

OECD Thematic Review of
Early Childhood Education and Care

Background Report

IRELAND

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for
The Department of Education and Science

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Glossary of Terms

After-school and Out-of-School Care: this refers to care provided for school-going children outside of school hours, including after-school hours and during school holidays.

Early Start Programme: this is a programme aimed at pre-school children in disadvantaged areas aged three to 4 years.

Childminders: these are private individuals who provide care for children predominantly in their own [minder's] home, providing full-day, part-time and after-school care to children of a wide variety of ages.

Infant Classes in Primary Schools: these are the first two years of primary school education and are usually comprised of 4, 5 and 6 year olds. This category also includes the small number of special infant classes that cater for children with special learning needs that are attached to some ordinary primary schools.

Naionrai: these provide pre-school education through the medium of Irish and cater for children aged 3 to 6 years.

Nurseries and Crèches: these typically provide full day services and many cater for children from 2 to 3 months up to school-going age. In addition, many of these provide after-school care for children of school going age.

Parent and Toddler Groups: typically these cater for children from birth to 3 years, are attached to other childcare services such as pre-schools or crèches and offer opportunities for play for children and social interaction and informal support to parents.

Play Groups and Pre-schools: these usually provide sessional services (that is, less than three hours per child per day) for children aged from 3 to 4 or 5 years.

Pre-School for Travellers: these cater for pre-school children from the Traveller Community.

Special Schools: this refers to schools that cater exclusively for children with learning and/or physical disabilities.

Abbreviations

ADM	<i>Area Development Management Ltd</i>
B.Ed	<i>Bachelor of Education</i>
CECDE	<i>Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education</i>
CLAR	<i>Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachtanais</i>
CSER	<i>Centre for Social and Educational Research</i>
CDB	<i>County Development Board</i>
CEB	<i>County Enterprise Board</i>
DCRGA	<i>Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs</i>
DES	<i>Department of Education and Science</i>
DELG	<i>Department of the Environment and Local Government</i>
DETE	<i>Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment</i>
DHC	<i>Department of Health and Children</i>
DIT	<i>Dublin Institute of Technology</i>
DJELR	<i>Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform</i>
DSFA	<i>Department of Social and Family Affairs</i>
EOCP	<i>Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme</i>
ERC	<i>Educational Research Centre</i>
ESF	<i>European Social Fund</i>
FETAC	<i>Further Education and Training Awards Council</i>
HETAC	<i>Higher Education and Training Awards Council</i>
HSCL	<i>Home School Community Liaison</i>
ICTU	<i>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</i>
INTO	<i>Irish National Teacher's Organisation</i>
ISPCC	<i>Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children</i>
NAPS	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>
NCCA	<i>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</i>
NCCC	<i>National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee</i>
NCNA	<i>National Children's Nurseries Association</i>
NCO	<i>National Children's Office</i>
NEPS	<i>National Educational Psychological Service</i>
NVCO	<i>National Voluntary Childcare Organisations</i>
RAPID	<i>Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development</i>
SNO	<i>Special Needs Organiser</i>
VEC	<i>Vocational Education Committee</i>

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1. CONTEXT AND CURRENT PROVISION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO IRELAND

1.1.1 Geography

Ireland is one of the smallest countries in Europe and occupies the most westerly, peripheral position. Geographically, the entire island is comprised of 32 counties, 26 of which make up the Republic of Ireland, (commonly referred to as the South), and 6 of which go to make up Northern Ireland (usually called the North), which forms part of the United Kingdom. This report is concerned with the Republic of Ireland only, which will be referred to as Ireland in the remainder of this report for ease of reading.

Ireland covers an area of some 70,282 square kilometres (27,136 square miles). It is comprised of 4 provinces: Leinster to the east, Connaught to the west, Munster to the south and Ulster, the majority of which (6 of nine counties) lie in Northern Ireland. Regional differences that broadly correspond to provincial divisions are commonly acknowledged. Leinster is the most developed part of the country in commercial and industrial terms, has the highest level of developed infrastructure and is the most urbanised and densely populated province. Connaught and the counties of Ulster are among the less developed regions of the country with less industry, less urban development (with the notable exception of Galway City) and an older and more sparsely distributed population. Munster, like Leinster, is mixed with some areas such as Cork and Waterford seeing high levels of economic and urban growth, but with large stretches of rural areas.

One particular feature of Ireland is its small size. At its longest the entire island, North and South, stretches 486 kilometres (302 miles) and is at most 275 kilometres (171 miles) wide. This is an important comparative issue in service location and provision as the distances or time spent travelling that are thought of as considerable in Ireland may seem insignificant in other countries. It is important to remember in this context that distance is not an absolute measure but is relative to what is considered normal or acceptable within any given culture as well as the travel opportunities, facilities and infrastructure available.

1.1.2 Population and Age Structure

The most recent national Census of Population took place in 2002¹ and only preliminary results are available at this time. The population of Ireland now stands at just over 3.9 million, an 8% increase on the previous Census figure of 3.6 million in 1996. (CSO, 2002a) Age breakdowns from the 2002 Census are not available at this stage. The number of children aged 6 years and under can be gleaned, however, from vital statistics records that provide the number of registered births. These figures are shown in Table 1 below. Using these figures the total number of children aged 6 years or under is 323,026, divided reasonably equally across the single year age groups. Although this figure does not account for inward or outward migration of children or infantile deaths, this is one of the most accurate estimates of the relevant age specific population currently available.

