Departments and agencies may provide the potential to do this. **At local level, the Team supports the work underway in City and County Childcare Committees to engage more actively with local health networks through the HSE and recommends that this work should be continued and enhanced.** This requires a great deal of cooperation on the part of a wide range of interests (see also Principle 5 below on Partnership).

OBJECTIVE 2.2 Extending Parental Leave

- 6.14** ● The Parental Leave Bill, 2002 is currently before the Oireachtas and represents a review of the Parental Leave Act, 1998. It seeks to raise the age of the eligible child to 8 years and to extend entitlement to those acting in *loco parentis* as well as allowing leave to be taken in separate blocks. However, it does not make provision for payment during parental leave – which accounts for its low take-up to date – nor does it extend the period of leave. It also fails to address ways to ensure that more men avail of it; an issue that the Team agreed should be encouraged.
- 6.15** ● The Project Team strongly supports the move towards opportunities for parents to remain at home in the first year of their child’s life. **The Team, therefore, recommends that parental leave should be provided for the baby’s first year of life.** This can be achieved over the next 4 years by increasing the length of childbirth related leave (see Box 6.1).
- 6.16** ● In making this recommendation, the Team is mindful of the need to ensure that parents who take up this option do not distance themselves from the labour market⁶. However, we believe that this proposal is conservative when compared with other EU countries – no other EU country provides less parental leave than Ireland. Childbirth related leave can run up to 3 years as is the case in France, Norway and Sweden, over two years in Austria and a year and a half in Denmark. In the UK, policy has been moving towards longer Maternity Leave with a view to having a 12 month period by 2009. **We recommend that the period during which Maternity Benefit is paid should be increased so that by 2009 women will be entitled to the payment for 26 weeks.** Moreover, further consideration should be given in the near future to paid Parental Leave. Arguments to support this were presented in Section V above.

Box 6.1

Proposed Incremental Increases (weeks) in Childbirth-related Leave*

	Current Provision	Budget 2006	Budget 2007	Budget 2008	Budget 2009
Maternity Leave	18	20	22	24	26
Additional Leave	8	9	10	10	10
Parental Leave	14	14	15	15	16
Total	40	43	47	49	52

*Paternity Leave is not legislated for but may be availed of mainly in the public sector and is 3-6 days.

⁶ The Team also acknowledges the debate on the need to support the children of parents who are not working (see for example, National Women’s Council of Ireland work on reforming the social welfare system).

- 6.17 ● The Project Team recognises the significant cost to the State of increasing Maternity Benefit (see Table 7.1 in Section VII). However, the Team is still committed to it on the basis of its fundamental importance to children (see also Section V). Employer bodies represented on the Team were unable to support this recommendation on the basis that a substantial review of Parental Leave has just been undertaken and that new legislation is now before the Oireachtas.
- 6.18 ● It may not always be appropriate or feasible for children to be at home in their first year. These children should, therefore, have access to a quality early childhood care and education service (we discuss this in Principle 3 below). Options for flexibility in relation to when parental leave is taken should also be available.

OBJECTIVE 2.3 Out of school provision

- 6.19 ● Notwithstanding its focus on the needs of children aged 0-6 years, the Project Team recognises the need to invest significantly in the further development of out of school provision or school age childcare⁷. We have not considered it in detail in this report as it goes somewhat beyond the remit of our terms of reference. However, the Team's firmly held view is that for integrated provision, services are urgently required for children in an out of school context which would support them and assist their parents to work. Under the EOCP, a NCCC sub-group produced a policy document on school age childcare which has just been published. **The Team endorses the proposals made in that document and recommends that they be implemented by the Early Childhood Development Unit, when established** (see Section VII). Key steps to be taken should include supporting and resourcing the existing community- and school-based infrastructure to provide school age childcare, developing a suitable programme with a strong emphasis on play and design and delivery of currently non-existent training for staff working with children up to the age of 14. As there is no regulation at present of school age childcare, **the Project Team recommends that new legislation should be drafted or existing legislation amended and resources set aside for this key area of childcare provision.**

⁷ Out of school provision/ school age childcare refers to childcare provided outside of normal school hours from the age when children first enter primary education to the age when they reach maturity – typically 14 years.

PRINCIPLE 3**Universal access to ECCE for all children**

OBJECTIVES

Objective 3.1 universal access for all children

Objective 3.2 targeted interventions for disadvantaged children, children with special educational needs, Travellers and ethnic minorities

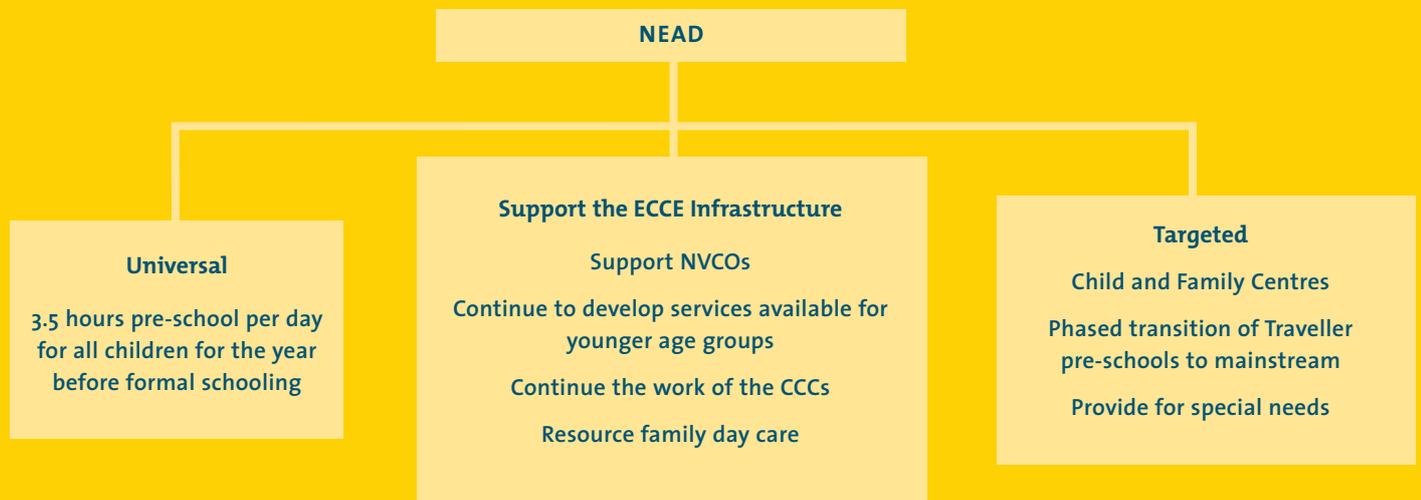
OBJECTIVE 3.1 Universal access for all children

- 6.20** ● From the outset, the Project Team's focus has been on how best to serve the care and education needs of *all* children. In practical terms a phased development of services will be needed so that over time, access to provision can be rolled out to every child. The initiatives required will vary in response to the needs and rights of children and families; a one size fits all approach will not be appropriate.
- 6.21** ● **The Project Team recommends the establishment by the Government of a National Early Age Development (NEAD) Programme to support the needs of all children.** The Programme takes its name from the Irish word 'nead' meaning nest which connotes a safe environment where little ones are nurtured. It also represents the coming together of a broad range of components and materials into a cohesive whole.
- 6.22** ● The Programme is based on three main strategies (see Figure 6.2) :
- a State-provided ECCE session *for all children* for a period of one year before they go into primary school;
 - the support and reform of the *existing ECCE infrastructure* so that children have access to quality services that are currently provided in a diverse range of settings (and are at present resourced under the EOCP); and
 - targeted provision for children *with specific needs*.

For all Children

- 6.23** ● Combined with the childbirth related leave discussed above, facilities for the care and education of children should continue to be resourced so that there is quality, choice and diversity of provision. **The stock of ECCE places available through full-day, sessional and family day care (child-minding) settings should continue to be developed and enhanced so that they can provide quality services for those children from 1 year up to when they are eligible for a free pre-school place.**
- 6.24** ● Moving in a seamless way from the younger age groups to the older cohort, **a free, State-funded ECCE session should be made available to each child.** The value of providing universal services has been made earlier in the report (see Sections I and V). The initial target to be achieved in the next five years would be to support 3.5 hours, 5 days a week (17.5 hours) for 48 weeks of the year for children over a period of a year before they go to school. This can be supported in the existing childcare infrastructure,

Figure 6.2: The National Early Age Development Programme (NEAD)



where those who attend, are currently catered for or in the infant classes in primary schools with some reform (see below). This might be offered as a franchised service provided on behalf of the State. Standardised criteria would be set for the delivery of the service. Community and private providers and schools would be eligible to deliver the Programme once these criteria were met. The features of the provision should include:

- a good physical infrastructure so that the space provided reflects the needs of the pre-school child;
- a standardised framework and pedagogy (see below); due consideration should be given to the role of the Irish language;
- adequate staffing; a teacher or ECCE worker with degree level training (B.Ed. or B.A. ECCE) and an ECCE assistant should work together to meet the needs of young children;
- low adult/child ratios; international research shows that group size has a major impact on quality; under existing regulations the requirement is a ratio of 1:8 for those aged 3 years and over;
- equipment and resources that are age and culturally appropriate;
- facilities for play, particularly outdoor play⁸, which is an area that requires immediate investment;
- facilities that support pre-school and after school care in the same/adjacent premises; and
- accredited training (this is addressed in more detail below).

⁸ In this regard, the Team welcomes the National Play and Recreation Policy and calls for its speedy implementation as well as for adequate resourcing of the newly emergent Play Resource Centre.

- 6.25 ● The Programme would be rolled out on a phased basis building where appropriate on existing services, starting with the most disadvantaged children and then extending to all. Disadvantage can be determined using the criteria developed by the Education Research Centre on behalf of the Educational Disadvantage Committee. This would mean that over a five-year time frame a pre-school session would be available to all children in the year prior to entering primary school. In the five-year period, 2010-2015, measures should be put in place to extend this to children two years before they enter primary school and for durations longer than 3.5 hours per day.
- 6.26 ● The Project Team is aware that this session will not cater for all the ECCE needs of children in full-day care when their parents work. This is why a move to full-day provision is important and why, for example, in the UK, the move to ensure “wrap-around services” has been heavily promoted. What is needed then is a combination of services, building on what currently exists, provided flexibly and in an integrated way so that a parent can choose the most appropriate form of care for his/her child. The Team, therefore, suggests that the universal session outlined above should be run back to back with services already provided in ECCE settings by agreement with providers (both private and community-based) so that those who opt for full-day care can still avail of it. The total cost to the parent would, however, be reduced (we discuss the issue of cost in Section VII below). It also needs to be supported by a well-developed school age childcare infrastructure (see above).

For the Infrastructure

- 6.27 ● **The NEAD Programme should continue the EOCP’s work of enhancing the childcare infrastructure and supporting the work of the County and City Childcare Committees (CCCs) and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.** This will ensure that the best aspects of our current provision continue to be supported and enhanced. A key part of the approach adopted by the NEAD Programme should be to continue to support and resource childminders in particular, as childminding continues to be the first choice for many parents in both urban and rural contexts. **The Project Team recommends that childminder networks should be developed and enhanced.** Some of this work is already happening under the EOCP but sustained investment will be required. The CCCs are developing good models for the childminding sector; in particular the aforementioned networks and the development of links with day-care services in the community. **Childminders should be required to register and be accredited like other providers, as should providers of school age childcare. This will require new/amended legislation.**

6.28 ● **To deliver the NEAD Programme, significant reforms of the present primary school system are also urgently needed**, particularly if it is to accommodate the needs of pre-school children but also because it currently provides only for 4-5 year olds. The key changes needed are in relation to the physical infrastructure and reduced adult/child ratios. The present Programme for Government proposed that all children under 9 years should be in classes of less than 20. At present in primary schools it is not unusual to have a 1:30 ratio. **The Team recommends that there should be a ratio of 2 adults for every 20 children in the infant classes of primary school.**

6.29 ● In new schools, serious consideration should be given to campus style developments to incorporate the whole range of ECCE services. For this to happen, guidelines and support to Boards of Management on usage of premises are needed.

For Children with Specific Needs

6.30 ● While the Project Team supports the development of an ECCE policy that is universal in its intent, it recognises that certain groups of children and their families have particular needs that should be supported as part of the approach outlined above. It supports Government policy in this regard. The groups that require additional support include :

- children who experience socio-economic disadvantage;
- Traveller children and those from ethnic minorities; and
- children with special educational needs.

Children who experience Socio-economic Disadvantage

6.31 ● Throughout the report we acknowledge the particular and very marked effect that ECCE has on children from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds. Evidence that ECCE is a vital component in ending child poverty is contained in a wide range of literature (see for example, Land, 2002; Leseman, 2002; Evans, 2004). The Combat Poverty Agency highlighted the dual role that the care and education of young children plays; it gives children a better start in life and it facilitates parents, especially mothers to access employment (Combat Poverty Agency, 2004). Some good work has been done in recent years to ensure a better start for disadvantaged children and families (for good examples, see Department of Health and Children, 2004). Gaps have been identified, however, in these services (CECDE, 2004a). These are :

- Sessional services dominate
- Services targeting children from birth to 2 years are very limited
- Services for children aged 4-6 years outside school hours are very limited and
- Services are more concentrated in urban areas.

- 6.32** ● The implication of these gaps is that there are a large number of young children who do not have access to vital services.
- 6.33** ● The EOCP is currently contributing over €30 million per annum in current funding towards the staffing costs of about 800 centre-based childcare services across the country to ensure that disadvantaged parents who are in employment, education and training can access childcare at less than the market rate. The Project Team's strongly held view is that a similar package of measures with particular supports should be provided for families and children in the lower socio-economic groups. This is in acknowledgement of the wide range of risks that poor children are exposed to in their daily lives and which have been summarised by Evans (2004) as follows:

Poor children confront widespread environmental inequities. Compared with their economically advantaged counterparts, they are exposed to more family turmoil, violence, separation from their families, instability and chaotic households. Poor children experience less social support and their parents are less responsive and more authoritarian. Low-income children are read to relatively infrequently, watch more TV and have less access to books⁹ and computers. Low income parents are less involved in their children's school activities. Low income neighbourhoods are more dangerous ... and suffer greater deterioration. Predominantly, low-income schools and day care are inferior.

