



Early Years Leading Education in Ireland

Submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Response to First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families and, Suggestions to support its implementation

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Introduction

PLÉ welcomes the publication of *First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (Government of Ireland, 2018). In the foreword, Minister Zappone highlights our ‘duty to the youngest members of society to create the conditions for the best start in life... [Including]...tackling inequalities that can emerge in early childhood...’ (p. 8). The Minister concludes that the ‘first five years of life should provide every child with a good start, a strong start and an equal start’. This core vision is underpinned by evidence from neuroscience which shows that by the time a child is three years old, 90% of their brain has been developed, providing the foundations of many of the most important abilities (e.g. memory, decision making, and emotion). Furthermore, the first five years last a lifetime meaning that the quality of relationships and learning environments for babies and toddlers is critically important (McCain, Mustard and Shanker, 2007).

We welcome also the acknowledgement in *First 5* of many years of underinvestment in early years care and education in Ireland. Such underinvestment is counterproductive in that economists (e.g., Heckman, 2006) assert that the economic return on investment per child in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is higher than the return on investment attained in any other period. It follows therefore, that ‘If we change the beginning of the story, we change the whole story¹’. The focus on establishing a new funding model for the early years sector in *First Five* is therefore timely. Changing the beginning of the story involves all those providing services for babies, young children and their families to contribute to their learning, development, health and well-being (Government of Ireland, 2018). In relation to ECEC, and drawing upon PLÉ’s unique expertise in this area, this submission focuses specifically upon **Goal D: An Effective Early Childhood System. Building Block 3: Skilled and sustainable workforce.**

PLÉ is concerned with three core and interrelated aspects of ECEC:

1. The quality of initial Educator training;
2. The quality of children’s experiences in settings and,
3. The professionalisation of the ECEC workforce.

¹ Christakis D. Media and children [video]. City: Publisher; 2011
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoT7qH_uVNo)

First 5 emphasises the need to support the ECEC workforce, both through improved working conditions and continued professional development, which we welcome. However, we would like to address here some of the important processes that must be attended to in order to achieve real progress and positive outcomes. In this respect, PLÉ welcomes the focus of *First 5* upon play and nurturing pedagogy, as well as plans to move towards a graduate-led workforce with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant managers and managers) working directly with children in centre-based ECEC settings holding an appropriate degree-level qualification (with an initial target of 30% reached by 2021) (Government of Ireland, 2018). While this requirement is a positive step towards the professionalisation of the ECEC sector, public regard for an area of work and the esteem in which it is held, has a powerful impact upon both professionalism and professionalisation (Moloney, in press). Drawing upon an extant body of literature, Figure 1 provides a summary of the core characteristics of a profession, many of which are included in *First 5*.

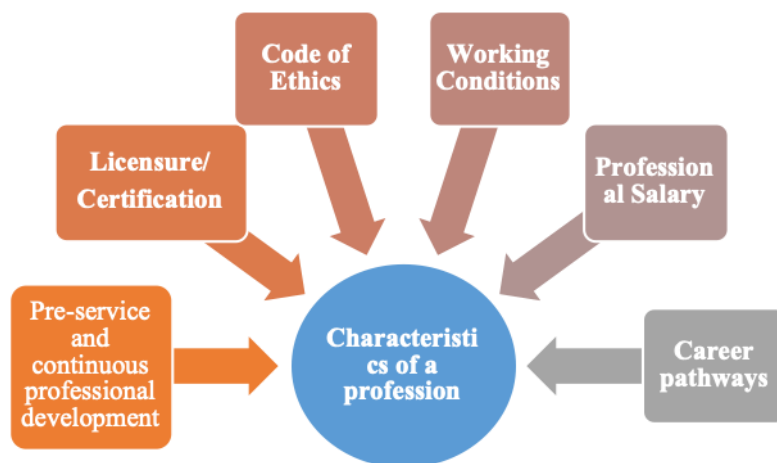


Figure 1. Core characteristics of a profession

With regards to licensing or certification, this signifies the ‘adequacy and validity of the training’ (Hakel, Keonig and Elliot, 2008, p. 44), ‘sets a professional standard and provides a baseline expectation for the quality of services rendered... [and is seen] as the mark of a professional’ (Uhlmann, Schuette and Yashar, 2010, p.468). Because it demonstrates a commitment to high standards of professionalism and creates clear education, certification and continuing education standards, Nutbrown (2012) suggests that licensing/certification impacts upon the public’s awareness of a profession while also indicating that members have graduated from an accredited graduate programme that ensures credibility and expertise.