¹ This was originally scheduled to take place in 2001 but was postponed due to the foot and mouth crisis.

Table 1
Single Year Age Cohorts

	Births in 2001	Births in 2000	Births in 1999	Births in 1998	Births in 1997	Births in 1996
Age 1 Year	57,882	-	-	-	-	-
Age 2 Years	-	54,239	-	-	-	-
Age 3 Years	-	-	53,924	-	-	-
Age 4 Years	-	-	-	53,551	-	-
Age 5 Years	-	-	-	-	52,775	-
Age 6 Years	-	-	-	-	-	50,655

Source: Vital Statistics available at www.cso.ie/principalstats/pristat7.html#figure1

1.1.3 Economic Growth and Changing Employment Patterns

It is important to contextualise the current debate on early childhood education and care in the rapid and significant economic change that has occurred in Ireland over the latter half of the 1990s and the changes that this has both demanded and facilitated in family life. On the whole, the 1980s and early 1990s represented a period of economic recession in Ireland that was characterised by high unemployment. However, in the mid-1990s the emergence of what was to be called the ‘Celtic Tiger economy’ was becoming noticeable. The period from 1996 onwards saw substantial economic growth, with average annual growth rates in GNP² of 4.7% between 1990 and 1995 and 6.7% between 1995 and 2000 (Duffy, Fitz Gerald, Kearney and Smyth, 1999). Unemployment decreased from 13.2% in 1990 to 11.8% in 1998 and 3.7% in 2001, with corresponding increases in the employment rate from 87% of the labour force to 88.1% and 96.3% respectively. The significance of these increases is further highlighted when placed in the context of a labour force that grew by just under 450,000 people or 34% over this eleven-year period (Central Statistics Office, 2002b). However, the Irish economy has slowed in 2001 and the outlook for 2002 is for a further moderation in the rate of growth, which it is estimated will be in region of 3%. This will have an impact on the national budget. (Department of Finance, 2002)

This economic boom has also come at a time of demographic dividend for Ireland, which has one of the youngest populations in Europe. Ireland is now reaping the benefits of a small baby boom that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Once employment became plentiful in the mid- to late 1990s, Ireland began to witness substantial inward and return migration. This too has improved Ireland’s demographic profile. However, these factors, as well as others such as the availability and usage of land, influenced the availability and cost of residential property. Nationally, the cost of new homes rose by just 4% between 1993 and 1994. Between 1997 and 1998 the annual rate of increase had climbed to 23% and to 19% between 1998 and 1999 (Drudy and Punch, 2000). Although price increases have stabilised somewhat in the past two years, prices still rose by 8.1% between 2000 and 2001 (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002). These increases have resulted in many first-time buyers who traditionally bought houses in their mid-20s

² Although GDP is the more widely used measure internationally, GNP is commonly used in Ireland due to the relatively large number of multi-national companies located here and the consequent significant repatriation of profits.

being squeezed out of the housing market until their late 20s or early 30s. In addition, many couples now require both parties to work in order to meet mortgage repayments, which, in turn, has had an impact on women's labour force participation (see 1.1.4 below). Rising house prices have also placed pressure on the private rented accommodation market, which has also seen a sharp increase in prices. These price increases have undoubtedly resulted in many young people delaying the formation of independent family units.

As the cost of accommodation is particularly expensive in the greater Dublin area, many young people seeking to establish their own homes have moved to the areas surrounding Dublin. This has resulted in an ever-widening commuter belt, which now stretches fifty kilometres and more around the Dublin area. This has had repercussions for childcare and education services in this commuter zone.

1.1.4 The Changing Role of Women

In Ireland, the traditional role of women was in the family home. This view was perpetuated by its inclusion in the country's Constitution (Article 41, Government of Ireland, 1999a) and also through the strong links between the Catholic Church and the Irish state. Following Ireland's entry to the EU (then the EEC) in 1973 and the implementation of legislation and policies necessary to meet EU directives that women's right to employment after marriage was established. Under the Civil Service (Employment of Married Women) Act 1973 and the Employment Equality Act, 1977 women were given a statutory right to remain in paid employment after marriage. Since then, as a result of the increased secularisation of Irish society, the industrialising economy and gender equality reforms, women in Ireland have experienced significant social and political changes. Some examples of the progress made are the fact that in 2000/2001, 54% of those in third level institutions in Ireland were women (Department of Education and Science, forthcoming 2002), and the current President of Ireland and her predecessor are female. However, it remains that fewer women than men participate in senior management, technical positions and high-ranking political positions. For example, less than 14% of the members of the current Irish Parliament are female.

Of particular concern here is the dramatic increase in female participation in the labour market. This is one of the key influences on the demand for early childhood care and education services. In the early 1990s Ireland had a low rate of female labour force participation relative to other EU member states. However, with economic growth came employment growth and an increasing demand for labour. Employment growth was not sector neutral and the services sector, which is traditionally labour intensive and dominated by women, grew in particular. Therefore, the labour market opportunities for women became plentiful. This 'pull' from the labour market, as well as the 'push' from a housing market that necessitated dual income households, had a substantial effect on women's labour market participation and employment.