- 6.34** ● In recognition of these inequities, early years programmes that adopt a multidimensional approach to children and their families have been shown to work better than those focused solely on strict pedagogy and school readiness. The Project Team strongly supports this approach. It recognises the valuable work undertaken in disadvantaged communities and the key contribution of community groups like, for example, the role played by community playgroups in supporting children and families (Katherine Howard Foundation, 2005).
- 6.35** ● As part of its consideration of the needs of disadvantaged children, the Project Team looked at the Early Start programme which was introduced on a pilot basis in 1994. Despite a somewhat negative evaluation initially (Ryan *et al.*, 1998) the programme continues but has not been expanded since its inception. It was restructured in 1998 and a curriculum and training were developed. In our consultations it was suggested that the positive elements of the Early Start programme should be built upon and should be extended to a greater number of communities. These elements should be identified by establishing a rigorous research project on Early Start so that the outcomes of the work can be identified and built upon in a more systematic manner.

⁹ The Books for Children Initiative run by the Department of Education and Science was a valuable means of providing access to books for all children.

- 6.36 ● **The Project Team recommends that the NEAD Programme should include specific support - building on the experience of the EOCP, the Early Start programme and others - for disadvantaged children and their families.** This should be provided on top of the universal service recommended above for the pre-school group. **To deliver this, the Project Team recommends that Child and Family Centres should be established to provide integrated services to disadvantaged children and their parents.** The Centres would in effect, act as a focal point for the development and delivery of child and family services locally. The OECD in its review of ECCE policy in Ireland also supported this approach. The Centres should draw on the experience of models like the Family Resource Centres here, the work that Barnardos does in relation to supporting families and children and the Children's Centres established under Surestart in the UK (see Annex 6.1). Their function would be to provide models of outreach to children and families.
- 6.37 ● There is already a great deal of evidence of local communities working together to provide integrated services (see also discussion on partnership below). Work has also begun at local level to build this kind of approach under the EOCP and in a small number of communities including Tallaght, (see Annex 6.2 for an outline of the work of the Tallaght project) and more recently in Ballymun, Coolock and Dublin's Inner City. The Project Team recommends that in the establishment of Child and Family Centres, these and existing community-based models of intervention should be drawn upon. To resource the Centres, the staffing grants currently available under the EOCP should be continued.

Travellers and Children from Ethnic Minorities

- 6.38 ● Traveller pre-schools have existed for over 20 years as a very specific form of early intervention for this section of the population. While the service has provided a valued support to Traveller children and their parents, its delivery is often variable and in limited supply. The Forum Report (1998) highlighted a "bewildering variety" in accommodation, staffing, programmes and accountability. **The Project Team supports a phased transition of provision for Traveller children, from one of segregated service delivery to their being part of more mainstream provision.** To do this, the specific needs of Travellers should be identified and addressed. A useful model from which to draw is the 'éist' diversity and equality training programme developed by Pavee Point under the EOCP, which is designed as a vehicle to promote inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice and respond appropriately to the needs of all young children and adults. This programme should become part of more mainstream provision. **Opportunities to involve Traveller interests also need to be reflected in the structures that are established to manage the delivery of ECCE services in the future.**

6.39 ● The growth in the number of ethnic minorities in many disadvantaged areas has led to the recognition of the need to embrace diversity and to respond to the needs of these groups through training. The Team recommends that future policy must also have as part of its core focus a respect for diversity and interculturalism. Under the EOCP, the NCCC Diversity Sub-Group produced a set of guidelines for practitioners in early childhood settings. The guidelines focus on addressing the needs of both minority and majority children and adults in ECCE settings. The 'éist' project (see above) has supported the work of the CCCs in this area by providing diversity and equality awareness training and information packs. In turn the CCCs have supported the building of capacity within the sector to respond to the needs of ethnic minority children, Traveller children and children with special requirements. This work should be continued.

Children with Special Educational Needs

- 6.40** ● A substantial number of responses to the Team's call for submissions came from organisations and individuals who are working with young children who have special educational needs because of a physical or sensory disability or who have learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural disorders¹⁰. The needs of children with disabilities are varied and as such, require a range of personalised responses. At present, some children are supported in mainstream ECCE settings; indeed, in some rural areas specialised facilities do not exist. The Team supports the move to integrate children into mainstream settings but stresses that adequate resources are needed to ensure that this happens successfully.
- 6.41** ● Considerable attention has been given, in recent reports, to the challenges that need to be faced in delivering ECCE services to those with special educational needs. The Forum Report (Coolahan, 1998) gave a great deal of consideration to this area as did the White Paper (1999) which proposed an early intervention service delivery plan. In the Child Care Regulations, however, there is no specific reference given to special needs.
- 6.42** ● Developments in recent years have improved access to schools for children with disabilities. The emphasis has been on integration into mainstream education. This includes, for example, since 1998, the appointment of Special Needs Assistants and the increase in the number of resource teachers. Grants were also made available by the DES for the purchase of specialised equipment; the most recent round of grants was announced in February of this year. An early years special education visiting service is also available to those with visual and hearing impairments. Following a series of legal challenges, there has been considerable response at policy level to children with special educational needs, particularly those with autism or with visual and hearing impairment. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 is the legislative framework within which services will be delivered in the future.

¹⁰ Children with special educational needs can also include children with normal potential but who show developmental delays due to socio-economic or cultural factors.

- 6.43 ● Notwithstanding these positive developments, there has been little recognition of the additional supports that are needed by early years providers, despite the recognition that early intervention plays a hugely important role for children with special educational needs and their families. Access to additional supports in rural areas is a particular concern and mainstream providers, often in the absence of these supports, care for many children with special educational needs. The system of resource allocation for special needs used in primary school should also be extended to the ECCE sector¹¹.
- 6.44 ● The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is the body charged with responsibility for providing services at national and local level in order that the educational needs of children with disabilities are identified and provided for. **The Project Team recommends that the NCSE should work collaboratively with the proposed new ECCE structure (see Section VII) when established, to develop paths to implementation for those in the 0-6 age group.** In particular, the Team proposes that it should develop a high quality family-focused early intervention plan with access to family support and services. This will require specialised equipment, special needs assistants, regular professional support and training for ECCE staff on special education issues to support those with special needs in mainstream settings in line with Government policy on mainstreaming for people with disabilities.
- 6.45 ● An anomaly currently exists in relation to children with special educational needs who are attending Early Start. These children are doubly disadvantaged as they are not entitled to the same levels of support (i.e. Special Needs Assistants) as those who attend community-based settings. In addition, they are only entitled to stay in Early Start for one year but in a community-based setting they can remain until they are deemed to be developmentally ready to progress to primary school. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

¹¹ This system allocates hours per week of resource teaching support to schools on the basis of disability ranging from 3 hours for those with physical disability to 5 hours for autistic children or those with multiple disabilities.

PRINCIPLE 4**Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision****OBJECTIVES**

Objective 4.1	a learning framework for the early years
Objective 4.2	standards for quality
Objective 4.3	a skilled workforce
Objective 4.4	supporting the infrastructure

- 6.46** ● Of fundamental importance to quality development is the need for an interface between each of these objectives so that the standards and inspection processes support the learning framework and that those working in the sector have the necessary skills and support to implement and constantly review them.

OBJECTIVE 4.1 A learning framework for the early years

- 6.47** ● The Project Team endorses the work of the NCCA on an outline framework for early learning (NCCA, 2004) and welcomes its very detailed consultation phase to support the work. The Project Team firmly backs the approach taken which supports children's *learning across* the early childhood period (0-6 years). What is most significant about the framework is that it recognises the dynamic nature of development in this period. The framework is based on four themes; well-being, identity and belonging, communication and exploring and thinking. The draft materials have been well-received by a range of stakeholders in the ECCE field and the task now in hand for the NCCA is to begin to put the actual framework together incorporating specimen curricula. **The Team recommends that the framework should be expedited and that alongside this development a detailed resource audit should be undertaken with ECCE providers (including parents) to ensure satisfactory implementation.**

Objective 4.2: Standards for quality

- 6.48** ● The Project Team also agreed on the need to develop standards to improve services for young children in ECCE settings. The standard of provision is currently set by the Childcare (Pre-School) Regulations which were put in place in 1996 and which have been under review by an advisory group established by the Department of Health and Children. These regulations do not cover all childcare settings (childminders are exempt) nor do they include 4 and 5 year olds in primary schools.
- 6.49** ● The Project Team acknowledges the work in relation to improving quality in the early years which is being delivered with support from the EOCP. Indeed, the NVCOs have actively engaged with the development of quality standards in the past few years. The CECDE's work on developing a National Framework on Quality for ECCE will set the standard against which provision can be benchmarked and improved. Following a period of

intensive consultation, the CECDE has published a considered set of 12 principles (see Box 6.2) on which the framework will be based (CECDE, 2004d). The prototype National Framework on Quality will be published in Autumn 2005. The detailed consultation process that has supported the development of the framework is commended by the Team as it helps to ensure agreement by the ECCE sector on the future direction of quality provision.

Box 6.2

Principles of the CECDE's National Framework for Quality in ECCE

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.
- The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.
- Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting his/her well-being, learning and development.
- Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.
- Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education.
- Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.
- The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on his/her well-being, learning and development.
- The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted.
- The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental.
- The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.
- Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.
- Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Source: CECDE, 2004d.

6.50 ● At present, ECCE providers are obliged to notify the health authorities of their existence but not to register¹². There is no formal registration process and there is little evidence available on the impact of the present system of notification and inspection on quality. **The Project Team recommends**

¹² Notification means that the onus is on the person or organisation providing the service to notify the relevant authority. Registration requires the State to agree to register the service as meeting a minimum standard.

that the Department of Health and Children should put in train legislative reform of the Child Care Act, 1991 (which is the legislation that governs the existing regulations) (see also Principles 2 and 3 above) to bring in child-minding and school age childcare (they are currently not covered under existing legislation) and to introduce a system of registration for ECCE providers. The ECDU, when established (see Section VII) should have responsibility for the registration of ECCE providers and should establish a process of ongoing review and evaluation of services.

- 6.51 ● In addition, a unitary inspection and evaluation service is now needed for ECCE. At present, inspections of ECCE settings are carried out by HSE personnel while inspections of schools are carried out by the DES Inspectorate. **The Project Team recommends that the existing regulations should be streamlined with the quality principles developed by the CECDE so as to facilitate the development of a single set of standards.** This should also be implemented by the ECDU, when established. This is currently the case in the UK where Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) has responsibility for inspection of all services for children in the 0-6 age group. The Project Team also recommends that an implementation strategy for the National Framework on Quality should be developed by the CECDE.

Objective 4.3 : A Skilled ECCE Workforce

- 6.52 ● As noted earlier in the report, training of staff is hugely important to positive child outcomes (see Sylva *et al*, 2003). The Project Team looked at this issue in considerable detail. It found that there are very little data on the size of the ECCE workforce in Ireland, on qualifications and on training levels. From what is available, we know that the workforce is largely female, training levels are low and rates of turnover are high. In the EOCP, at the end of 2004, 3,009 full-time and 3,772 part-time staff were working in funded facilities (of which 906 full-time and 1,307 part-time positions are directly funded). There are also significant numbers of Community Employment workers in EOCP funded services. In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 4,364 primary teachers employed in the infant classes in primary schools (Department of Education and Science, 2003).
- 6.53 ● Most recent figures from the EOCP (ADM, 2004) show that there has been a steady increase in the levels of training of staff in funded services since the programme started. From a sample of over 5,000 in 2004, one-third had FETAC Level 2 qualifications and one-sixth (886; 16.4%) had availed of training provided by the NVCOs. However, almost 10% had Foundation Level training only (494; 9.1%) and another 10% (502; 9.3%) had no childcare qualification. While these figures represent a relatively small part of the ECCE sector, relating to only about 28,000 centre-based community-based childcare places, they do suggest strong leadership is required on what the recognised professional skills for ECCE should be for the future if the quality objective is to be achieved. To facilitate this, and in light of the Team's difficulty in obtaining good information, **it recommends that a national training audit should be undertaken to establish, in more**

detail, the current state of training.

- 6.54 ● In general terms, the Team acknowledges the organic development of training in the ECCE area, through parental initiatives and parental involvement, and the evolution of methods of adult education that took into account the skills, experience and expertise of parents. Valuable learning accrued to the sector through this could usefully be drawn on in the future.
- 6.55 ● Within the ECCE sector there has been an increase in the options for degree level training. Degree courses in ECCE/Early Childhood Studies are now offered by UCC (since 1995), the Dublin Institute of Technology (since 1999), St. Nicholas Montessori College, Mary Immaculate College (since 2003) and in the Carlow Institute of Technology. It is also expected that other institutes of technology will develop courses in ECCE in the coming years and a range of private colleges offer courses.
- 6.56 ● Our consultations with teacher training colleges revealed that the level of ECCE training given on the B.A./B. Ed. degree courses undertaken by students is small (40 hours in First Year) and that the take up of optional modules in ECCE is low. A review of primary teacher education (DES, 2002) recommended that teacher training should incorporate early childhood studies in each year and should move to a four year degree. We endorse this recommendation.
- 6.57 ● The core findings of the Project Team in relation to training were as follows :
- Training is not a requirement of the Pre-School Regulations and this has contributed to the low levels of training across the sector. Notwithstanding this, there have been enormous efforts on the part of the voluntary childcare sector to source training to facilitate providers in their work. Much of this has been developed and supported and indeed delivered by the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.
 - There has been an increasing demand for degree level ECCE courses but supply is still relatively low. For example, CAO figures for the 2005/06 academic year for DIT's B.A. in ECCE show that there are 974 first preference applicants for about 45 places.
 - Access to training which is flexible and which is provided in the evening and at week-ends is in short supply so that those who work full-time in ECCE settings find it difficult to attend.
 - Quality across courses varies; there is a vast array of providers including the VECs, third level colleges, private colleges, FÁS and the NVCOs and up to recently quality assurance of training by some providers has not been guaranteed.
 - There is no accredited training available for childminders. A welcome development in this area was the Quality Awareness Programme for childminders provided under the EOCP.

- For those who wish to work in Irish-medium settings, training is particularly hard to access.
- Current training does not adequately cover diversity, equality and anti-discriminatory issues.
- The cost of training can be prohibitive for some providers. Adult education courses, including FETAC courses are expensive to undertake. Those who seek training through this avenue are, therefore, treated differentially to those who go directly to third level colleges where provision is free.