Submission

This submission begins with a discussion of the relationship between a skilled ECEC workforce and the quality of children's experiences in settings. It then sets out the issues associated with a poorly trained and unsustainable workforce in ECEC, namely pedagogical quality, staff turnover, and the factors that impact upon staff turnover. Finally, the submission explores the factors that underscore professionalization. We set out the ways in which PLÉ can work with Government to effect the implementation of Goal D with regards to the following action areas identified within *First Five*:

- Initial Educator Preparation
- Workforce Development Plan
- National Programme of CPD
- Early Childhood Workforce Initiative
- Professional Standards Body
- Review of Favourable Working Conditions

Relationship between a Skilled ECEC Workforce and Quality

Although it is widely recognised that ECEC services can enhance children's development, a poor quality setting may do more harm than good (EU, 2014). Furthermore, UNICEF (2008) notes that 'access is of little merit without quality (p.23)'. Staff with higher education and on-going training and a low turnover are two of the most important indicators of quality in ECEC (EU, 2014). A skilled and professional workforce is therefore central to quality in ECEC. In fact, numerous reports including the National Academies of Science report in the US (2015) *Transforming the Workforce*, underlines the contribution of the ECEC workforce to enhancing the pedagogical quality of services for young children. Many of the other domains identified in the EU (2014) *framework for quality in ECEC* are dependent on workforce quality. For example, although curriculum is viewed as an important driver of quality, (Milotay, 2016; OECD, 2012; Vandenbroeck, Lenaerts and Beblavý, 2018), it is not a proxy for quality in ECEC. In the absence of a skilled and sustainable workforce, curriculum is ineffective, and by extension, as discussed later in this submission, positive child experiences and outcomes may be at risk.

Quality of workforce also underpins the relationships which are the bedrock of ECEC (Moloney and McCarthy, 2018) and therefore must not be overlooked. Melhuish (2016) stresses that interactions drive development, and in the first three years of life, in particular,

‘language development and socio-emotional development are critical aspects of development, and are strongly influenced by children’s interactional experience’ (p.11). Further underscoring the importance of interactions in the early childhood period, Moloney and McCarthy explain:

Because learning results from interactions in the everyday routines that occur naturally within the ECEC setting, children and educators jointly construct the learning, and have the freedom to both drive, and alter the pace of learning, depending upon abilities, interests, and particular needs. Learning in this sense is a carefully negotiated territory between adults (including parents, educators; early intervention team etc.) and children

Clearly, ECEC is a highly complex field that combines both care and education within an overarching relational framework. It is no surprise then that educators are considered central to realizing universally accessible, high quality ECEC services (EU, 2014; ILO, 2012; 2014; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Peeters et al, 2011; Urban Vandenbroeck, Lazzari and Peeters, 2012; UNESCO, 2015). In particular, well qualified educators whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role, are essential (EU, 2014; ILO, 2014).

Importance of Qualifications and Continuous Professional Development

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) multilevel or bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) may be applied to underscore how, at all levels within the ECEC sector, qualifications directly impact upon the quality of provision, in terms of pedagogical quality, and therefore, upon outcomes for children (OECD, 2012). Moreover, higher levels of preparation correlate positively with better developmental outcomes for children, and educator competences (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). For instance, better educated staff are more likely to hold child-centred beliefs and engage in similar pedagogical practices (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant et al., 2005), provide stimulating learning environments (Litjens and Taguma, 2010), use more words and more complex language when communicating with children (Montie, Xiang, and Schweinhart, 2006) and better support children’s healthy development and school readiness (Bueno, Darling-Hammond, and Gonzales, 2010). Critically, educators who have more formal education and more specialised early-childhood training provide more stimulating, warm and supportive interactions with children (EU, 2014).