Between 1990 and 1996 the number of women aged 15 years and over in the labour force grew from 456,500 to 573,700 and to 761,000 in 2002. This gives increases in the female labour force participation rate from 35.8% in 1990 to 41.4% in 1996 and 48.8% in 2002. (CSO, 1990-1997, 2002b) The increasing participation of married women and, more specifically, mothers in the labour force should also be noted. In

1990, the labour force participation rate of married women was 31%. By 1996 this had increased to 40.8% and to 48.1% in 2002.

Table 2

Proportion of employed men and women in full and part-time employment and full and Part-Time Labour Force Participation Rates (ILO) for Persons Aged 15 Years and Over, 1990, 1996 and 2002

	1990	1996	2002
Men	%	%	%
<i>% Share Full-Time Employment</i>	96.7	95.0	93.5
<i>Full-Time Participation Rate</i>	58.6	57.0	62.8
<i>% Share Part-Time Employment</i>	3.3	5.0	6.5
<i>Part-Time Participation Rate</i>	2.0	3.0	4.4
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	12.5	11.9	4.6
Total Participation Rate	69.3	68.1	70.4
Women			
<i>% Share Full-Time Employment</i>	83.2	78.2	69.5
<i>Full-Time Participation Rate</i>	25.6	28.5	32.6
<i>% Share Part-Time Employment</i>	16.8	21.8	30.5
<i>Part-Time Participation Rate</i>	5.2	7.9	14.3
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	13.8	11.9	3.7
Total Participation Rate	35.8	41.4	48.8
Married Women			
<i>% Share Full-Time Employment</i>	72.4	70.5	60.6
<i>Full-Time Participation Rate</i>	19.0	25.9	28.4
<i>% Share Part-Time Employment</i>	27.6	29.5	39.4
<i>Part-Time Participation Rate</i>	7.3	10.8	18.5
<i>Unemployment Rate</i>	15.0	10.0	2.4
Total Participation Rate	31.0	40.8	48.1

Source: Central Statistics Office Labour Force Surveys 1990 and 1996, Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2 Mar-May 2002.

Historical data on the labour force participation of women with children, and in particular very young children, is somewhat sparser and less regularly available. More recent data is available in the Quarterly National Household Survey. Data from the 1996 Labour Force Survey shows that 27.3% of women in family units (that is, either living with a partner and/or with at least one child) and in work had at least one child aged less than 5 years. In the period March to May 2002, this rate had increased to 29.3%. In 1996, lone mothers with a child/children aged under 5 years accounted for 5.5% of women with a child/children in this age group and had an employment rate of 22.2%. By 2002, lone mothers accounted for 16.3% of women

with at least one child aged under 5 years and had an employment rate of 41.7% (Central Statistics Office, 2002b).³

As a consequence of these changes, the traditional view of the role of women in Irish society has changed to a 'dual' one. In a family where both parents want and/or need to work, the responsibility for childcare still falls predominantly on the woman. (Fine-Davis et al, 2002) Consequently, more and more women are striving to reconcile childcare and home responsibilities with formal employment. As a result, participation in part-time or atypical forms of work represents a continuing trend amongst Irish women. For example, in 2002 almost one third (30.5%) of women in employment worked part-time, in comparison to just over 6% of men (CSO, 2002b). Part-time work among married women was substantially higher, with the share of part-time employment standing at 39.4%.

In recent years, a number of Government initiatives have been designed to address the issue of equal employment opportunities and an increasing number of large employers have become aware of the benefits of supporting family friendly policies. However, small and medium employers, who employ up to 70% of those working in the private sector, cannot afford to offer the same policies as larger organisations. As a result, although some progress is being made, much work remains to be done to ensure that parents, and in particular mothers, can successfully and positively balance family and work commitments.

1.1.5 Changing Family Size and Structure

Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe and, correspondingly, one of the lowest and most favourable age dependency ratios. Recent fertility patterns would suggest that this favourable picture will remain for a while longer and that the dependency ratio worries currently facing many European countries will not affect Ireland for some time yet. This favourable position was supported by relatively unusual (by western European standards) family formation and fertility patterns found in Ireland up to the late 1960s, as well as the small baby boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s referred to above. Fertility and marriage patterns up to the late 1960s was characterised by a relatively low incidence of marriage, but high fertility and large families. This pattern has now changed to one similar to most western nations of higher incidence of marriage and smaller families.

Traditionally, Ireland has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe. In 1960, Ireland's total fertility rate (TFR)⁴ stood at just below 4. However, the total fertility rate (TFR) declined substantially during the 1970s, '80s and '90s, but bottomed out in 1999 at 1.89. This still leaves Ireland with the highest TFR in Europe. Using information on birth orders from birth registrations, it is clear that family size also decreased significantly, if slowly, over this period.⁵ In 1960, approximately one third

³ It should be noted here that the data from the 1997 Labour Force Survey is based on Principal Economic Status (PES) while the more recent data is based on the more widely used ILO Economic Status. See National Economic and Social Council, 1999, pp. 411-412 for a fuller description of these measures.

⁴ Total fertility rate refers to the number of children women of childbearing age can be expected to have if the fertility rates for any one year are applied.