- 6.58** ● At a broad level, the work by the NQAI on a National Qualifications Framework will address some of the issues about qualifications in a more structured way. In addition, FETAC since the beginning of 2005, initiated a process whereby training providers are required to have a quality assurance system in place. This development is welcome, and when fully in place will greatly improve the training that is currently provided.
- 6.59** ● Following the publication of the National Childcare Strategy in 1999, which also considered training, the NCCC developed a Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the ECCE sector (DJELR, 2002). The framework articulates the occupational profiles and core skills for each stage of professional development, access, transfer and progression and issues about quality assurance (see also Section III). Of central importance to the Model Framework is its recognition of experiential learning as a route to professional development. Although the document was published in 2002, there has been little or no development in this area, despite broad agreement by the wider ECCE sector on its direction. **The Project Team recommends that the NQAI, in conjunction with the accrediting bodies should give active consideration to the particular training and accreditation needs of the ECCE sector and that the Model Framework developed under the EOCP should be used as a basis for this work.**
- 6.60** ● In the future, there is a need to think about what skills should be set for those who work with children in the 0-6 age category and how their developmental needs can best be supported by the adults who look after them. In this respect, the Project Team welcomes the vision identified by the Daycare Trust in the UK for its workforce :

“by 2020 the early education and care workforce will mainly be educated to degree level and will be capable of meeting the challenges of working in highly complex environments where children’s learning and being are valued and demand a high level of skills and knowledge. The workforce will be drawn from all sections of the community, including men, and the current split between ‘teachers’ and ‘childcare workers’ rethought around a model of an integrated worker who employs a holistic, pedagogical approach”.

6.61 ● As greater demands are placed on those working in the sector to focus on the developmental needs of children, on ensuring quality and on working with parents and communities, greater attention will have to be given to the core skills needed. The Project Team considered what skills ECCE workers will require in the future and recommends that training providers should offer opportunities to develop these skills. Core skills (which could be specified as requirements to deliver the NEAD Programme) might include :

- an understanding of and respect for children regardless of background or ethnicity and knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate activities for children;
- recognition of the diverse needs of children and strong ambitions for their educational attainment;
- ability to work with parents and communities in a supportive and cooperative way;
- having a broad understanding of the NCCA's framework on early learning and how it can best be applied;
- assistants with lower levels of training (at a minimum standard of FETAC Level 2) to support qualified ECCE workers who will have a degree level qualification in ECCE. This would be aimed at achieving the EU target of having 60% of staff with at least degree level training (or equivalent). Assistants will be encouraged and provided opportunities to progress to degree level as, at present, there are no progression routes;
- appropriate and accessible training should be provided for childminders with the long-term view of more formal qualifications;
- opportunities for staff to have workplace continuing professional development (CPD) should be available in all ECCE settings as currently there is none; and
- opportunities should be developed at postgraduate level for research and for the training of trainers to increase the knowledge base on ECCE training provision.

6.62 ● **A minimum training standard for ECCE staff should be agreed and phased in over the next five years.** This should include at least 60% of staff trained to degree level and a minimum standard for other staff of FETAC Level 2. This ought to be a requirement of registration and of the CECDE's National Framework on Quality.

Community Employment

- 6.63 ● The Project Team also considered the role of Community Employment (CE) and other Active Labour Market Programme personnel in ECCE settings. At present, Active Labour Market programmes are an essential component in the staffing of these settings, particularly in areas of greatest disadvantage. The Project Team supports the view that, in the longer term, over-reliance on these programmes to support the ECCE sector should be reduced. Furthermore, those on CE should be supernumerary (as other trainees are) so that they are not included in the adult-child ratios that are required under regulations in ECCE settings. The Project Team recommends that in the medium-term, the experience of those on CE should be improved. **CE workers should be well-supported in ECCE settings with mentor-style training by qualified ECCE mentors. To achieve this, the skills base of mentors in ECCE needs to be expanded. In the longer-term, CE places in ECCE should be ring-fenced into a more social economy type programme to support essential services in the community.**

Pay and Conditions

- 6.64 ● The future skills base for ECCE should also be reflected in the value placed on the ECCE worker by society. In this regard, there is an urgent need to look at pay and conditions for those who currently work in the childcare sector. This is linked to the issues about training raised above and the need for an occupational profile for the sector. **The Project Team strongly supports the recommendation in the National Childcare Strategy that a national pay scale should be established for ECCE workers. This should be developed through the most appropriate mechanisms available by the DETE and should be linked to levels of training as outlined above.**

Under-Representation of Men

- 6.65 ● The Project Team also agreed that there should be more opportunities for men to work in the ECCE field so as to increase the diversity of experience of young children in play and learning and, ultimately, to improve the outcomes for children. Recent statistics from the INTO show that 90% of all students in training for primary teaching are female and that of 1,357 teachers appointed last year, only 144 were male. In the childcare sector, the proportion of men is even lower. The Kilkenny Childcare Committee has been instrumental in setting up a 'Men in Childcare' Network and hosted a conference on the issue in conjunction with a number of bodies. The National Flexi-Work Partnership which is funded under the EU EQUAL Programme is also looking at measures to encourage men to work in ECCE. Widening the gender diversity in ECCE has proved difficult but **measures to address the under-representation of men in ECCE settings should be encouraged through active recruitment policies and through networking** to support those already in the sector as well as raising awareness among parents.

Objective 4.4 : Supporting the Infrastructure

- 6.66 ● Quality in ECCE service delivery requires adequate financial resources and appropriate support/mentoring to facilitate the ongoing challenge towards attainment and retention of quality standards. At national level developments are advancing to consolidate national standards (CECDE), regulations (DHC) and curriculum (NCCA) for the ECCE sector. There is also a need to ensure that an appropriate support framework is in place for ECCE services in parallel with the implementation of enhanced national standards and inspection procedures.
- 6.67 ● Much of the work establishing this support framework has been advanced under the EOCP – Quality Improvement measure. Thirty-three County/City Childcare Committees operate within this framework alongside the seven national voluntary childcare organisations which receive funding under the EOCP. The national support structures operate at a strategic level through services for their membership and support for the sector as a whole. One other key difference between the local and national structures is that the national organisations existed before the EOCP and continue to make a strong contribution at policy level.
- 6.68 ● These national organisations work in collaboration with the local county structures and both contribute to the EOCP quality improvement objectives. The promotion and support of quality underpins all of the work undertaken by the National/County support structures and their actions contribute to the enhancement and promotion of quality within ECCE, e.g. training, professional development and capacity building. Last year there was significant progress made in the implementation of County and National strategic plans and organisational infrastructure. This represents a major leap forward from previous years and shows the benefits and need for such supports in parallel to any inspection function. Also in evidence is a greater level of collaboration and sharing of expertise and resources with other agencies, horizontally and vertically. The capacity in the ECCE sector has been considerably advanced and the quality of childcare service provision throughout the country is consistently being developed and improved through the work of the County and National support structures.
- 6.69 ● The EOCP quality improvement measure has established and consolidated the support framework, which will also be required in the future national policy framework for ECCE. The CCC foundations, which exist at county level are endorsed by the County Development Boards (CDBs) and also operate with the Local Government Framework CDB Development plans. **The Project Team recommends that this work should be supported and continued within the NEAD Programme (see above).** In so doing, some thought needs to be given to strengthening the organisational nature of the CCCs. Currently they function as companies limited by guarantee and do not have any statutory basis. Their role is also limited to the delivery of the EOCP. This will require change if they are to be part of the ECCE infrastructure in the future.

PRINCIPLE 5**Building on existing partnerships****OBJECTIVES**

Objective 5.1	partnership at national and local levels
Objective 5.2	partnership with parents and communities
Objective 5.3	partnership with the Business/Employer Sector.

OBJECTIVE 5.1 Partnership at national and local levels

- 6.70** ● Partnership has a particular resonance in the Irish context and there is a Government commitment to collaborative effort across a range of policy areas. The work of the Team has shown that the ECCE policy area is no exception. There is a very strong and vibrant localised network of ECCE providers which is caring for the nation's young in a broad range of settings and using a number of developmental approaches. Examples of how its participation has been very useful in the development of policy include input to the CECDE's National Framework on Quality, the NCCA's outline framework for early learning, the development by the NCCC of a Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in ECCE as well as its School Age Childcare Policy document. Much of this engagement has been with the NVCOs who have been resourced to be part of the wider policy planning process (see Principle 3 above). At county level also, the CCCs are providing an opportunity for agencies and providers to interact with each other. It is envisaged that the participation of the DES in the county structures will now be enhanced with the establishment of regional offices.
- 6.71** ● At local level, more opportunities are needed for cross-sectoral co-operation which focuses on the needs of children in a more integrated way. In particular, in the establishment of the Child and Family Centres (see Principle 3 above), agencies and local communities will have to work together to ensure that local needs are identified and then met. Greater cooperation is needed still between schools and the community childcare sector. **The Project Team, therefore, recommends that the DES through its regional structures should encourage schools to develop links with the community-based ECCE infrastructure through the CCC network to plan and develop more integrated delivery.**

OBJECTIVE 5.2 Partnership with parents and communities

- 6.72** ● Another aspect of the partnership that is needed to implement change is the need for a wider involvement of parents, families and the communities where children live. The move towards integrated service delivery is most powerfully felt at the local community level. One of the difficulties in this area is that there is no representative body for parents' voices to be heard in the ECCE area. The White Paper on Early Childhood Education specifically raised the issue of parental involvement. The CECDE has been given a responsibility to progress this area of work and has articulated

parental involvement in the principles which underpin the forthcoming National Framework on Quality (see above). **The Project Team recommends that the CECDE should bring forward proposals for the more active engagement of parents in planning and delivery of ECCE.**

- 6.73 ● The voice of children is central to all of our recommendations and the Project Team stresses that imaginative approaches to consulting with children are also needed on an ongoing basis. This is of particular importance when planning school age childcare. The Project Team endorses the work being done by the National Children’s Office in this area (NCO, *et al*, 2005). It also supports the role played by advocacy groups who provide a voice for particularly marginalised children.

OBJECTIVE 5.3 Partnership with the business/employer sector

- 6.74 ● In a number of countries employers play a key role in supporting early childhood services. There has been a growing awareness of late in the business community in Ireland (see, for example, National Competitiveness Council, 2004; National Centre for Partnership and Performance, 2004) of the value that early childhood care and education plays in the longer term to productivity and to prosperity. In the short-term it makes good business sense to assist employees with childcare as this can address issues in relation to:
- recruitment (employers who offer additional supports will have the advantage when it comes to filling vacancies);
 - higher retention rates resulting in reduced recruitment costs;
 - reduced absenteeism due to childcare concerns; and
 - greater loyalty – employees are more likely to show loyalty if they feel their employer is supportive.
- 6.75 ● A special working group has been established under the social partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* – bringing together representatives of IBEC and ICTU – to examine the role of employers and unions in supporting the development of childcare. The outcome of its deliberations, being facilitated by Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, are likely to be considered in the context of the next partnership discussions.
- 6.76 ● The Project Team endorses the view of the OECD that there is a very important role to be played by employers in the development of ECCE policy in the future. In IBEC’s Pre-Budget Submission (IBEC, 2005), it also draws particular attention to the need to invest in the quality of the childcare infrastructure and to assist parents in paying for the care of their children. There are many different ways of supporting the ECCE needs of children and their parents. One of the key areas where employers could contribute is in supporting school age childcare, as this represents a particular point at which parents often have to leave the workforce due to a lack of facilities to cater for their children after school or during school

holidays. One of the issues that will have to be addressed in any consideration of this issue is that employees who receive support with childcare from their employers are liable to pay tax as this is regarded as a Benefit in Kind.

- 6.77** ● ECCE also needs to be considered as an integral part of work-life balance policy. The Mayor's London Childcare Strategy highlights the importance of businesses supporting their employees through, for example, information and guidance on Government supports and developing more streamlined family friendly working policies. These initiatives are part of a general context of support for children, parents and providers through a range of Government policies. While some good practice exists already in Ireland, particularly in larger companies, the Team is mindful that the challenge is often greater for SMEs to deliver on this.
- 6.78** ● The Project Team urges the business community to look at initiatives that have been developed in other countries to assist employees with the care and education of their children. **The Project Team recommends that, in the upcoming talks on a successor to *Sustaining Progress*, this issue should be addressed.**

VII

Implementing the ECCE Policy Framework

Introduction

- 7.1** ● The most crucial aspect of the NESF's work on ECCE policy is to ensure that the recommendations in the Project Team's policy framework are translated into key action lines that can be implemented. The Project Team recommends that this framework should be developed over a ten year period so that by 2015 the landscape of ECCE policy and practice will be greatly altered. It is now clear that enlightened and far-sighted investment in ECCE at this stage will reap bountiful dividends on a variety of levels as we progress into the 21st century. Here we set out an implementation plan for the medium to long-term. The Team supports an initial plan for five years, followed by review and a further five-year period after that.
- 7.2** ● To guarantee successful implementation the Team believes that a number of mechanisms are needed. In summary these are :
- co-ordination of policy at national and local levels;
 - an outline programme with specific goals and timelines; and
 - clear budget lines and committed resources that are ring-fenced and are provided on a multi-annual basis.

We present our recommendations on each of these issues below.

Co-ordination of Policy at National and Local Levels

- 7.3** ● It is clear from our deliberations and from the submissions made to the Project Team and from a range of other relevant policy documents that it will not be possible to achieve the objective of having integrated and holistic services for children and families without some agreement on institutional responsibility for ECCE. In other jurisdictions, ECCE services are provided on the basis of either a single system of administration or on a split system basis. A single system of administration favours one department to co-ordinate policy for all 0-6 year olds while in a split system one department has responsibility for 0-3s and another has responsibility for the 4-6 years age group.