PLÉ is not suggesting that university education is the only or best way to achieve quality in the ECEC workforce. Indeed, the role of continuous professional development features strongly at policy level nationally and internationally. Vandenbroeck et al., (2018) rightly acknowledge the need to support educators, already working in the field, who may have missed out on the opportunity of undertaking initial pre-service training, through systematically providing opportunities for CPD. In fact, it is considered that on-going professional development, which can be in-service (on the job) training may be just as important as initial pre-service qualifications in enhancing educator competency, but only if it is of sufficient length and intensity (EU, 2014). On-going professional development can lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, the continuous improvement of educational practice and the deepening of pedagogical understanding (CoRe, 2011).

University qualified educators and less qualified educators can work alongside each other in complementary roles. Siraj- Blatchford et al (2002), for instance, indicate that less qualified educators engage in more sustained thinking with children, when supervised by qualified educators than when they work alone, or work only with lesser qualified staff.

While the ability of educators to support children's learning experiences is, no doubt, influenced by their initial and on-going professional development, other factors such as their work environment, salary and professional status also play a role (UNESCO, 2015). In the words of Press, Wong and Gibson (2015) 'it is not only what staff know, it is how long they remain in the setting in which they are employed that is also important' (p.89). Given the well-established relationship between staff qualifications and quality ECEC, staff turn-over is a matter of grave concern.

Staff Turnover

The EU (2014, p. 360) refers to the 'constant and detrimental' staff turnover in the ECEC sector which creates an unstable learning environment that negatively impacts children's development (OECD, 2012) and undermines quality (Vandenbroeck et al, 2018).

In Ireland, where the turnover rate currently stands at 25% (Pobal², 2018), some worrying trends have emerged. Statistics provided by Pobal (2017) for the 2015/2016 period show that the percentage of staff who had been working within their current setting for less than 12 months had grown from 15.6% in 2014 to 18% for this period. This indicates either an increase in the number of new entrants to the sector, as a result of increased staffing, or an increase in the turnover rate (Oireachtas, 2017). Of the 20,823 staff profiled in 2016/2017, 32% had worked in the sector for less than 2 years (Pobal, 2018). While the factors that contribute to staff turnover worldwide are summarised in figure 2, it is thought that poor salaries and low professional standing are the main reasons for exiting the sector in Ireland (Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) 2016, Moloney and Pope, 2013, Moloney, 2015, 2018).

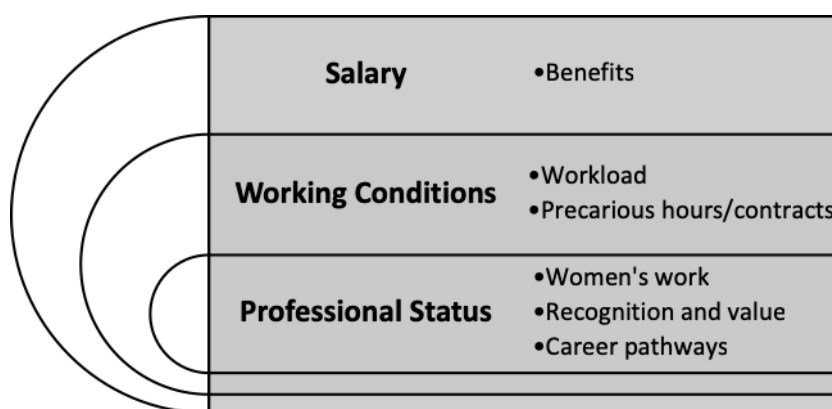


Figure 2. Factors that Contribute to ECEC staff turnover

As mentioned earlier, quality relationships with children are the bedrock of quality ECEC. In addition to the factors outlined in figure 1, it seems that educators are also leaving the sector due to burnout. A recent study (Oke, Filipovic, Lambert and Hayes, 2018), indicates that working conditions, recognition and reward are predictors of burnout amongst Irish early childhood educators. For all of these reasons, it is critical that the Irish ECEC workforce is supported to remain in practice to develop the quality relationships that are vital for children's early learning and development.

Resisting Early Childhood Education and Care

Staffing in ECEC may be compared to a revolving door, where individuals are deliberately leaving in significant numbers, and turning their backs on the sector as an attractive, valuable

² Pobal is an agency that works on behalf of the Irish Government to manage programmes in areas such as social inclusion, early childhood care and education, community development, peace and reconciliation, equality, labour market supports and education and training

and sustainable career choice. Resistance to seeing ECEC as a permanent and sustainable choice is coming from within and outside the field, as pre-service undergraduate ECEC students and existing educators are sidestepping ECEC as a career option. Current remuneration levels are an important driver in the attractiveness and the status of a profession, as is professional status. At present, there is a lack of recognition at societal level in most countries, of the educator's professional status.