⁵ See Fahey and Russell (2001), p.11 for a discussion of the use of birth order data for determining family size.

of births were registered as the mother's fifth child or more. By 1999 this had fallen to 10.2%. In addition, fertility among women in their 30s, and particularly in the 30 – 35 years age group, has increased substantially in the 1990s, displaying a tendency towards delayed childbearing. (Fahey and Russell, 2001)

Also of interest here are recent trends in marriage, family formation and the incidence of lone parenthood. The 1980s and 1990s saw particular changes in family formation. In the 1980s a high incidence of marriage resulted in the formation of many new families. However, by the mid-1990s marriage had become less common and more women of childbearing age were reported as never married. (Fahey and Russell, 2001) This decline in the number of marriages coincided with the increase in births to unmarried, and in particular never married, parents. In 1986, just over 20% of lone parents had never been married, with just under half (47.5%) being widowed. Just 10 years later, 35% of lone parents had never been married and only one eighth (12.4%) were widowed. The remaining lone parents had been married but were separated: in 1986 these accounted for one third (32.3%) of lone parent families but by 1996, this had increased to just over half (52.7%). (Fahey and Russell, 2001)

These changes in fertility, family formation and family structure are, in part at least, reflective of changing moral attitudes towards sexual activity, family and marriage. In addition, the legalisation providing for the ready availability of contraception in the 1980s and the introduction of divorce in 1995 played their part in these changing fertility and family formation trends. With respect to the latter, it is interesting to note that the number of marriages has increased substantially in the late 1990s. Much of this increase can be attributed to the incidence of second marriages.

While all of the above factors – economic growth, rising employment, increased female labour market participation and changes in family formation and fertility patterns – are of themselves of interest, it is their interaction that is central to issues of early childhood education and care. If fertility rates had declined in a period of recession, where the increased labour market participation of women would not have been so marked, the issues facing the early childhood education and care sector in Ireland would be substantially different to those faced today.

1.2 Overview of EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

1.2.1 Children, Family and Education in the Constitution

Ireland is a sovereign, independent, parliamentary democracy with a written Constitution (Bunreacht na hEireann, Government of Ireland, 1999a). The functions and powers of government derive from the Constitution and all laws passed by government must conform to the Constitution. The Constitution, originally enacted in 1937, is open to amendment or change only through national referenda. Article 41 of the Constitution says *The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law. The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State* (Government of Ireland, 1999a, Articles 41.1. and 41.1.2). The critical importance of this Article is that it affords the family a degree of privacy and

protection that has been interpreted as superceding the rights of its individual members, including children.

The roles of the family and of the State in the education of children are addressed in Article 42 of the Constitution. Under Article 42 the State recognises that *the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children* (Article 42.1). By allowing for the education of children in their home, the Constitution does not make it compulsory for children to attend schools. While children may be educated by their parents at home, Article 42.3.2 states that the State shall act as guardian of the common good and therefore *require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social* (Article 42.3.2). However, Article 42.4 obliges the State to provide for free primary education for every child whose parents wish them to avail of it.

The importance of these articles lies not only in their legal protection of the family and the promotion of education, but also in the national culture they reflect. This involves the overriding importance of the family in Ireland and the rights of families to privacy and independence in the conduct of their family responsibilities.

The Constitution also sets out the right of the various churches to provide educational services for their congregations. Article 44, paragraph 2.5 states that *Every religious denomination shall have the right to manage its own affairs, own, acquire and administer property, movable and immovable, and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes*. The Churches, and in Ireland the Catholic Church in particular, have played and continue to play a significant role in the development and delivery of education. The majority of primary schools in Ireland are denominational and, reflecting the religious denomination of the majority of the population, are Catholic. The principal model of primary education is one of State sponsorship where the school premises are owned by the Church and managed by a board of management that is, in a great number of cases, chaired by a local priest. All primary schools have patrons and this is primarily the bishop of the relevant diocese in the case of Catholic and Church of Ireland schools.

1.2.2 Changing Perceptions of Children: The Emergence of a Rights-Based Approach

One of the principal features in relation to children and their place in society, as defined in the Constitution and Irish law, is the passive role attributed to them and the assumption that their parents or other adults will provide for and protect them. It is only in *exceptional cases* of failure in meeting parental duties that the State intervenes in the protection of children in their family environment (Article 42.5). In addition, the Constitution contains no Article on the rights of the child as a separate individual or their active participation in society (Government of Ireland, 1998). It could be argued that the traditionally large Irish family did not allow for considerable introspection on children's development by parents who, in the majority of cases, were primarily concerned with the physical well being of their children. However, increasing wealth and prosperity, decreasing family size, as well as greater exposure

to education, both formal and through mass media and Information and Communication Technologies, have undoubtedly led to an increase in more informed parenting in which the overall development of the child is considered. This issue was clearly reflected in the Report of the Commission on the Family, *Strengthening Families for Life*, which recognised the changing nature of parenting, the increased demand for parenting courses and the need for these to always hold the well being of the child as their central concern (Government of Ireland, 1998)

It is only in recent years that issues such as children's rights and participation have become important in Irish discourse and policy. The traditional dominant view of children as adults-in-waiting 'who should be seen and not heard' has been challenged through the emergence of a rights approach to children and childhood (Government of Ireland, 1998). This is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in 1990. This Convention is based on a view of children as active participants in their own lives and who have rights that are distinct from adults. The 54 Articles of the Convention cover the civil, social, economic and cultural rights and the rights to protection of children. The Convention places a significant onus on parents, families, communities and the State to ensure that these rights are promoted and protected.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Ireland in 1992. On foot of its *First National Report* (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1996), in 1998 the UN Committee on Children's Rights commented on the lack of real commitment to an integrated approach to children and the absence of effective measures to eradicate child poverty. The Committee recommended that Ireland remove all constitutional barriers to the implementation of the Convention and to put in place a range of measures to promote children's rights and implement the Convention. Following this, the Government undertook a number of measures recommended by the UN in its Concluding Observations on the State of Children's Rights in Ireland, including the development of a National Children's Strategy (see 1.2.6 below). Following this, the government established the National Children's Office (NCO) and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. These are crucial in the development among children as well as adults of the reality of the children's rights approach. What is not yet clear is to what degree this rights-based approach has translated into practice on the ground by those most closely involved with children, including parents, care givers and teachers.