- 7.4** ● In Ireland service provision is currently divided across a range of Departments and over a range of policy objectives. These include :
- facilitating parents to take up employment or training (mainly through the DJELR’s EOCP which promotes the development of new and enhanced childcare services for the age-range 0-14 years);
 - addressing socio-economic disadvantage (EOCP, DCRGA which supports childcare through the Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme, the Community Development Support Programme and Family Resource Centres, DES support for Early Start and Traveller Pre-Schools, DSFA provision of crèche supplements; DELG – allocating space for ECCE facilities in housing developments, DHC support for setting up and running ECCE services for children at risk/disadvantaged);
 - providing early education (DES through the Infant School system); and
 - delivering services for families and children (provided by DHC for ante- and post-natal care, child development, parent support services and by the DSFA on Child Benefit and Child Income Support as well as the work of the Office for Social Inclusion and Family Support Agency who provide support for disadvantaged parents and children).
- 7.5** ● In the Policy Audit (see Section III above) the issue of administrative responsibility features in all of the recent policy documents but there is no clear consensus on where this responsibility should lie. The Forum report recommended a split system between DHC and DES, the White Paper proposed the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency under the auspices of the DES, and the National Childcare Strategy recommended a National Childcare Management Committee under the DJELR. The OECD in its review emphasised the need for a single department or agency to take on the co-ordination function. More recently, the National Economic and Social Council proposed a split system (NESC, 2005).
- 7.6** ● The Team agreed that irrespective of where responsibility is ultimately placed, it is necessary to identify a ‘champion’ at political level to drive the policy debate forward. It also agreed that the work that has taken place in the last few years under the EOCP should be continued so that services locally can grow and develop in an organic way, taking account of the needs and wishes of local communities and supporting those communities to be able to develop quality services. This requires a high level of innovation, imagination and a commitment to working alongside those with expertise in this area. It will also require a local delivery mechanism, based on community development principles, which can carry the co-ordination function right through to the community level. At present, the County and City Childcare Committees are best placed to do this.

7.7 ● As part of its consideration of the issue of institutional responsibility, the relative merits of existing Government Departments were considered :

- the DJELR has the experience of running the EOCP and of supporting the work of the childcare sector over the last number of years. It has also developed a well-resourced Childcare Directorate and has put in place a very valuable model of cooperation with ADM which acts as a support and development agency to the overall programme.
- the DHC was also considered as it already provides a range of services to children and families through its child and family support programmes. It also has a well-developed local network of providers that work to deliver on policy objectives and services.
- the DSFA is largely responsible for income support for families and children. It supports a range of target groups and also works well at local level through its local offices to deliver services.
- the DES currently supports 4 and 5 year olds in Primary schools and also provides for some 3 year olds in disadvantaged areas. Recent ECCE initiatives have come through agencies of the DES including the work of the NCCA on an early years learning framework and the CECDE on quality and this provides a basis for the continuing development of policy in this area.
- DCRGA also supports a wide variety of local and community projects and offers a network of local facilities that could be engaged in the future.

7.8 ● The Team concluded that a single system of administration would be the most desirable as it would address the often unhelpful division between care and education and would allow for seamless and unified delivery of services based on the needs and rights of the child. It favours an approach that sets ECCE in a mainstream policy context and that recognises its core contribution to children, families and society in general. The Team took its lead from the White Paper which is Government policy on early childhood education and which states that for seamless provision, structures must “*facilitate provision of care and education in an integrated manner and must enable co-ordination of strategy*”. It was agreed that much good work has been done by a range of bodies to develop the notion of a 0-6 years grouping and that this needs to be further developed and supported. In recognising that a political decision is now needed on this issue, the Project Team wishes to bring to the attention of Government, the importance of a single line of responsibility and that it should act accordingly. The work of the High Level Group chaired by the NCO and the senior officials group chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach should facilitate the Government’s decision in this matter. When this decision has been reached the Team’s implementation plan, as outlined beneath, should then be put into operation.

Implementation Plan and Structures

- 7.9** ● **The Project Team recommends the establishment of an Early Childhood Development Unit (ECDU) under the direct responsibility of an Assistant Secretary in the designated lead department.** This Unit was also proposed in the Forum Report, the White Paper and in the OECD Review. The role of the Unit would be to implement, over the next ten years, a national plan on ECCE based on the blueprint set out in this report. Figure 7.1 below sets out how the ECDU would interface with existing statutory and non-statutory bodies that have a role in relation to ECCE. While fully integrated into its parent department and managed within the civil service, the ECDU should have scope to recruit external expertise in this area and to ensure continuity between new developments and past experience. The Unit should draw from the expertise within existing government bodies (e.g. DES Policy Unit, DJELR Childcare Directorate, DHC, DSFA, DCRGA, ADM, the Family Support Agency) and the wider ECCE sector. The Unit should establish mechanisms to ensure the active inclusion of all stakeholders in ECCE.

Figure 7.1 Implementation Matrix for Framework on ECCE



- 7.10** ● The ECDU should act as the driving force for the development and implementation of policy into the future. Its functions should include :
- responsibility and accountability for all aspects of ECCE policy for children aged 0-6 years and management of key strategic developments in this area; the Unit should also have responsibility for implementing a policy on school age childcare;

- management of a ring-fenced budget for ECCE;
 - liaison with the range of statutory and non-statutory bodies involved in ECCE;
 - resource and support for the wider ECCE infrastructure to deliver on the 10-year plan;
 - development and implementation of a registration and inspection system for ECCE; and
 - development of strategies for training and continuous professional development within the ECCE workforce.
- 7.11** ● To support the work of the ECDU, the Project Team recommends the following :
- (i) The Unit should report through its parent department to the Cabinet Committee on Children.
 - (ii) To ensure that that the momentum of existing development is not lost in the transition to the new administration, ADM should continue to act as the key support agency for the rolling out of a future ECCE programme.
 - (iii) The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations should be appropriately resourced to provide ongoing support and to work with its members locally and regionally on continued quality development in service provision.
 - (iv) The City and County Childcare Committees should continue to be resourced so that they develop further as the local co-ordination bodies for ECCE. Their strategic links with the County Development Boards should also continue and their brief should be inclusive of both education and care. Their current structure may need to be strengthened or reconfigured so as to ensure their existence beyond the EOCP.

Outline Programme for Action

- 7.12** ● With regard to actions and implementation schedules, the Table in Annex 7.1 to the report presents a year by year outline of the developments needed to ensure by 2010 that we have in place an ECCE policy and services that will ensure significant progress along the continuum from low investment to high investment in ECCE (see Section III). The Table is adapted from the experience in New Zealand in implementing its Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education and covers an initial five-year period. A further plan will be needed for the period 2011-2015 following substantial review of the initial plan.

Costs of the ECCE Package

- 7.13** ● The case has already been made in this report for significant investment in ECCE and a key question will be how this investment is financed. To date, funding has been mainly through the market place where parents purchase services directly for their children. Government policy over the last number of years has been to increase Child Benefit from a low base as a financial support to parents. ‘Earnings disregards’ are paid to welfare groups like lone parents in recognition of the high cost of childcare. Early Start and Pre-schools for Travellers and Rutland Street are directly supported by the State as compensatory mechanisms for most disadvantaged children and through the Primary school system some 4 year olds and most 5 year olds are provided with a free part-day service. Most recently, the EOCP provided significant investment to improve the ECCE infrastructure. The Project Team considered that the most appropriate way of delivering the NEAD Programme would be through a capitation grant that would be paid to approved service providers on the basis of registration and improved quality standards.
- 7.14** ● Table 7.2 below presents the costs associated with the main recommendations put forward by the Team. Some of the recommendations are cost-neutral as they only involve better co-ordination and integration. However, significant Exchequer funding is needed to support the NEAD Programme. This includes the cost of delivering the universal pre-school element which is estimated at €2,831 per child (current costs). The total cost of delivering the universal service would be €136 million (see Annex 5.1). This can be readily justified as the longer-term societal benefits that would accrue on the basis of this investment are at a ratio of 1 : 7 (or 1 : 4 using more conservative estimations). The other substantial area of investment identified by the Team is the extension of Maternity Benefit. It is estimated that for each extra week, the cost is €12.6 million (which includes the top up to public service workers). The net cost to the State of extending the Benefit from 18 to 26 weeks is, therefore, approximately €100 million. Costs to employers may result because of recruitment or training.

Table 7.2 Costs of NEAD Programme and other Recommendations

Recommendation	Timeframe	Annual Cost	Cost 2005–2009
Introduce universal pre-school session	2005–2009	€136 million	€680 million
Support the ECCE infrastructure to develop and deliver services	2005–2009	To be costed	
Reform of primary school	2005–2009	To be costed	
Establish Child and Family Centres	2005–2009	To be costed	
Extend Maternity Benefit x 8 weeks	2005–2009	€12.6 million (based on cost per extra week)	€100 million

7.15 ● At present, education is funded in part on the basis of a per capita payment. Current rates of expenditure for education in Ireland per student are €3,042 at primary level⁹, €4,263 at secondary level and €8,131 at third level (OECD, 2004c). **The Project Team recommends that, to implement the changes we propose in Section VI, it will be necessary to view ECCE as an essential part of Exchequer expenditure to promote economic and social development, as with education or health, and fund it accordingly.** The impact of the Government’s policy discussions in this area will, of course, have budgetary implications.

Much of what we propose in relation to the development of the infrastructure will add to the cost. Pending the precise details of these decisions, it is not possible for the Team to cost all of its proposals (see Table 7.2). Moreover, the costs will vary depending on the phased introduction and development of these new services. **The Project Team, therefore, recommends that a professional and detailed costing of its proposals should be undertaken so as to take account of these variations.**

7.16 ● **The NEAD Programme should be delivered through the payment of capitation grants to service providers.** The payment should operate on a sliding scale so that the subsidy payable per child may be increased on the basis of special educational needs or socio-economic disadvantage (a similar system exists in the Netherlands). This would enable providers to cap the fees that low income families have to pay, making childcare more affordable and allow for additional supports where they are required.

⁹ DES figures estimate that the average annual cost per child is €4,361 at primary level.

- 7.17 ● The Project Team agreed that an investment envelope needs to be set aside for ECCE and that this money should be ring-fenced so that it cannot be used for other Exchequer expenditure. **This was the case in the EOCP and the Team recommends that the Department of Finance should give serious consideration to continuing this precedent.**
- 7.18 ● It will also be important to allocate funding on a longer term basis (see also NESF, 2004). The precedent for this has already been established in relation to transport. In Budget 2005 it was announced that proposals for a 10-year funding envelope are being considered for transport because it “is important for the promotion of competitiveness, sustainable economic growth and balanced regional development”. The Project Team’s view is that a similar argument can be made for ECCE.
- 7.19 ● In the long-term, the Team supports ECCE provision through campus style developments where schools and ECCE settings co-exist and cater for the needs of children and families in a streamlined way. In the short to medium term, greater regulation and co-ordination of the existing ECCE infrastructure will facilitate enhanced delivery and better outcomes.

Annexes

Annex 1.1 References

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Annex 1.2 Individuals and Organisations Consulted by the Project Team

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Stan Mc Hugh	FETAC
Barbara Kelly	
Ronnie O' Toole	Forfás

Annex 1.3 Early Childhood Care and Education Plenary Session Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Wednesday 15th June 2005

Attendance List

Name	Organisation
Ms Peggy Atkins	HSE Southern Areas
Mr Peter Baldwin	Department of Education and Science
Ms Priscilla Beirne	HSE Southern Areas
Ms Marna Bell	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Mr Seamus Boland	Irish Rural Link
Ms Sharon Boles	Sligo Childcare Committee
Ms Anne Boyle	Travellers Pre-School Teachers Association
Ms Siobhan Bradley	DIT
Ms Marion Brennan	Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee
Ms Deborah Brock	Tallaght Partnership
Mr Neil Brown	Bright Horizons
Ms Aine Brummell	Offaly Childcare Committee
Deputy Joan Burton	Labour Party
Ms Michelle Butler	Fingal Childcare Committee
Dr Judith Butler	Coláiste an Chraoibhín
Ms Catherine Byrne	INTO
Ms Noreen Byrne	Childcare Bureau
Ms Aisling Byrne	FÁS
Ms Patricia Callan	Small Firms' Association
Ms Elizabeth Canavan	NCO
Deputy Pat Carey	Fianna Fáil
Ms Paula Carey	ICTU
Cllr. Anne Carter	Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly
Ms Kay Cassidy	Longford Childcare Committee
Ms Monica Cassidy	Dublin City Childcare Committee
Ms Charmaine Clarke	Safefood
Ms Michéle Clear	HSE South Western Area
Ms Frances Coffey	Irish Farmers' Association
Ms Anne Conroy	Barnandos
Mr Tom Considine	Department of Finance
Prof. John Coolahan	
Ms Maria Corbett	Children's Rights Alliance
Dr Mary P. Corcoran	Department of Sociology
Mr Tom Costello	Atlantic Philanthropies
Ms Anne Coughlan	Enable Ireland
Ms Sarah Craig	NESF
Ms Maria Cronin	IBEC
Ms Lylia Crossan	Childcare Directorate
Ms Karina Curley	OAK Partnership
Deputy John Curran	Fianna Fáil

Ms Tracy Daly	Irish Sign Link
Ms Mary Daly	Katherine Howard Foundation
Mr Cathal de Paor	NCCA
Ms Muriel Dempsey	Laois Childcare Committee
Dr Florence Dineen	Mary Immaculate College
Mr Darragh Doherty	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Dr Philomena Donnelly	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Mr Michael Doody	ICMSA
Ms Gráinne Doohar	Department of Education and Science
Ms Maresa Duignan	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Ms Liz Dunphy	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Ms Tina Elliott	Sligo Family Support Ltd
Deputy Olwyn Enright	Fine Gael
Ms Jacqueline Fallon	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Ms Lucy Fallon-Byrne	NCPP
Ms Teresa Farrell	HSE - Northern Area
Ms Mary Farrell	Roscommon Partnership
Ms Máire Farrell	HSE Northern Area
Ms Catherine Fenton	Pre-School Services
Dr Margret Fine-Davis	Centre for Gender and Women's Studies
Ms Claire Finn	Geary Institute
Ms Siobhan Fitzpatrick	NIPPA
Ms Geraldine French	
Dr Maureen Gaffney	NESF
Mr Stuart Garvie	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Ms Mary Giblin	Galway Childcare Committee
Ms Aedamar Gillespie	Leitrim Childcare Committee
Ms Alison Gillicand	INTO
Dr Sheila Greene	Children's Research Centre
Ms Darina Greene	Dublin North East Drugs Task Force
Ms Irene Gunning	IPPA
Cllr. Constance Hanniffy	General Council of County Councils
Dr Colm Harmon	Geary Institute
Dr Nóirín Hayes	DIT
Ms Tricia Hayes	Carlow Childcare Committee
Ms Fiona Healy	Meath Childcare Committee
Ms Rose Kavanagh	Waterford County Childcare Committee
Ms Cáit Keane	
Mr Gerry Kearney	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Ms Maura Keating	ADM
Mr Noel Kelly	Northside Partnership
Ms Breda Kenny	Finglas/Cabra Partnership
Ms Hilary Kenny	Children's Rights Alliance
Mr Jeremy Kynaston	Wicklow Childcare Committee
Ms Lorna Lafferty	Bray Partnership
Ms Angela Lambkin	Further Education and Training Awards Council