In the absence of professional remuneration and status, individuals may opt to leave the sector altogether, seeking better paying jobs (for example in retail and in factories) where they can earn much more, with none of the responsibility associated with ECEC (Moloney, 2018). Others, particularly better educated staff, transition to better paid and more prestigious jobs in the formal education sector (Boyd, 2013; Moloney and Pope, 2013; Moloney, 2015; Moloney in press; Whitebook, Sakai, & Howes, 2004).

As discussed above, undergraduate ECEC degree students also resist ECEC as a career, opting instead to work in the school sector (Gibson, 2013; Thorpe, Boyd, Ailwood, & Brownlee, 2011). An Australian study by Thorpe et al, (2011) examining influences on pre-service educators' decisions about whether or not they would work in the field, found that approximately half resisted ECEC as an option because of its pay and conditions. Against the backdrop of a destination survey for undergraduate ECEC students in Ireland, Moloney & Pope (2013) found that the issue of remuneration impacted negatively upon graduate perceptions of working within the sector, undermining their confidence and self-esteem in relation to the value of their work. In UCC, an in-house survey among final year Early Years and Childhood degree programme students in 2017, found that only 29% planned to work in the ECEC sector. While many graduates perceive their work as 'meaningful and valuable', they also indicate their unwillingness to remain in the ECEC sector (Moloney and Pope, 2013). Their intention to leave is fuelled by poor professional status and low salaries and, in some instances, job insecurity (Moloney, in press b). Regrettably, skill stasis is emerging as a significant issue in the ECEC sector in Ireland. Overall, as noted by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2018, p. 7) 'clear challenges are already emerging in relation to the recruitment, attraction and retention of qualified staff into the workforce' in Ireland.

The publication and implementation of *First 5* is, therefore, timely. It offers a valuable opportunity to influence the career trajectory of ECEC educators by redressing many of the factors that currently result in unsustainable staff turnover. *First 5* can and must address the ‘wicked issues’ that lead to skill stasis, an unsustainable workforce and ultimately, children’s experiences in settings.

Recommendations

The remainder of this submission sets out the ways in which PLÉ can support the implementation of *First 5*. While our primary focus is upon **Goal D: An Effective Early Childhood System. Building Block 3: Skilled and sustainable workforce**, we also highlight areas where PLÉ can also support Building Block 1: Leadership, Governance and Collaboration, and Building Block 2: Regulation, inspection, quality assurance. In this respect, we stress that PLÉ comprises Early Education and Care experts lecturing on undergraduate and postgraduate ECEC programmes across the higher education landscape in Ireland, engaging in research and publishing nationally and internationally. Furthermore, to achieve best practice, planning, assessment and evaluation as essential building blocks are integral to the realisation of achieving quality in ECEC. As such PLÉ has vast expertise in early childhood development, neuroscience, educational psychology, inclusion, diversity and equality, collaborative working with educators, providers, policy makers, curriculum development, psychometrics and measurement, implementation and assessment, professional practice, reflection, ECEC management and leadership, governance, school-age childcare and programme development at Level 7, 8 and 9, as well as in the areas of supervision and mentoring. Drawing upon our wide ranging expertise, we believe that it is paramount that **PLÉ is included as a key member of the *First 5* implementation group.**