1.2.3 Child Poverty in Ireland

The revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS, see 1.2.9 below) identifies children and young people as one of the most vulnerable groups in Ireland today. Child poverty has long been a concern in Ireland and in the mid-1990s Ireland had the highest rate of child poverty in the EU. In 1994, the proportion of children under the age of 14 years living in consistently poor⁶ households stood at 24%. Children living in households headed by a person who was unemployed, ill or disabled and / or in

⁶ Consistent poverty is defined as the proportion of households living on less than 60% of average disposable incomes and experiencing an enforced lack of at least one item on the following list of eight necessities: one substantial meal each day; chicken, meat or fish every second day; a 'roast' or equivalent once a week; two pairs of strong shoes; a warm coat; new rather than second hand clothes; and, being able to pay everyday household expenses without falling into arrears.

households in which there were three or more children were at a particularly high risk of poverty. (Nolan, B., 2000) Significant progress has been made on reducing child poverty since then and the most up-to-date data shows that this rate had fallen to 8% in 2000 (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000). The revised NAPS has a specific target of reducing the number of children who are consistently poor to less than 2% in the period to 2007 and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty among children. This Strategy recognises that meeting these targets will require interventions across a range of areas, including education, housing and health. (Government of Ireland, 2002b)

As with most groups, children who experience poverty and social exclusion are not homogenous. The importance of this diversity is highlighted in the National Children's Strategy which states that particular children, including children with disabilities, Traveller children, the children of refugees and other immigrants, have special needs which have to be considered. (Government of Ireland, 2002) There is, however, relatively little known about the experience of such groups of children.

There are approximately 12,000 Traveller children aged less than 10 years in Ireland. These children experience poverty and discrimination, are vulnerable to ill health and poor physical development and are subject to disadvantages in emotional and cognitive development. (Pavee Point, 2002a). In terms of education, in 1999 approximately 6,000 Traveller children attended primary schools. (Pavee Point, 2002b) The number of Traveller children transferring to second level has increased in recent years, with more than 1,000 Traveller children in second level schools. (DES, 2002a) However, while the transfer rate to second level is high at 90%, more than half of Traveller children leave school before the end of the Junior Cycle.

Although there are no precise figures available, a substantial proportion of asylum-seekers in Ireland are children and there is evidence that many face very high levels of poverty and exclusion. In a study of 43 households in receipt of direct provision⁷ most were found to be living on incomes that would place them below the 20% poverty line, with children experiencing extreme material deprivation. (Fanning, B, Veale, A. and O'Connor, D. 2001) This same study reported that many parents saw education, including pre-school education, as central in supporting their children's participation in Irish society, but identified a number of obstacles to accessing such services, including language and religion. Additional factors such as a disrupted education, trauma and stressful living conditions impeded children's educational progress.

The Framework Document that supports the Revised NAPS clearly states that children experiencing poverty and exclusion do less well educationally and have reduced life chances that may lead to a cycle of deprivation and social exclusion that may also have intergenerational consequences. (Department of Social, Community

⁷ Direct provision, introduced 2001, means that newly arrived asylum seekers ceased to be entitled to full rates of supplementary assistance, as was previously the case. Instead, adults dispersed into hotels, hostels and other reception centres around the country receive a weekly benefit of €19.50 per week, with €9.75 per week being paid in respect of each child plus child benefit. Some additional payments may be made for children aged under 3 years in exceptional cases at the discretion of community welfare officers. These typically live in hostels which make no provision for the needs of babies.

and Family Affairs, 2001). Many of the interventions identified in this report are targeted at reducing educational disadvantage, thereby increasing life chances.

1.2.4 How Early Childhood Education and Care is Understood in Ireland

From birth to 6 years is the widely accepted age bracket for use when discussing early childhood education and care. This is a relatively straightforward issue and is further assisted in Ireland by the fact that the compulsory age at which children must start primary education is 6 years. However, in determining what is meant by ‘care’ and ‘education’ is considerably less straightforward. Although perhaps not capturing all perceptions of early childhood care and education, official definitions exist. Based on extensive consultation, the Report of the Expert Working Group on Childcare defines childcare as

“...daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out-of-school hours. It includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children, parents, employers and the wider community. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naionrai [Irish language pre-schools], daycare services, crèches, play groups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded.” (Government of Ireland, 1999b)