Ms Hilary Lane	Enable Ireland
Ms Sylva Langford	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Ms Catherine Lawlor	St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland
Ms Mary Lee Stapleton	NCNA
Mr Andrew Logue	
Mr Dara Lyons	Limerick City Childcare Committee
Ms Rosemary Lyons	Donegal County Childcare Committee
Ms Alyson Lyons	Ballymun Job Centre
Dr Maureen Lyons	Equality Studies Centre, UCD
Ms Margaret Maher	Clondalkin Partnership Company
Mr Don Mahoney	St Vincent de Paul
Mr Billy Mangan	Longmeadows Pitch and Putt Co
Ms Ursula Manning	NESF
Ms Noreen Maunsell	HSE Southern Areas
Ms Marie Claire McAleer	National Youth Council of Ireland
Ms Marie McArdle	Westmeath County Childcare Committee
Cllr. Patricia McCarthy	Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland
Ms Mary McCarthy	Centre for Gender and Womens Studies
Ms Marlene McCormack	IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation
Ms Denise McCormilla	Border Counties Childcare Network
Ms Deirdre McDonnell	Department of Education and Science
Ms Bernadette McDonnell	Department of Health and Children
Ms Mary-Ann McGlynn	Drogheda Partnership
Ms Anne McGough	St Patricks College, Drumcondra
Ms Theresa McGouran	Markiewicz Community Centre
Ms Helen McGrath	INTO
Ms Mary McGreal	IFA
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Ms Mary Meaney	National Disability Authority
Mr Colin Menton	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr Shane Molloy	Fine Gael
Ms Elizabeth Moloney	
Ms Mary Moloney	Limerick City Childcare Committee
Ms Pauline Moreau	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Mr Michael Moroney	
Ms Debbie Mullen	NCNA
Mr Kevin Mulqueen	Irish Deaf Society
Dr Rosaleen Murphy	UCC, Education Department
Ms Martina Murphy	Bright Horizons
Ms Patricia Murphy	
Ms Anne Murray	Irish Country Women's Association
Ms Wendy Murray	Irish Deaf Society
Ms Colette Murray	Pavee Point
Ms Patricia Murray	National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative
Ms Éadaoin Ní Chlúirigh	Childhood Development Initiative West Tallaght

Mr Michael O'Brien	Cork Corporation
Ms Pauline O'Callaghan	Chareville and District Community Enterprise Ltd
Mr Pat O'Connor	National College of Ireland
Ms Maura O'Connor	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Ms Orla O'Connor	National Women's Council of Ireland
Ms Ciara O'Dwyer	Centre for Gender and Women's Studies
Dr Fergus O'Ferrall	The Wheel
Mr Seán ÓhÉigearthaigh	NESF
Ms Carey Oppenheim	
Mr Gerald O'Regan	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Mr Robert O'Shea	Chambers of Commerce of Ireland
Mr Pearse O'Shiel	Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association
Deputy Willie Penrose	Labour Party
Ms Deirdre Power	Kilkenny Childcare Committee
Mr John Quinlan	Department of Education and Science
Ms Ashling Quinn	FÁS
Senator Feargal Quinn	Independent
Sr. Brigid Reynolds	CORI
Ms Mary Rose Reid	Parent Child Psychological Support Programme
Ms Maureen Roche	HSE Southern Areas
Mr Heino Schonfeld	CECDE
Ms Deirdre Scott	Institute of Technology, Sligo
Ms Catherine Sheehan	Cork Early Years Network
Ms Darina Shouldice	INTO
Mr David Silke	NESF
Dr Emer Smyth	ESRI
Ms Ann Spain	HSE - Midland Area
Ms Frances Spillane	National Children's Office
Ms Noelle Spring	Katherine Howard Foundation
Mr David Stampton T.D.	
Ms Angela Stenson	Southside Partnership
Dr John Sweeney	NESC
Ms Avril Sweeney	Donegal County Childcare Committee
Mr Paul Tansey	Tansey, Webster, Stewart and Company Ltd
Dr Damian Thomas	NCPP
Ms Anne Timony	ADOPT/Community Council Pettigo
Ms Sarah Traynor	Dundalk Employment Partnership Ltd
Ms Máire Uí Ainín	Forbairt Naíonraí Teo
Mr Gerard Walker	NESF
Ms Aisling Walsh	The Disability Federation of Ireland
Mr Thomas Walsh	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Mr Brendan Ward	NESDO
Dr Jean Whyte	Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin
Deputy Michael Woods	Fianna Fáil
Dr Katherine Zappone	CDI

Annex 3.1

Table 3.1

Summary of Issues/Recommendations Made in Policy Documents 1998-2005

(this table presents main issues arising. In some cases there may be duplication/overlap)

Issue	Forum Report on Early Childhood Education (1998)	White Paper (1999)	National Childcare Strategy (1999)	National Children's Strategy (2000)	OECD Review (2004)
Co-ordination/Structures	<p>Single co-ordination agency at governmental level.</p> <p>Establishment of Early Years Development Unit (EYDU) as a joint initiative of the DHC and DES. Capacity building at local level.</p>	<p>Two levels:</p> <p>(i) interdepartmental committee and (ii) advisory expert group drawn from parents, providers, trainers, researchers and academics as well as Departments, agencies and others.</p> <p>Establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency (ECEA)</p> <p>Establishment of an Early Years Development Unit in the DES.</p>	<p>Three levels:</p> <p>(i) County Childcare Committees should be set up in each county, should develop a 7-year plan and should co-ordinate services in their area.</p> <p>(ii) NCMC (The DJELR should be the lead department to implement the NCS).</p> <p>(iii) An interdepartmental Policy Committee should be set up as the link between Cabinet and NCMC.</p>	<p>CCCs to develop a co-ordinated strategy in each area.</p>	<p>Integration of all ECCE policy under one ministry or designated funding and policy agency.</p> <p>Formulation of a National Plan for Early Childhood Services</p> <p>Development rolled out over three years with specific goals, targets and responsibilities (plan should include targets for disadvantaged children, children from Traveller communities and children with special needs).</p> <p>Transformation of the NCCC to a National Policy Committee for Early Education and Care.</p> <p>CCCs to become County Early Education and Childcare Committees to transform national policy into concrete plans for each county.</p> <p>Close cooperation between departments.</p> <p>Effective engagement of the DES in policy at national and county levels.</p> <p>Establishment of an Early Years Development Unit in the DES.</p> <p>Pooling resources to establish 50 Child and Family Centres around the country.</p> <p>Decentralisation of planning and management of ECCE services at local levels to an integrated agency at county/city level.</p>

Issue

Quality

Achievement of the EU Council
Recommendations on Child Care.
Reduction in class sizes in infant
schools (20 children).

Development of a QE (Quality in
Education) mark which will
provide a national standard for
the pre-school sector.
Development of an evaluation and
inspection mechanism to support
and assess standards of early
childhood education.
Development of a curriculum for
children aged 0-3 years.
Analysis and development of best
practice in teaching
methodologies.

(Quality central but no specific
recommendations)

Early education and child
development programmes based
on White Paper to meet needs of
all children as part of a quality
service programme.

Development of a national goals
and quality framework.
Develop a more active pedagogy
for younger classes in primary
schools.

Access/supply/provision

Central concepts of care and
education should be kept to the
fore in planning provision.
Existing provision should be
respected, improved and quality
assurance put in place.

The EOCP should be expanded
and an additional £3.5 m be
allocated for each of the three
years of the Strategy.
Capital allowances should be
provided for group-based
childcare.
A new grant scheme should be
provided for small scale providers
towards upgrading of premises to
comply with regulations.
Employment grants to be paid for
new staff employed in private and
community childcare facilities.
Tax relief for employers in
relation to childcare for their
employees (through provision
of childcare facilities, vouchers
or subsidisation).
Development of after school
provision.
Establishment of local childcare
networks.

CCCs to engage in needs assess-
ment; data collection, develop-
ment of light drop-in facilities for
mothers and young children and
purpose-build Child and Family
Centres in each county.
A move towards full-day services
and out of school care for 3-6
year olds in partnership between
education and care sector
(beginning with Early Start).
All 4 year olds to have
entitlement to an education place
or other programme.
Child Assistants to be appointed
to work with teachers and reduce
ratio to 15:1.

Issue	Forum Report on Early Childhood Education (1998)	White Paper (1999)	National Childcare Strategy (1999)	National Children's Strategy (2000)	OECD Review (2004)
Access/supply/provision			<p>DELG to publish guidelines on planning permission for childcare facilities.</p> <p>Planning authorities to include allocations for childcare facilities.</p> <p>A scheme to support the childcare costs of low income parents on training and education programmes.</p> <p>Broadening the provision for subsidising childcare under SWA.</p> <p>Income limit for FIS should be raised where families incur receipted childcare costs.</p> <p>OFP ceiling should be raised where lone parents incur receipted childcare costs.</p>		<p>CCCs to engage in needs assessment, data collection, development of light drop-in facilities for mothers and young children and purpose-build Child and Family Centres in each county.</p> <p>A move towards full-day services and out of school care for 3-6 year olds in partnership between education and care sector (beginning with Early Start).</p> <p>All 4 year olds to have entitlement to an education place or other programme.</p> <p>Child Assistants to be appointed to work with teachers and reduce ratio to 15:1.</p>
Disadvantage/Travellers	<p>The experience of programmes to address socio-economic disadvantage should be built on and extended to other areas.</p> <p>Evaluation and extension of existing pre-school provision for Traveller children.</p> <p>Standards for Traveller pre-schools to be brought in line with Early Start.</p> <p>The EYDU to have responsibility to promote early childhood education for Travellers.</p> <p>Inclusion of Travellers in the delivery of services.</p> <p>Introduction of an intercultural curriculum to promote respect for cultural diversity.</p>	<p>Follow-up analysis of Early Start participants.</p> <p>ECEA to encourage disadvantaged communities to set up their own pre-school programmes.</p> <p>Raise standards in Traveller pre-schools (ECEA).</p>	<p>The needs of children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion should be prioritised.</p>		<p>Implement recommendations of national evaluation of Traveller Pre-schools (representation from Traveller community to policy bodies, Traveller parents on pre-school management boards).</p> <p>Appropriate programming for children and families in disadvantaged areas.</p> <p>Anti-bias teacher training and attention to issues of diversity.</p>

Special Needs

For deaf children, pre-school projects using sign should be set up.

Establishment of a Task Force to formulate policy on the provision of appropriate education for young children with special needs.

Early identification of children with special needs (through remedial service).

Quality equipment facilities and materials for infant classes.

Multidisciplinary teams to identify and advise on range of disabilities met and to develop education plans.

Flexibility in curriculum delivery.

Parents of all pre-school children with diagnosed disabilities to have access to an early education expert.

Teachers to have access to pre-service and in-service development on special needs.

Appropriate curriculum guidelines.

A range of professional services will be made available as required.

Supports for those who run pre-school services that enrol children with disabilities and further classes for 3-4 year olds will be established.

NEPS to be extended to all schools.

Implement recommendations made in Forum report on children with special needs.

Issue	Forum Report on Early Childhood Education (1998)	White Paper (1999)	National Childcare Strategy (1999)	National Children's Strategy (2000)	OECD Review (2004)
<p>Training and Qualifications</p>	<p>Training and qualifications framework for individuals working in early education and childcare and support for provision on a wider scale.</p> <p>Reform and renewal in the training for early childhood education and investment in early childhood training in teacher training colleges.</p>	<p>Design of a national qualifications framework (building on work of NQA) which will identify core competencies required for early childhood education teachers and childcare workers and determine which courses can equip participants with those skills.</p> <p>Clear routes of progression will be established.</p>	<p>An occupational profile and appropriate qualifications should be agreed by the NCMC.</p> <p>A National Framework for qualifications in childcare should be developed in consultation with the NCMC. It should have progression pathways which can be achieved through formal and informal education and training and APL.</p> <p>A minimum of 60% of staff should have 3 years training in ECCE.</p>	<p>A draft framework to address qualification, accreditation and certification for the childcare sector.</p>	<p>A review of teacher training to ensure that greater emphasis placed on ECCE pedagogy (possibly moving to 4 year degree). On a long-term basis, develop an education degree with the possibility of specialising in ECCE.</p> <p>Intensive professional development and, in particular, for Early Start staff targeted in-service training and the establishment of a networking system for Early Start workers.</p>
<p>Inspection/ Regulation</p>	<p>Inspections on the basis of health, care and educational aspects to be carried out by single inspector.</p> <p>ECEA to recruit its own inspection staff (independent of DES)</p> <p>Inspectorate which will continue to inspect infant classes in primary schools – trained in appropriate expertise.</p> <p>Development of a parallel system of self-regulation for providers.</p> <p>Evaluation at project level, thematic level and national level on the basis of quality, parental involvement, partnership arrangements and co-ordination.</p>	<p>The present system of notification (Child Care Act, 1991) should be amended and a system of registration of all facilities and childcare workers developed.</p> <p>All childcare providers (including childminders) should be required to register.</p> <p>Relatives should be exempt from registration.</p> <p>The existing notification system should require adherence to minimum standards.</p> <p>A common induction and training programme should be provided for inspection teams.</p> <p>One member of the inspection team should be training in ECCE.</p> <p>A Garda clearance procedure at central level should be put in place.</p>	<p>A voluntary accreditation system linked to a childcare subsidy (similar to the voluntary scheme developed in Australia).</p>		

Issue

Funding/resources

Mechanisms for cost-sharing to include home-based care, using existing resources more effectively, saving on capital costs and recurrent costs, cost-sharing with institutional stakeholders and cost recovery from the users.