Goal D: An Effective Early Childhood System

Building Block 1: Leadership, Governance and Collaboration	Actions	Role of PLÉ
	<p><i>Strategic Action 1.B: Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the operating system for ELC (and school-age childcare), at national and local level, to develop more consolidated and streamlined planning, funding, administration and quality support. As part of this review, consider a range of possible options including a dedicated Statutory Agency, the use of existing State Agencies or the establishment of an executive arm of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs 	<p>PLÉ can assist the DCYA/DES implementation group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a scoping exercise to explore the status, composition, role, benefits and challenges of establishing a professional body. <p>It is important here to note that ‘one of the hallmarks of a profession is having a professional association which acts to protect the status and position of its members...[through]’ accreditation of education and training providers, developing key standards for education and training programmes, workforce registration and fitness to practice’ (p. 9697). (Moloney and McKenna, 2017, p.95- 97).</p>
	<p><i>Strategic Action 2.A: Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement quality standards for school-age childcare. 	
<p>Building Block 2: Regulation, inspection, quality assurance A robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards</p>	<p><i>Strategic Action 2.B: Progressively reform the ELC (and school-age childcare) regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and use appropriate methods to take account of the views of children and parents in the inspection of ELC (and school-age childcare) Develop a revised self-evaluation framework for ELC to replace the existing Siolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) so that providers can assess their own performance along the quality spectrum, from compliance to excellence Align the national quality improvement infrastructure around the Better Start Quality Development service which operates nationally. Include a regional structure and increase support to the sector through an enhanced specialist service that provides 	<p>PLÉ can assist the DCYA/DES implementation group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop participatory methods (e.g., the Mosaic approach) to take account of the views of children and parents in the inspection of ECEC services (early childhood and School-age) Develop participatory assessment methods. Assessment is a critical part of a high-quality, early childhood programme. At present, children have limited participation in the assessment process. Develop a revised self- evaluation framework for ECEC to replace the existing Siolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) so that providers can assess their own performance along the quality spectrum, from compliance to excellence

	intensive coaching, training and advice to improve professional practice (see CPD Action under 3.B).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align the national quality improvement infrastructure around the Better Start Quality Development service
Building Block 3: Skilled and sustainable workforce An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families	<p>Strategic Action 3.A: Identify and put in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services.</p> <p>Introduce a range of measures so that, by 2028:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement; and a graduate-led ELC workforce, with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant manager and managers) working directly with children in centre-based ELC settings and coordinators supporting the work of childminders, hold an appropriate degree-level qualification (with an initial target of 30% reached by 2021) Informed by the predictive model developed by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs for the ELC workforce, develop a Workforce Development Plan to ensure the appropriate number of ELC and school-age childcare staff at all levels in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan will support the achievement of the above targets. The Workforce Development Plan will also set out plans to raise the profile of careers in ELC (and school-age childcare), establish a career framework and leadership development opportunities and will work towards building a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce. Consideration will also be given to broader ELC and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements 	<p>PLÉ can assist the DCYA/DES implementation group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the content of School-Aged childcare training, taking account of child development from 5 to 12 years in particular, the informal nature of SAC, collaborative working, curriculum/activities, children's rights to rest, leisure and play, child protection etc. Develop easy to use self-evaluation measures to monitor and record the use by ECCE practitioners of the various tools, guides and other mechanisms that have been introduced to enhance the quality of the ECCE scheme Inform the development of the Workforce Development Plan, taking account of the ever changing policy landscape in which the sector operates, and how this impacts upon educator skills and competencies, while also being cognisant of the skills required for the workforce in the future vis a vis technology, governance, financial accountability and so on. In addition, PLÉ can Advise with regards to the broader ECE and SAC workforce in terms of inspection, training and mentoring roles³. In terms of SAC, cognisance must be taken of the broad age range involved in this sector, and the consequent impact upon relationships and interactions. As such the ECEC environment differs considerably from that in a primary school classroom and the SAC context. Accordingly, PLÉ recommends that in the context of training and mentoring,

³ PLÉ is currently developing a blended learning programme in mentoring and supervision for anyone involved in mentoring/supervising undergraduate students while undertaking professional practice placements.