Early education is not as rigorously defined. The reason for this can be identified from the definition of childcare above. This is the view that early childhood education cannot be separated from early childhood care as the two are inextricably linked. This perception of a continuum of care and education for young children is to be found in all of the major policy documents dealing with provision and policy for young children. The Report of the Expert Working Group on Childcare clearly articulates this view by stating: *“Care and education are inextricably linked elements in a child’s holistic development...”*. (Government of Ireland, 1999b, p.45)

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education upholds this view and goes on to state that *“Early childhood services will usually encompass both care and education, with the distinction between the two increasingly blurred as the age of the child decreases.”* (Government of Ireland, 1999c, p.3) However, the corollary of this statement also holds true and the White Paper expounds the view that education rather than care becomes increasingly important as the child matures and states that *“Care is the dominant requirement of children aged less than 3 years and, because education is a more significant need of older children, the principal, though not exclusive, policy focus of this White Paper is on children aged between 3 and 6 years”*. (Government of Ireland, 1999c, p.4) In terms of provision, this understanding of early childhood education brings formal⁸ primary school education in infant classes and specific pre-

⁸ The term ‘formal’ is used here in relation to early education in primary schools, that is, infant classes, including classes catering for children with special needs. This distinguishes it from childcare as defined by the National Childcare Strategy, which takes place in other venues.

school education provisions of the DES for disadvantaged groups into the early childhood education and care arena.

1.2.5 The Irish Education System

Until recently much Irish education provision and policy was determined on an administrative rather than legislative basis within the Constitutional framework outlined above. In the past few years, important new legislation has been introduced, in particular, the Education Act, 1998. This Act establishes a statutory basis for the operation and continuing development of Irish education at primary and post-primary level. Its very existence reflects the increasingly interventionist role of the State in education. It also reflects of a decade of consultations and policy documents including the *Education for a Changing World - Green Paper on Education* (DES, 1992), the *Report of the National Education Convention* (National Education Convention Secretariat, 1994) and *Charting Our Education Future - White Paper on Education* (DES, 1995). The Act sets out a number of key objectives that the education partners are required to take into account in implementing the various provisions of the legislation. These objectives include:

- giving practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, as they relate to education, including children with disabilities and children with other special educational needs;
- promoting equality of access to and participation in education and developing the means whereby students may benefit from education;
- promoting the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice having regard to the effective and efficient use of resources;
- promoting best practice in teaching methods with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of the skills and competences of teachers;
- promoting effective communication between schools and the wider community;
- contributing to the realisation of national education policies; and
- enhancing the transparency and accountability of the education system at local and national level.

Under the Act the Minister for Education has a statutory responsibility to determine national education policy and to ensure that, subject to available resources, there is provided to each person in the State, including a person with special needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person. The Minister is required to carry out these functions in line with the objectives outlined above.

The Department of Education and Science provides for education in primary and second-level schools and in third-level institutions. Although education provision has traditionally focused on these three levels, recent years have seen an expansion in the focus of provision to include pre-school education for children experiencing disadvantage or with special needs and further / adult education. The diagram at Annex 1 provides a brief overview of the education system in Ireland

Primary Education

Attendance at full-time education is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 16 years. Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of 6, a high proportion of children start school prior to this. Consequently, half (49.2%) of 4 year olds and virtually all (99.9%) 5 year olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools (Department of Education, forthcoming 2002). As a result, much of what is considered pre-school education in other countries (from age 4 to 6) is provided for all children in Ireland. (Government of Ireland, 1990)

State-funded primary schools include schools run by religious orders, multi-denominational schools and Gaelscoileanna (schools that teach the curriculum through the Irish language). All of these are managed by Boards of Management which are typically comprised of two nominees of the Patron, two parents of children enrolled in the school (one father and one mother), the principal teacher of the school, one teacher and two other members nominated by the Board to represent the local community (DES, 2000). The primary school cycle is 8 years long (2 years of infant classes, followed by 1st class to 6th class). There is no formal examination at the end of primary schooling and virtually all students proceed to post-primary level. In the school year 2000/2001, there were a total of 444,782 students in 3,286 primary schools in Ireland. (DES, forthcoming 2002)

Post-Primary Education

The second-level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools, all of which are substantially funded by the DES. The majority of Irish students go to secondary schools, which are privately owned and managed and often run by religious orders. Vocational schools are administered by local Vocational Education Committees (VECs) while community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions. Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two or three-year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate is taken at the end of the junior cycle. The Leaving Certificate is the terminal examination of post-primary education and takes place at the end of the senior cycle. In the school year 2000/2001, there were 349,274 students enrolled in 780 post-primary schools in Ireland. (DES, forthcoming 2002)

Third Level Education

The third level sector in Ireland comprises the university sector, the technological sector and the colleges of education that are substantially funded by the State and are autonomous and self-governing. In addition, a number of independent private colleges have developed in recent times. In 2000/2001 a total of 126,300 students were receiving full-time education at third level in Ireland. (DES, forthcoming 2002)

Further Education

The Further / Adult Education sector embraces education and training which occurs after second-level schooling but which is not part of the third level system. It includes programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate courses, second chance education for the unemployed (the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme - VTOS), and for early school leavers (in Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres), adult literacy and basic education, and self-funded night-time adult programmes in second-level schools.