A budget should be made available to the NCVOs to implement the NCS.
Tax relief on childcare expenses.
Free/subsidised childcare should no longer be treated as benefit in kind.
Refundable Tax Credits should replace subsidies if a tax credit system is introduced.

Pooling of resources and sharing of costs across ministries and users.
A transfer of some costs to local communities and schools.
Shifting educational financing towards early childhood.
Rationalising and bringing together services around the local school.
Support from the corporate and business sector.
Special funding initiatives e.g. special taxes and national lotteries.
A separate budget for the infant school at local level and management responsibility to its senior teacher.

Parental involvement

Foster relationships between parents and teachers.
Parental leave.
Parenting education.

Involving parents at every stage of the process.
Appropriate parenting courses.
Research on parental involvement (best practice).

The CECDE to make practical recommendations for the early education field for parental engagement.

Family day care
(childminders)

A special tax allowance should be provided for childminders (subject to review after 3 years).

Transform childminder arrangements into family day care networks.
Community providers and childminders to focus more on young children (0-3).

Issue	Forum Report on Early Childhood Education (1998)	White Paper (1999)	National Childcare Strategy (1999)	National Children's Strategy (2000)	OECD Review (2004)
Other Issues	Expansion of research activities in ECCE			Funding for research	Strengthening research, evaluation and data collection.
Men in Childcare			Twenty per cent of staff employed in childcare should be men.		
Rates of Pay			A national pay scale for childcare workers.		
CE and childcare			FAS should through CE provide a dedicated childcare training and work experience initiative.		
Irish language	Use of Irish language to enrich ECCE.				
Other related policy issues				Maternity Amendment Act 1994 to be amended to provide for additional maternity leave.	Paid, flexible and job-protected maternity and parental leave for the first year of a child's life.
– maternity leave				Parental Leave Act 1998 to be reviewed.	
– parental leave				Further measures to promote family-friendly work arrangements	

Annex 4.1 List of Written Submissions Received

Andrew Logue

Barnardos

Barnardos Early Years Network, Cork

Border Counties Childcare Network

Brigitte Riedel-McGarry

Cavan RAPID

Chambers of Commerce of Ireland

Charleville and District Community Enterprise Ltd.

Children's Research Centre

Coláiste an Chraoibhín, Cork

Combat Poverty Agency

Cope, Westside Outreach Service

Cork City Childcare Company Ltd.

Cork City Development Board

Cork County Childcare Committee

Cumas

Department of Education, University College Cork

Dublin Institute of Technology

Donegal County Childcare Committee Ltd.

Dublin North East Drugs Task Force

Elizabeth Moloney

Enable Ireland, Cork

First Steps Crèche, Ballybeg

Geraldine French

High/Scope Ireland

Home-Start National Office, Dublin

Inchicore Community Drug Team

IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation

Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists

Irish Deaf Society

Irish National Teacher's Organisation

Irish Rural Link

Institute of Technology, Sligo

Joseph Enright

Katharine Howard Foundation

Margaret Kernan, Dublin Institute of Technology

Model School for the Deaf

Mountview/Blakestown Community Drugs Team

Naíonra Thomais Daibhis

Namhi

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

National Disability Authority

National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative

One Family, Dublin

PLANET, Co. Wexford

SafeFood (Food Safety Promotion Board), Cork

Scoil Mhuire na nGrás, Cork

Sligo Family Support Ltd., Sligo

South Eastern Health Board

South West Area Health Board

Tallaght Partnership

The Women's Health Council

Waterford County Childcare Committee

WITH

Annex 5.1 Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universal ECCE in Ireland

Overview

With early childhood environments deemed significant in shaping later outcomes, the case for early childhood intervention is convincing (Heckman, 2004, Magnuson *et al*, 2004). Stating that skill begets skill and learning begets learning, Heckman *et al* (2004) highlight the cumulative effects of early disadvantage (or indeed advantage) and the considerable associated costs to society. With respect to these early deficits (or early disadvantage) it is argued that later remediation is often prohibitively costly, while early interventions can achieve the same results but at a lower cost (Heckman, 2004). Therefore by comparison, policy measures based on interventions in later life are not cost-effective. Evidence supporting the effectiveness of quality early childhood education programmes for disadvantaged children is particularly convincing. Well-designed programmes in the year prior to year 1 of school are shown to generate benefit for government, society and for the participants themselves, across a wide range of measures. In short, benefits are shown to outweigh costs (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

The Benefits of Pre-school Education

The literature points to a myriad of evidence which demonstrates the long-term benefit of pre-school care to disadvantaged children who benefit more because simply there is more room for improvement, on school achievement and other measures (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005). More advantaged children are generally shown to benefit less. One explanation for this is the quality of childcare in the home is closer to the quality of childcare they receive in pre-school (compared with more disadvantaged children). While benefits for more advantaged children are likely to be modest (if any) they are more numerous so even small gains can accumulate as substantial gains across the whole population (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

The aim of this section is to outline a set of potential benefits from a one year high quality pre-school programme in Ireland converted into monetary terms. The methodology as set out by Karoly and Bigelow (2005), for a similar exercise with respect to California, is closely followed. Programme benefits for a targeted Chicago-based programme are adjusted for a universal programme, whereby a lower level of benefit is expected to accrue to lower-risk children. The assumptions used are set out in Box 5.1. From these assumptions a percentage level of benefit to Ireland is deemed to equate to 49% of the comparison (Chicago based) programme which is then used to calculate estimated impacts for an Irish single-year cohort of 4 year olds participating in universal pre-school (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

Box 5.1 Outline of Assumptions (1)

1. Baseline Model

1.1	Baseline of no pre-school			
1.2	Universal Provision-non-compulsory			
1.3	Years of pre-school per child	1 year		
1.4	Participation rate	70%		
1.5	Proportion of population categorised as high, medium or low risk (respectively)	25%	20%	55%
1.6	Distribution of benefits of pre-school between high, medium and low risk	100%	50%	25%
1.7	Irish Benefit as a percentage of Comparison Study benefit	49%		

Explanatory Notes

1.1

It is assumed that there is no existing pre-school. This is deemed valid where existing provision for pre-school services is low or non-existent. Reliable statistics on this issue are limited. However, it is suggested by the OECD that approximately 10% to 15% of children between 0-3 are in half or full-day publicly subsidised services, (OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland, 2004).

1.2

While a programme targeted at disadvantaged children would expect higher returns per Euro invested as benefits are greater for 'at-risk' children, the disadvantages of a targeted programme are as follows:

- a) Administrative costs of determining eligibility and addressing changes in eligibility over time
 - b) Stigma associated with participation
 - c) Unavoidability of missing children who could benefit but either do not meet criteria or are confused about eligibility rules
 - d) Political support may be stronger for programmes available to all children and, therefore, funding for high quality provision is more likely
- (The Economics of Investing in Universal Pre-school Education in California, Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

1.3

Evidence suggests smaller benefits in the second year than that gained in the first or a higher per Euro return for a 1 year programme. This suggests where resources are limited that it is best to serve a greater number of children for 1 year than a lesser number of children for 2 years.

(The Economics of Investing in Universal Pre-school Education in California, Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

1.4

As participation is non-compulsory, a participation rate of 70% is assumed.

1.5

The population is divided into high-, medium- and low-risk based on income. This is because evidence shows that pre-school benefits are highest for those with lower income and lowest for those with higher incomes.

1.6

Given assumption 1.5, it is assumed that depending on your level of risk you will receive a certain percentage of 'benefit' from the pre-school programme. Those in the high-risk category will receive the most 'benefit' (100%); those in the low-risk category will receive less 'benefit' (25%). See assumption 1.7.

1.7

This analysis uses an existing 'comparison' study that examines and quantifies the 'benefits' of quality pre-school on specific indicators/variables with respect to an existing targeted pre-school programme. Adjusting these 'benefits' for the fact that the proposed Irish programme is universal and not targeted, the Irish 'benefit' represents 49% of the 'benefit' as quantified by the existing comparison programme.

Table 5.1 Present Value Costs and Benefits for Universal Preschool in Ireland
(In € per child)*

Source of Costs or Benefits	Government	Society	Participants	Total
Programme Costs	-2831	0	0	-2831
Programme Benefits				
Measured				
Educational Outcomes				
Grade retention	204	0	0	204
Special education	1574	0	0	1574
Educational attainment	-437	0	0	-437
Juvenile Crime				
Reduced prosecutions (minimum savings)	391	0	0	391
Reduced victim costs	benefit			
Value of childcare				
Value of childcare for families	0	0	6057	6057
Projected				
Labour force earnings				
Net earnings	0	0	10481	10481
Tax revenues	2096	0	0	2096
College Education				
Increased college attendance	-281	0	-31	-312
Adult crime				
Reduced prosecutions	benefit			
Reduced victim costs	benefit			
Total Benefits	3546	benefits	16507	20053
Net Benefits	715	benefits	16507	17222
Benefit-Cost Ratio (€/€1)				
total benefits/total costs	1.25			7.08

Notes

* Less conservative model adjusted for universal provision only.

a) All amounts are per child in 2003 Euro and are the present value amounts over time where future values are discounted to age 3 of participating child.

b) Programme costs refer to current expenditure in a 'steady state'.

c) Value of childcare for families is the number of hours of childcare per year multiplied by the minimum wage. The aim is to yield a benefit to participating families for the time they now have to work or for other activities.

Table 5.2 Present Value Costs and Benefits for Universal Preschool in Ireland
(In € per child and € per cohort of 4 year olds)***

Source of Costs or Benefits	Euro per child (millions)	Euro per cohort (millions)
Programme Costs	-2831	-136
Programme Benefits		
Education outcomes (measured)	1341	64
*Juvenile crime outcomes (measured)	391	19
Value of childcare (measured)	6057	290
Total Measured Benefits	7789	373
College Attendance (projected)	-312	-15
Labour market earnings (projected)	12577	603
**Adult crime (projected)	0	
Total Projected Benefits	12265	588
Total Benefits	20053	962
Total Net Benefits	17222	826
Benefit-Cost Ratio (€/€1)	7.1	7.1

*Not included- benefits from reduced victim costs.

**Not included-benefit from reduced adult crime and reduced victim costs.

Euro per cohort assumes a cohort of 68500 with a participation rate of 70%.

A possible limitation with this method is that a high risk child in the US may not equate to a high risk child in Ireland where it is expected that other welfare benefits to disadvantaged families in Ireland might ameliorate some of the disadvantage for high risk children in particular, and, thereby, result in a reduction of the potential benefit of a pre-school programme. To incorporate this limitation into the cost-benefit analysis is difficult; however, utilising data on welfare spending from the OECD we make some attempt to adjust for this. Ireland's spending with respect to two welfare spending indicators, income support for those of a working age as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of government transfers to the lowest three income deciles for those of working age, are shown to be twice that of the US (OECD data). This suggests an appropriate reduction in level of benefit might be in the region of 50%. Admittedly this method is somewhat crude; however it does go somewhat towards accounting for the reduced level of benefit expected in Ireland due to better welfare supports. The estimates incorporating this 'welfare adjustment' are a more conservative version of the original, as described earlier. The benefit-cost ratio for government now falls, below 1, to 0.63. However overall, for government, society and participants, the benefits still substantially exceed costs with a benefit cost ratio of 4.61 (see Table 5.3 for a comparison based on more and less conservative models).

Table 5.3 The Benefit-Cost Analysis under Alternate Assumptions

	Programme Costs – current expenditure only			
	Less Conservative <i>Euro per Child</i>		More Conservative <i>Euro per Child</i>	
	Total	Government	Total	Government
Programme costs	-2831	-2831	-2831	-2831
Programme Benefits				
Education outcomes (measured)	1,341	1,341	670	670
*Juvenile crime outcomes (measured)	391	391	195	195
Value of childcare (measured)	6057	0	6057	0
Total measured benefits	7789	1731	6923	866
College attendance (projected)	-312	-281	-156	-141
Labour market earnings (projected)	12577	2096	6288	1048
**Adult crime (projected)	0		0	
Total Projected Benefits	12,265	1815	6132	908
Total Benefits	20,053	3546	13055	1773
Total Net Benefits	17222	716	10224	-1057
Benefit-Cost Ratio (€/€1)	7	1.25	4.6	0.63

Notes

*Not included - benefits from reduced victim costs.

** Not included - benefit from reduced adult crime and reduced victim costs.

Euro per cohort - assume a cohort of 68,500 with a participation rate of 70%.

Less conservative adjusted for universal provision.

More conservative adjusted for universal provision (49%) and other welfare supports (50%).

Cost Benefit Model for an Irish Pre-School Programme

To evaluate the costs and benefits of a universal pre-school programme we must make assumptions about the key features of such a programme. Ideally, these would be associated with a high quality pre-school programme that is universally available to all age-eligible children. Relevant features would include eligibility criteria and the age(s) of children served, the programme intensity in terms of the hours of services delivered, and characteristics associated with high-quality programmes (e.g., the class size, child-staff ratio, and teacher qualifications). The benefit-cost analysis expresses benefits and costs in common units (Euro) inflated (or deflated) to a common base year and discounted to the year 2003 - this is the present value of benefits (costs) (see Tables above). The benefit-cost ratio is the ratio of total benefit to total cost.

While the usefulness of benefit-cost analysis cannot be denied, some limitations are worthy of note. For example, some benefits either may not be measured in the comparison study evaluation or are difficult to cost. In addition, this type of analysis only considers benefits and costs in the aggregate. From an equity perspective this is not always desirable, as some decision-makers may place more weight on benefits to more disadvantaged children. Benefit-cost analysis weights benefits equally for children, regardless of their levels of advantage (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).

Estimating Benefits

Benefits and costs are expressed in 2003 Euro terms. A brief summary and explanation of benefits (costs) are as follows:

- **Educational Outcomes:** Savings are identified due to a reduction in grade repetition and decrease in years of special education (see Table 5.4) with estimates and sources for unit cost of a year's primary school, for example). Increased costs due to increased years of education attainment are accounted for. Also, an increase in Leaving Certificate completion rates facilitates the projection of increased third level costs.
- **Justice system:** The savings to government from a reduction in juvenile crime is estimated. A concomitant reduction in victim crime costs are acknowledged as 'benefits' but are difficult to estimate in monetary terms. The same is true of both expected adult crime reduction and adult crime victim costs. This is a conservative estimate and is in fact the minimum expected benefit.
- **Labour Force Earnings and Taxes:** The lifetime earnings differential between those with and without Leaving Certificate completion is calculated using Living in Ireland survey data on mean annual earnings by education and age. This also allows the calculation of difference in tax revenue accruing to government.
- **Value of childcare for families:** The time children spend in school is valued at the minimum wage, this benefit amounts to time participating families now have available for work or for other activities.