		<p>primary schools must be included, from an ECEC provision perspective (with the intention that undergraduate students will undertake professional practice placement in junior and senior classes in line with the impending 35% practicum requirement) and the SAC perspective as many schools begin to offer breakfast/SAC services.</p>
	<p><i>Strategic Action 3.B: Improve access to high-quality initial training and CPD opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publish agreed criteria and guidelines for further and higher education ELC (and school-age childcare) qualifications including access and entry requirements; knowledge and content of programmes and the incorporation of supervised professional practice. These standards and guidelines will support the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan by helping to create a shared agenda, common practice and understanding of quality (ensuring that practice frameworks are reflected in training), clarifying the roles and responsibilities of training institutions ▪ Develop a national programme of CPD opportunities for the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce to be delivered through Better Start Quality Development Service. Over time, this will develop links with the national structure for CPD of primary school teachers. Opportunities for joint delivery of CPD programmes where appropriate will be considered ▪ Review graduate training options and requirements for all professionals working with babies, young children and their families to ensure that appropriate specialist training is available, including training that is specific to early childhood and ensure all those working with babies and young children are supported to undertake regular CPD ▪ Develop an Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. This initiative will include the health and social care workforce and the early learning workforce, including ELC staff and 	<p>PLÉ welcomes the imminent publication of Award Criteria and Guidelines for Level 7 and Level 8 ECEC programmes. With regards to professional practice placement, PLÉ has developed ‘Best Practice Guidelines for Professional Practice Placement’ across the Higher Education sector. These guidelines can be readily adapted for professional practice placement at Level 5 and 6 and can be used to support the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan by helping to create a shared agenda, common practice and understanding of quality</p> <p>PLÉ can further assist the DCYA/DES implementation group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a national programme of CPD for the ECEC and SAC sectors, similar to the LINC programme currently in place through the Access and Inclusion Model. Any such programme must be premised upon a specific CPD allowance (3 days per annum minimum) and resources that enable settings to maintain adult/child ratios during CPD. Settings must be required to maintain CPD attendance records for inspection by POBAL. ▪ Review graduate training options and requirements

	<p>primary school teachers, among others. Aligning with developments in the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative and the Nurture/National Healthy Childhood Programme, the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative will develop opportunities for all professionals working with babies, young children and their families to learn together and develop collaborative working approaches. The initiative will progress joint pre service training and in-service learning modules on key issues of relevance across the early childhood workforce including child development, bonding and attachment, play, working with parents, working collaboratively, family violence and addressing disadvantage. The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative will also develop mechanisms to acknowledge and recognise effective collaborative learning and working (e.g. Team Around the Child initiatives such as Meitheal and AIM).</p>	<p>for all professionals working with babies, young children and their families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore how to develop and support joint in-service training across the ECEC and Primary School sectors, including child development, bonding and attachment, play, working with parents and families, working collaboratively, family violence and addressing disadvantage. ▪ Develop strategies for practice to reduce the risk of burnout for ECEC educators ▪ In relation to School Age Childcare, it is imperative to consider relational pedagogy with reference to the skills and strategies required to consult with and plan SAC content ▪ Develop context specific and reliable measurement methods and measures to ensure efficacy and quality and to highlight any gaps.
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	<p><i>Strategic Action 3.C: Develop mechanisms to raise the professional status of the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce and support employers to offer more favourable working conditions to attract and retain staff.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop proposals for a structure to review and oversee compliance with new standards and guidelines for further and higher ELC (and school-age childcare) education programmes and create a register of the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce. This structure would, over time, move towards a professional standards body to promote and regulate the ELC (and school-age childcare) profession ▪ Having regard to the Workforce Development Plan and alongside the introduction of a new funding model for ELC (and school-age childcare), examine the possibility of introducing further quality levers (e.g. extending the use of higher capitation payments) within the framework provided by the ACS so that appropriate incentives can be made available to employers to attract and retain staff, in particular graduates, working with children of all ages ▪ Undertake a review of the types of favourable working conditions that could be supported so that employers can attract and retain staff working in ELC (and school-age childcare) settings as a key input to the development of a new funding model (described later). As part of this review, the optimal time for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents will be explored. 	<p>PLÉ can assist the DCYA/DES implementation group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the working conditions that help employers to attract and retain staff. In this respect, PLÉ recommends that a SEQUAL study (Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning: A Tool for Programme Improvement) be carried out. Developed for use in the U.S, this tool has been adapted for International Use, and an Irish prototype has been developed (Moloney and Whitebook, 2018). This online study would provide evidence-based findings and garner invaluable data relating to a range of factors (participatory practices, non-contact time, CPD, ability to implement learning etc.) that enhance or impede professionalization and the likelihood that educators will remain in the sector. It would also allow us to pin-point gaps and provide targeted recommendations. ▪ PLÉ recommends that the current requirement for Level 7 and Level 8 graduates to have 3 years paid experience before their setting can claim higher capitation through the ECCE scheme be reversed. This requirement, which does not exist elsewhere in the education system, creates an additional obstacle for graduate employment, and acts as a disincentive to graduates to enter the sector. Furthermore, in the context of the National Childcare Scheme, mechanisms must be developed to encourage graduates to work with babies and toddlers. In this respect, we suggest extending the capitation scheme to non-ECCE children (from birth to 2 years and 8 months).
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