The Irish Language in the Education System

Under the Constitution, the Irish language is Ireland's first official language. While those using Irish as their first language are very much a minority in Ireland today, the language plays an important role in the cultural and educational life of the nation. The Irish language is taught in all primary and second-level schools. While the numbers of students receiving their education entirely through Irish are relatively small, there is evidence of growing interest among parents in having their children educated through Irish. Ireland currently has 114 recognised Gaelscoileanna (primary schools delivering education through the medium of Irish). In the school year 2000/2001 22,923 children were attending these primary schools. This represents 5.4% of all primary pupils. Unfortunately, it is not possible to break these numbers down further to determine the numbers in infant classes without contacting each of the schools. There are 3,359 3 to 6 year olds attending 292 Naíonraí (play groups providing services through the medium of Irish).

1.2.6 The Development of Early Childhood Care and Education Policy in Ireland

The development of national policy on early childhood education and care has been much discussed in Ireland since the beginning of the 1980s. However, these issues moved to the fore in Irish policy discussions and developments from the mid-1990s. Increasingly, the value of early childhood care and education for children, and specifically for those experiencing or at risk of educational disadvantage and the participation of women in the labour force were emerging as key factors in this debate. In this context, and spurred by the beginnings of the economic growth and labour force changes outlined above, a number of fora concerned with childcare and early education came into being. It is through these fora that national policy was developed in the form of various reports, strategies and one White Paper. In addition, these policies identified necessary institutional supports and have resulted in significant changes in the institutional landscape. These policy documents and reports are drawn on substantially throughout this report and are outlined below in chronological order. In addition, key pieces of legislation in early childhood education and care are also highlighted.

In looking at the policies derived from and contained in these documents, consideration of the context in which these were formulated is important. This involves the demographic, economic and labour market circumstances outlined above, as well as the place and role of the family enshrined in the Constitution, but also the level and type of childcare and early education provision that existed at the time. In this regard, it is particularly important to note that early childhood education and care was, and many would claim still is, under-developed in Ireland, with no history of comprehensive or universal State provision other than through infant classes in the primary schooling system. Until the late 1990s, support to childcare came mainly from the Department of Health through Health Boards. The majority of this support was provided through small grants to Community-based services catering for children at risk and in need of protection that were referred by the health services. Judged against this background, the progress made in terms of policy and provision in recent years has been significant.

Much of the gap in pre-school education and childcare provision was met by extended family members and local childminders. The gap in provision was also increasingly being addressed by private and community-based, not-for-profit providers. This sector has continued to grow in response to increase female labour force participation and the reduction in informal childcare. (IPPA, the Quality Childcare Organisation, 2001) Some of these services are based on well established early educational approaches, including Montessori, Steiner, Froebel and Highscope, but all include an educational component.⁹ The contribution of these providers and their umbrella organisations – such as IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation and the Montessori schools – to developing quality services should not be overlooked. At a time when there was little State support, such providers and organisations worked to develop and increase the capacity of the sector to deliver quality services. These organisations developed and delivered training, provided advice, information and support and worked for policy change in the various fora. Without the work of such organisations, there would have been little childcare provision for policies, programmes and funding to engage with in recent years.

The importance of appropriate early childhood care and education is clearly acknowledged in the various policy documents identified below. Within these documents, the role of such provision in combating educational disadvantage and promoting social inclusion is emphasised. Many of the commitments given in, or made in respect of the recommendations included in these documents, are reinforced in the current Programme for Government (2002a) and implemented through the various institutional structures and programmes identified in this report. The focus within these policies and programmes is clearly on the needs of the most vulnerable children, especially those with special education needs due to disabilities or those coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

The National Agreements: *Partnership 2000* and *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*

Since the mid-1980s Ireland has operated a number of three-year national partnership agreements that provide an agreed framework for economic and social policy. These are based on agreement between the social partners – the Government, the Trade Unions, Employer's Organisations, Farming Organisations and Social and Community Organisations. The nature of social partnership in Ireland has a number of unique features, not least of which is the recognition and inclusion of the community and voluntary sector as a full partner since the mid-1990s. Since their inclusion, the national partnership agreements have contained more detailed social chapters. These have set down the policy parameters and committed the government to a range of measures. These have included education, including early education, and childcare. Indeed, the Expert Working Group on Childcare and the National Childcare Strategy arose from the national agreement *Partnership 2000* (Government of Ireland, 1997), which ran from 1997 to the end of 1999.

The current national agreement, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) (Government of Ireland, 1999d) sees lifelong learning as the key to a future of sustained economic growth and social development at a time of ongoing change. In

⁹ It is worth noting here that childcare services in Ireland are zero VAT rated on the basis that they services they provide are educational.

this regard, one of the main objectives is to provide a continuum of education provision from early childhood to adult targeted at tackling educational disadvantage and promoting equality of opportunity and participation. In relation to Early Childhood Education, the Programme proposes extensive actions ranging from the implementation of the recommendations in the White Paper 'Ready to Learn' to early literacy strategies and a wide range of strategies to prevent early school leaving. To date, significant progress has been made in relation to many of the actions proposed. These include the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), the enhancement of the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme, the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the establishment of a National Educational Welfare Service and a statutory Education Disadvantage Committee, and the implementation of an integrated plan to tackle educational disadvantage. These are returned to in sections 1.2.6 and 1.2.7 below.