Other Potential Benefits

The total benefits are understated to some extent; this is due both to the difficulties associated with including some recognised benefits and to the use of conservative estimates of benefits for more difficult calculations (such as that for the justice system). Other intangible benefits worth noting include potential health benefits as higher levels of education result in health improvements over their life course; the relationship between health and years of schooling is well-established, one commentator suggests that those with high levels of education make better health production inputs (Grossman, 1972). Potential benefits in the form of indirect benefits such as labour force and macro-economic benefits (increased productivity and competitiveness) are also worth noting.

Estimating Costs in Euro Terms

The calculation of costs closely follows the methodology incorporated by Karoly and Bigelow (2005) in their Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Universal Pre-school Programme. Assumptions are made regarding day length, weeks per year, classroom space required, instructional and administrative staff required and salaries (see Table 5.4). Based on these assumptions, estimated steady state current expenditure per participating child in euro per year is estimated to be €2,831⁴. Expenditure including capital costs is calculated as a percentage of salary cost and is derived from occupancy costs over a 30 year period, it is estimated as €4,119 per child per year. In substituting this for current expenditure, the benefit-ratio for government falls below one. However overall, the benefit-cost ratio, for government, society and participants remains above three for both more and less conservative baselines. In short, the overall economic returns (under more and less conservative assumptions) are such that gains outweigh costs. **This leads to the conclusion that investment in early childhood education can result in long-term payoffs for government, society and participants.**

⁴ The cost of primary school education per child per year is €4,361. Multiplying the cost of pre-school per child per year by 2 (two children receive half-day schooling in pre-school) equals €5662, this facilitates a comparison of the costs of full-day equivalents for pre-school and primary. It is expected that the cost of pre-school per two children (full-day equivalent) would be roughly similar to the cost of primary school per child, but due to economies of scale it is also expected that the cost of pre-school per two children (full-day equivalent) will be somewhat greater than the cost of primary per child.

Table 5.4 Estimates and Sources for Valuing Preschool Benefits (Costs)

	Impact	Unit Cost (2003 – €)	Age Applied	Unit Cost Source
Measured				
Grade Repetition-Reduction (%)	0.08	4,361	19	Average annual cost of primary education per child, Statistics, Department of Education and Science
Special Education-Reduction (%)	0.34	6,018	12	1.38 of average annual cost of primary education per child (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005)
Educational Attainment-Increase (yrs)	0.16	4,361	19	Average annual cost of primary education per child, Statistics, Department of Education and Science
Juvenile Crime Reduction (%)	0.20	2,972	18	Minimum estimated savings (Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2003, Department of Education and Science Statistics on Juvenile Detention Centres, An Garda Síochána Annual Report 2003, Irish Times 12/03/05, Scottish Executive: Working with persistent juvenile offenders)
Value of Childcare (annual hours)	840.00	7.65	4	Minimum wage by annual hours of pre-school care
Projected				Impact and Unit Source
College Attendance-Increase	0.05	9,456		<p>Impact source Secondary School completions with an average of 1.5 years post-secondary education. (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005)</p> <p>Unit source Average annual cost of third level education per child Statistics, Department of Education and Science plus 10% for participant costs (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005)</p>
Labour Force Earnings and Taxes on Earnings				Lifetime earnings differential for those with and without Leaving Certificate. Taxes on earnings (Living in Ireland Survey) expressed as benefits per participating child
Taxes on Earnings				20% of Lifetime earnings differential expressed as benefits per participating child.

Explanatory Notes:

IMPACT: refers to the estimated impact in years of percentage of an Irish Pre-school programme.

UNIT COST: refers to the cost per unit costs and benefits, for example, one year of primary education or one referral/prosecution to the juvenile justice system.

UNIT COST SOURCE: refers to source of data used for the unit cost.

AGE APPLIED: refers to the age at which a benefit or cost accrues, this accounts for the fact that the further in the future a Euro accrues the less valuable it is. This is referred to as discounting and the rate is 3%.

Box 5.2

Outline of Assumptions (2)

2 Pre-school Costs

2.1	Hours per day per child participating	3.5
2.2	Two sessions/classes of 3.5 hours per day	
2.3	Class size	20
2.4	Teachers per class of 20	1
2.5	Teaching Assistants per class of 20	1.3333
2.6	Director per 120 students	0.15
2.7	Accountant/Bookkeeper per 120 Students	0.15
2.8	Education Specialist per 120 Students	0.15
2.9	Enrollment Specialist per 120 Students	0.15
2.10	Other non-personnel and capital costs as a percentage of salary costs	31%

Explanatory Notes:

This cost analysis follows closely the cost analysis carried out by Karoly and Bigelow, 2005.

2.1

The number of high quality preschool hours per child per day is 3.5 hours. A 'wrap around' service providing extended-day care, financed from other sources, could also be made available.

2.2

Two sessions per day per teacher and classroom are provided.

2.5

One teacher and one teaching assistant per classroom, one 'roaming' teaching assistant for every three teacher/teaching assistant combination.

2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9

Administrative staff for every 120 students consists of 0.15 full-time equivalent cost.

2.10

Non-personnel costs are assumed to equal 31% of total costs. 29% relates to capital costs spread out over 30 years. 2% relates to costs for equipment and supplies. Some adjustments are also made to account for distribution of other expenses with respect to the Irish system, i.e. departmental expenses, grants and subsidies.

Annex 6.1 Children's Centres in the United Kingdom and the Proposed Child and Family Centre Model

The Children's Centre programme in the UK is based on the concept that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services are key factors in determining good outcomes for children and their parents. It is proposed that the Child and Family Centres would develop along a similar vein. The aim of the Child and Family Centres in this country would be to build on existing good practice at the community level and to bring together, in a more coherent and integrated way those who are currently providing services for children and families.

Some families with young children already benefit from integrated service provision. The work of the HSE, the Community Development Programme the Family Resource Centres and others has greatly facilitated this approach. The Project Team proposes that this work should be built upon and enhanced.

The following services are provided by Children's Centres in the UK:

- Early education integrated with full day care, including early identification of and provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Parental outreach.
- Family support, including support for parents of children with special needs.
- Health services.
- A base for childminders, and a service hub within the community for parents and providers of childcare services.
- Effective links with local employment services, local training providers and further and higher education institutions.
- Effective links with Children's Information Services, Neighbourhood Nurseries, Out of School Clubs and Extended Schools.
- Management and workforce training.

Source : Surestart Unit, UK.

The Team agreed that the Child and Family Centres proposed by the OECD (2004) and endorsed in this report should broadly reflect a similar service delivery model.

Annex 6.2 The Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West

Change for Children – The next ten years

The Vision

“We who live and work in Tallaght West have high expectations for all children living in our communities.

We see every child and every family being provided with support, opportunities and choices to meet these expectations.

We see the whole community owning responsibility for the quality, beauty and safety of the local environment.

We see children encouraged and cherished by the whole community.”

In the next 10 years, the Initiative is working towards measurable improvements in OUTCOMES for children in the following areas :

Children’s Health (physical, psychological – emotions and behaviour, intellectual and spiritual)

- Children’s Safety (reduce harm they experience in community, school and home);
- Children’s Learning and Achieving (staying in school longer, improving reading and writing skills, becoming more reflective and creative in all aspects of learning); and
- Children’s Sense of Belonging (an active giving and receiving to family, friends and community).

How?

1. It is a whole-community strategy that intends to incorporate both a ‘universal access of ECCE services for all children’ component as well as comprehensive, outcomes-focussed activities that are targeted at children living in a socially and economically disadvantaged setting (including those with special needs, Travellers and international families).
2. Its focus is to integrate and strengthen existing services as well as provide brand new opportunities for a growing number of children.
3. It incorporates improving quality of existing provision as a key activity.
4. It will ensure that all innovation emerging from the strategy is rigorously evaluated and extend this learning to all local and regional agencies as well as outline national policy implications from the local evidence of what works.

Who?

A Consortium of people living and working in Tallaght West in dialogue with politicians and policy-makers.

Annex 7.1

Table 7.1 Implementation Schedule for ECCE, First Phase 2005–2009

	Responsibility	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Review
Agree Departmental responsibility for ECCE	Government	x					
Establish ECDU	Government	x					
Agree and implement work programme for the ECDU	ECDU/Parent Dept	x	x	x	x	x	
Establish timelines and targets for first five year period	ECDU/Parent Dept	x					
Principle 1 Valuing children's competence and contribution							
Objective 1.1 Implement the NCS							
<i>Actions</i>							
1.1.1. Secure Govt commitment to NCS	NCO/Govt	x	x	x	x	x	
1.1.2. Implement NCS proposals on ECCE	ECDU/NCO	x	x	x	x	x	
Objective 1.2 Promote importance of children's here and now status and experience							
<i>Actions</i>							
1.2.1. Raise awareness about childhood	NCO/ Minister for Children	x	x	x	x	x	
Principle 2 Holistic support for young children's well-being, learning and development							
Objective 2.1 Integrated delivery							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.1.1. Develop integrated approaches at central level	ECDU/DHC/DES/HSE	x	x	x			
2.1.2. Continue to support local integrated delivery	ECDU/CCCs/HSE/ NVCOs/local community	x	x				
Objective 2.2 Extend parental leave							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.2.1. Extend Maternity Leave	DSFA	x	x	x	x		
2.2.2. Increase duration for Maternity Benefit	DSFA	x	x	x	x		
2.2.3. Increase duration of Parental Leave	DETE		x	x	x		
Objective 2.3 Out of school provision							
<i>Actions</i>							
2.3.1. Develop physical infrastructure	DES/Parent Dept	x	x	x			
2.3.2. Train staff	ECDU/Parent Dept			x	x		
2.3.3. Implement recommendations of NCCC Report	ECDU	x	x				
2.3.4. Draft new legislation for out of school provision	ECDU/DHC/Govt		x				
Principle 3 Universal access to ECCE for all children							
Objective 3.1 Universal access							
<i>Actions</i>							
3.1.1. Develop NEAD programme	ECDU/Parent Dept	x					
3.1.2. Roll out NEAD programme to disadvantaged areas	ECDU/Parent Dept		x	x			
3.1.3. Roll out NEAD programme to all children	ECDU/Parent Dept				x	x	
3.1.4. Continue support for CCCs and NVCOs	ECDU/ADM	x	x	x	x	x	
3.1.5. Develop childminder clusters	ECDU/CCCs	x	x				

<i>Table 7.1 cont'd</i>		Responsibility	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Review
3.16	Continue to resource existing ECCE providers to ensure ECCE for younger age groups	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.17	Reform current provision for infants in primary schools	DES/ECDU		x	x	x	x	
3.18	Develop campus style school buildings in new developments	DES				x	x	
Objective 3.2 Targeted interventions								
<i>Actions</i>								
3.2.1	Establish Child and Family Centres in local areas	ECDU/Parent Dept	x	x	x			
3.2.2	Promote 'éist' programme	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.3	Include Traveller interests in ECDU	ECDU	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.4	Work with NCSE to put services in place for children with special education needs	ECDU/NCSE	x	x	x	x	x	
3.2.5	Remove anomaly regarding services for children with special needs in Early Start	ECDU/DES/NCSE	x					
Principle 4 Ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision								
Objective 4.1 A Framework for Early Learning								
<i>Actions</i>								
4.1.1	Expedite the NCCA work	DES/NCCA/ECDU	x	x				
4.1.2	Compile resource audit for providers	ECDU		x	x			
4.1.3	Implement the framework	ECDU/DES			x	x	x	
Objective 4.2 Standards for quality								
<i>Actions</i>								
4.2.1	Amend Child Care Act 1991	DHC/Govt.						
4.2.2	Establish system of registration for ECCE	DES/DHC/ECDU		x				
4.2.3	Implement the National Framework on Quality in ECCE	DES/CECDE/ECDU		x	x			
Objective 4.3 Develop a Skilled Workforce								
<i>Actions</i>								
4.3.1	Devise profile for ECCE workers	Accrediting bodies/ECDU				x		
4.3.2	Implement the Model Framework	NQAI/ECDU	x	x				
4.3.3	Reform use of CE in ECCE	FÁS/ECDU	x	x				
4.3.4	Establish national pay scales in ECCE	DETE	x					
Principle 5 Building partnerships								
Objective 5.1 Partnership at national and local levels								
<i>Actions</i>								
5.1.1	Support NVCO input to national policy	ECDU/NVCOs	x	x	x	x	x	
5.1.2	Develop links with schools/voluntary providers	ECDU/NVCOs	x	x	x	x	x	
Objective 5.2 Partnership with parents and communities								
<i>Actions</i>								
5.2.1	Develop proposals for inclusion of parents	CECDE/CCCs	x	x				
5.2.2	Devise ways to consult with children	ECDU/NCO	x	x	x			
Objective 5.3 Partnership with the business/employers sector								
<i>Actions</i>								
5.3.1	Develop employer response to ECCE provision	Social partners	x	x	x			

Annex 8 Membership of the NESF

Independent Chairperson	Dr. Maureen Gaffney
Deputy Chairperson	Mary Doyle, Dept. of the Taoiseach

Strand (i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil	Michael Woods T.D. Pat Carey T.D. John Curran T.D. Senator Mary O'Rourke Senator Paschal Mooney Senator Brendan Daly Senator Geraldine Feeney
Fine Gael	Senator Paul Coghlan Damien English T.D. Paul Kehoe T.D.
Labour	Joan Burton T.D. Willie Penrose T.D.
Progressive Democrats	Senator Kate Walsh
Independents	Senator Feargal Quinn
Technical Group	Jerry Cowley T.D.

Strand (ii) Employer/Trade Unions/Farming Organisations

Employer/Business Organisations

IBEC	Maria Cronin Heidi Lougheed
Small Firms' Association	Patricia Callan
Construction Industry Federation	Kevin Gilna
Chambers of Commerce/ Tourist Industry/Exporters Association	Seán Murphy

Trade Unions

Technical Engineering & Electrical Union	Eamon Devoy
Civil & Public Service Union	Blair Horan
AMICUS	Jerry Shanahan
SIPTU	Manus O'Riordan
ITCU	Paula Carey

Agricultural/Farming Organisations

Irish Farmers' Association	Mary McGreal
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association	Michael Doody
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society	Mary Johnson
Macra na Feirme	Carmel Brennan
Irish Country Women's Association	Anne Murray

Strand (iii) Community and Voluntary Sector*Womens Organisations*

National Women's Council of Ireland	Orla O'Connor Dr Joanna McMinn
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Unemployed

INOUE	June Tinsley
ICTU Centres for the Unemployed	Patricia Short

Disadvantaged

CORI	Sr. Brigid Reynolds
Society of St. Vincent de Paul	Audry Deane
Pavee Point	Brid O'Brien
Anti-Poverty Networks	Sharon Keane

Youth/Children

NYCI	Marie Clarie McAleer
Children's Rights Alliance	Jillian Van Turnhout

Older People

Senior Citizen's Parliament/Age Action	Robin Webster
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Disability

Disability Federation of Ireland	Aisling Walsh
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Others

The Carers' Association	Frank Goodwin
Irish Rural Link	Seamus Boland
The Wheel	Fergus O'Ferrall

Strand (iv) Central Government, Local Government and Independents

Central Government

Tom Considine,
Secretary-General, Department of Finance

Paul Haran,
Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

John Hynes,
Secretary-General, Department of Social and Family Affairs

Gerry Kearney,
Secretary-General, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Niall Callan,
Secretary-General, Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Local Government

General Council of County Councils	Councillor Ger Barron Councillor Jack Crowe Councillor Constance Hanniffy
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Association of Municipal Authorities	Councillor Patricia McCarthy
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County and City Managers Association	John Tierney
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Independents:

Geary Institute, UCD	Prof. Colm Harmon
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Department of Sociology, NUI Maynooth	Dr. Mary P. Corcoran
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ESRI	Prof. Brian Nolan
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Tansey, Webster, Stewart & Company Ltd.	Paul Tansey
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	Cáit Keane
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Secretariat

Director	Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
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Policy Analysts	David Silke Sarah Craig Gerard Walker
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Executive Secretary	Paula Hennelly
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Annex 9 NESF Publications

(i) NESF Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1.	Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP	Nov 1993
2.	National Development Plan 1994 – 1999	Nov 1993
3.	Commission on Social Welfare - Outstanding recommendations	Jan 1994
4.	Ending Long-term Unemployment	June 1994
5.	Income Maintenance Strategies	July 1994
6.	Quality Delivery of Social Services	Feb 1995
7.	Jobs Potential of Services Sector	April 1995
8.	First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	May 1995
9.	Jobs Potential of Work Sharing	Jan 1996
10.	Equality Proofing Issues	Feb 1996
11.	Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment	Jan 1997
12.	Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion	Mar 1997
13.	Unemployment Statistics	May 1997
14.	Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion	Oct 1997
15.	Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	Nov 1997
16.	A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation	Dec 1997
17.	Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service	Mar 2000
18.	Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation: Building the Future	Sept 2000
19.	Alleviating Labour Shortages	Nov 2000
20.	Lone Parents	July 2001
21.	Third Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	Nov 2001
22.	Re-integration of Prisoners	Jan 2002
23.	A Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues	Mar 2002
24.	Early School Leavers	Mar 2002
25.	Equity of Access to Hospital Care	July 2002
26.	Labour Market Issues for Older Workers	Feb 2003
27.	Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: Implementation Issues	April 2003
28.	The Policy Implications of Social Capital	June 2003
29.	Equality Policies for Older People	July 2003
30.	Fourth Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum	Nov 2004

(ii) NESF Opinions

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment	Mar 1995
2.	National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Jan 1996
3.	Long-term Unemployment Initiatives	Apr 1996
4.	Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?	Aug 1996
5.	Employment Equality Bill	Dec 1996
6.	Pensions Policy Issues	Oct 1997
7.	Local Development Issues	Oct 1999
8.	The National Anti-Poverty Strategy	Aug 2000

NESF Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	Development of the Equality Provisions	Nov 1997
2.	Targeted Employment and Training Measures	Nov 1997

(iii) NAPS Social Inclusion Forum: Conference Reports

1.	Inaugural Meeting on 30 January 2003	
2.	Second Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum	Jan 2005

Annex 10 Structures and Working Arrangements of the NESF

Introduction

1. The following structures and working arrangements are designed to enable the NESF to work as efficiently and effectively as possible in the discharge of its mandate.
2. The NESF will work through:
 - Plenary Sessions;
 - A Management Committee;
 - Project Teams; and
 - Ad Hoc Working Groups.

Plenary Sessions

3. The functions of the Plenary Sessions will be to debate, *inter alia*,:
 - the NESF's draft Work Programme, on the basis of proposals submitted by the Management Committee; and
 - the Reports prepared by the NESF's Project-based Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups.
4. Ministers may attend and participate at these Sessions at the invitation of the NESF or on their own initiative. Opposition Spokespersons may also be invited to attend and participate at these Sessions.
5. Plenary Sessions will be held between four and six times a year. The main venue for meetings will be Dublin but one or two Sessions a year may be held in provincial locations.
6. Plenary Sessions will be held in public, except when dealing with issues relating to the internal management of the NESF. Invitations to concerned interests to put forward their views and attend such Sessions will normally be left to the discretion of the NESF's Chairperson. 'Public' in this context will also be interpreted to mean that the media will be invited to attend.

Management Committee

7. The Management Committee will be responsible for the management of the NESF and in ensuring its overall effectiveness and functioning. This role will include:
 - assisting the Chairperson of the NESF, in conjunction with the NESF Secretariat, in carrying out her Executive role;

- formally adopting the NESF’s Work Programme in the light of the discussions at Plenary level; this should indicate a statement of the problem to be addressed under each main theme and serve also as the ‘mission statement’ for the subsequent work of the Project Teams;
 - monitoring the Work Programme and the Structures and Working Arrangements on an on-going basis; agreeing amendments in both these areas which may be necessary in the light of experience;
 - when work is initiated on a particular theme or sub-theme, the Committee may give broad guidelines to the Team concerned on the specific issues to be covered, give indicative timetables for completion of the project, make suggestions on sources of information, outside expertise, etc. but this should not be such as to unduly delimit or circumscribe the autonomy of the Teams;
 - formally adopting the Reports prepared by the Project Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups; these may be accompanied with a NESF commentary, as the Committee considers appropriate, based on the debate at Plenary level; in advance of the Management meeting, the Project Team/ Working Group may meet to review and amend its Report, as it sees fit, taking into account the comments made at the Plenary Session;
 - preparing the Periodic Reports on the work of the NESF and on the implementation of its recommendations; for this purpose, the Committee may prepare guidelines on the procedures to be followed in discussing follow-up action by Departments on recommendations contained in NESF Reports;
 - in exceptional circumstances, and where action has to be taken at short notice such as a request from Government or an individual Minister, the preparation of Reports in this case may be undertaken either by the Committee itself or through its establishing an Ad Hoc Working Group for this purpose;
 - the composition of such a Group, which will be drawn equally from all four Strands and decided on by the NESF’s Chairperson, in consultation with the Management Committee, will have particular regard to involving Members with relevant expertise and experience in the area under examination; these Groups may also be assisted by outside experts; and
 - in the above circumstances and because of the time constraints involved, these Reports will be adopted uniquely by the Management Committee (this will be referred to as the ‘fast-track’ procedure).
8. The Management Committee will be chaired by the NESF’s Chairperson. Each of the Strands will have three representatives on the Committee.
9. Finally, the quorum for meetings of the Committee will be a simple majority of Members. This will also apply in the case of meetings of the Project Teams and of Ad Hoc Working Groups.

Project Teams

10. Reflecting the NESF's new focus on policy implementation and evaluation, including the impact of policies in specific geographic areas, these Teams will be the main body involved in the preparation of Reports. The Teams – whose membership should not exceed twelve at most – will comprise balanced representation from the various organisations and interests involved, with particular account taken to ensure representation by the local and/or specialised elements of the national social partnership organisations.
11. To encourage as full participation as possible, and, the ownership of and input by the full NESF membership of the final results, Project Teams will:
 - at an early stage in their work make an interim presentation at Plenary Sessions on how their work is progressing; this will provide an opportunity for all NESF Members to make an input before reports are too far advanced and finalised by the Teams;
 - Plenary Sessions might break into smaller Working Groups for the above purpose;
 - for information purposes, periodic up-dates (1/2 pages), will be circulated by the Teams through fax/e-mail to all NESF Members on the progress made in their work; and
 - furnish attendance records to the Management Committee, with a view to addressing any problems that may arise in this area.
12. The work of the Teams will be specifically directed at:
 - evaluating the effectiveness of policies;
 - identifying corrective action and/or timely changes to ineffective policies; and
 - improving policy-making by better informing and influencing the reshaping of strategic policy analysis.
13. Save in exceptional circumstances when the NESF's Chairperson would need to be consulted, the appointment of Team Chairpersons, and/or Project Leaders if needs be, will be made by the Project Teams themselves.
14. The Teams will have particular regard to and take into account as fully as possible any guidelines prepared by the Management Committee to facilitate them in their work.
15. For this purpose, and to serve as a standard-type frame of reference, the Teams should take the necessary steps to ensure that:
 - within the framework of the NESF's agreed Work Programme and Management Committee's guidelines, specific and operational terms-of-reference are agreed to in the early stages of their work, in consultation with the Management Committee, together with an indication of the work-process, phasing and time-table involved and other related issues such as background documentation, speakers, research (if any) to be commissioned, etc.

- on-going consultations and interaction are held with Departments/State Agencies so that up-to-date information is available on official thinking on policy issues and of whatever work may already be underway;
 - the work process is geared to solving problems, addressing specific policy issues and bringing an ‘added value’ dimension to bear on policy-making through identifying, where possible, new thinking and alternative options;
 - recommendations are specific and actionable (both in their content and to whom they are addressed); they also need to be supported by underlying analysis, costed (where this is feasible) and prioritised;
 - detailed drafting points are left to the Secretariat; and
 - where possible, decisions on substantive issues are only taken when there is a representative and balanced attendance of Members present.
16. Project Teams may be assisted by outside experts. Decisions in this area will be taken by the NESF’s Chairperson, on the basis of proposals from the Team in question. The task of these experts will be to facilitate the work of the Teams through the preparation of position papers, participation at meetings (but not voting) and, in some cases, the drafting of Report or Sections of such Reports.
17. The tasks of Project Leaders will be to provide impetus and assistance in the overall management of the Project Teams.
18. The Teams will mostly meet in private but may, by agreement with the Chairperson of the NESF, hold public meetings or local hearings as appropriate. All such public meetings will be chaired by the NESF’s Chairperson.
19. Finally, Ministers, Opposition Spokespersons, interest groups and public officials may be invited to attend meetings of the Teams. NESF Members not on a particular Team but who wish to contribute will be invited to make written submissions and follow this up with an oral presentation, subject to the agreement of the Team concerned.

Ad Hoc Working Groups

20. Working Groups may be established on the initiative of the full NESF meeting in Plenary Session, or of its Management Committee, to consider specific issues which form part of or are related to the NESF’s Work Programme or to assist the Management Committee, for example, in the preparation of the Periodic Reports.
21. In contrast to the role of the Project Teams, which will be focussed on resolving problems on the implementation of specific policies and programmes, the above Working Groups may be used, in particular, to advance and accelerate the preparation of shorter Reports or Opinions which will be linked in with the Government’s timetable and decision-making processes. These Groups will function along the more standard lines of the NESF’s former Standing Committees.

22. As a general principle, these Groups will consist of not more than twelve Members. The composition and chairing of such a Group will be decided by the NESF's Chairperson, following consultation with the Management Committee. Particular attention will be given in this regard to having Members nominated who have relevant expertise and experience in the area under examination. There will be balanced representation on these Groups.
23. Working Groups may also be assisted by outside experts, under the same arrangements as will apply in the case of the Project Teams.
24. Save in exceptional circumstances, Reports from Working Groups will be discussed and adopted in the normal manner through the Plenary Session/Management Committee mechanism.

NESF's Chairperson

25. The Chairperson will seek to facilitate and encourage participation by all of the Members of the NESF so as to achieve consensus. She will have a key role in managing the operation and administration of the NESF. These tasks will include:
 - chairing Plenary Sessions, Management Committee meetings and hearings by the Project Teams which are held in public;
 - encouraging participation and consensus and facilitating groups not directly represented to put forward their views and make presentations to the NESF;
 - taking final decisions on membership of the Project Teams, as well as on related questions such as that of alternates, in consultation with the Management Committee;
 - liaising with the Project Teams and Ad Hoc Working Groups;
 - organising agendas and work programmes in consultation with the Secretariat and the Management Committee;
 - ensuring that the Work Programme is within the NESF's terms-of-reference and that its implementation has regard to agreed structures, working arrangements and timetables; and
 - dealing with publicity and media issues on behalf of the NESF.
26. In her absence, the above functions will be undertaken by the NESF's Deputy Chairperson.

Annex 11 Terms of Reference and Constitution of the NESF

1. The role of the NESF will be:
 - to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in the context of social partnership arrangements, especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion; and
 - to facilitate public consultation on policy matters referred to it by the Government from time to time.

2. In carrying out this role the NESF will:
 - consider policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of the Government; the work programme to be agreed with the Department of the Taoiseach, taking into account the overall context of the NESDO;
 - consider reports prepared by Teams involving the social partners, with appropriate expertise and representatives of relevant Departments and agencies and its own Secretariat;
 - ensure that the Teams compiling such reports take account of the experience of implementing bodies and customers/clients including regional variations;
 - publish reports with such comments as may be considered appropriate;
 - convene meetings and other forms of relevant consultation appropriate to the nature of issues referred to it by the Government from time to time.

3. The term of office of members of the NESF will be three years. During the term alternates may be nominated. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed will hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. Retiring members will be eligible for re-appointment.

4. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the NESF will be appointed by the Government.

5. Membership of the NESF will comprise 15 representatives from each of the following four strands:
 - the Oireachtas;
 - employer, trade unions and farm organisations;
 - the voluntary and community sector; and
 - central government, local government and independents.

6. The NESF will decide on its own internal structures and working arrangements.