The National Childcare Strategy

The national agreement of 1997, *Partnership 2000* (Government of Ireland, 1997) included provision for the establishment of an Expert Working Group on Childcare, convened by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This Expert Working Group comprised over 100 individuals and received over 100 submissions in response to advertisements in the national press. The Expert Working Group worked in two Framework Resource Groups, one of which addressed the needs and rights of children, with the other deliberating on equality of access and participation. 6 Framework Development Groups were also established, one of which addressed each of the following issues:

- maximising the job potential and financial implications of childcare;
- registration, training and qualifications;
- regulations and standards;
- early education;
- resourcing and sustaining childcare in disadvantaged urban areas; and
- resourcing and sustaining childcare in rural areas.

The outcome of the deliberations of these groups was the National Childcare Strategy, which was launched in 1999 (Government of Ireland, 1999b). This comprises discussions of the salient issues and 27 recommendations relating to notification and registration, staffing and employment procedures, training and pay, supporting and stimulating both the supply of and demand for childcare, and the structures and procedures necessary to implement and support the overall strategy. These structures will be returned to later (see 1.2.8 below).

The fact that this Expert Working Group had such a wide membership serves as an indication of the importance that the question of childcare had come to assume in Ireland. The National Childcare Strategy is important not least in that it represents the first concerted attempt to develop a coherent and comprehensive government policy that specifically addressed childcare. Nonetheless, one particular caveat should be noted here. The terms of reference of the Expert Working Group was to consider the needs of children whose parent/s were either at work or attempting to access work through training and/or education. Provision under the National Childcare Strategy is inextricably linked to labour market participation. Therefore, while the National

Childcare Strategy states that the needs and rights of children should be a primary consideration, this has to be interpreted as the needs and rights of children whose parent/s are active in the labour market. The needs of children being cared for by a parent who is not active in the labour market were considered to be substantively different and therefore seen as requiring different policies. However, the National Childcare Strategy states that “...*improving the quality and quantity of childcare will also have a positive on parents who choose to care for their child at home since 16% of children with parents who work full-time in the home avail of paid childcare.* (Government of Ireland, 1999b, p.xxv)

The National Development Plan, 2000-2006

The majority of funding for the development of childcare in Ireland is channelled through the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (Government of Ireland, 1999e). This has 5 Operational Programmes, one of which is the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP). This addresses the labour market and human capital needs of the Irish economy for the period 2000 to 2006. The EHRDOP has 48 measures and sub-measures, of which Early Education is Measure 4. Early interventions are encouraged to improve long-term education participation, to identify and address literacy and numeracy difficulties at an early stage and to prevent subsequent problems giving rise to long-term unemployment, social problems, etc. The Plan aims to target funding at key groups and to provide funding on a devolved basis integrated within area-based interventions in the case of areas with significant concentrations of educational disadvantage.

The NDP has 2 Regional Operation Programmes: (1) the Border, Midlands and West (BMW) Operational Programme and (2) the Southern and Eastern (S&E) Operational Programme. Both of these include 4 priorities, one of which is the Social Inclusion and Childcare Priority. Here, the primary objectives of childcare are seen as overcoming social disadvantage and promoting equality by improving access to education, training and work and reconciling work and family life. For instance, in relation to the EOCP the Regional Operational Programme for the Border, Midlands and Western Region states that

The Childcare Measure, which is being promoted as the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 to 2006, has both an equal opportunities and a social inclusion focus in that it addresses the needs of men and women generally in reconciling their childcare needs with their participation in the labour force while, at the same time, facilitating access for parents, in particular disadvantaged women, to education, training and employment. The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme will also cater for the needs of disadvantaged children by initiating play and development opportunities for them. (BWM Regional Assembly, 2000)

While exclusion from the labour market is seen to impact most severely on disadvantaged women and single parent families, the majority of which are headed by lone mothers. However, the interests of men too are to be served as the childcare measures “...*will address the needs of men and women generally in reconciling their childcare needs with their participation in the labour force*” (Government of Ireland, 1999e, p192).

The Social Inclusion and Childcare Priority includes one measure that provides European Structural Funds for capital grants to childcare providers and 2 sub-measures that support staffing and quality improvement grants to childcare providers. These provisions are managed and distributed under what is known as the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme.

The EOCP 2000-2006 is one of the most important development in the support and development of childcare in Ireland and is the primary source of funding available to existing childcare providers as well as those seeking to develop new childcare facilities. The details of funding the programme are provided in section 2.5.3 below.

The primary aims of this programme are improving access to education, training and employment and improving equality between men and women in the labour market. This is to be supported through the achievement of three objectives: to enhance the quality of childcare, to increase the number of childcare facilities and childcare places, and to introduce a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services. While developing services and infrastructure that will help meet the needs of a diverse range of parents, particularly those trying to reconcile work and family life, the EOCP seeks to ensure that the needs of the child are paramount. The NDP allocated €317.4 million to the DJELR for childcare measures. This money has been augmented by an anti-inflationary package agreed with the social partners and the transfer of childcare schemes and their associated funding from other Government Departments to the DJELR. The total funding available to the Department is now €436.7 million for investment in childcare over the period 2000-2006.

The EOCP 2000-2006 is based on the experience of a previous EOCP funded with monies made available following the Mid-Term of the 1994-1999 round of Structural Funds. This earlier programme was much smaller, with expenditure of just €14.6 million, and provided funding for childcare infrastructure projects, a national employer childcare stimulation scheme and core funding for community-based childcare projects (ESF Programme Evaluation Unit, 1999).

A number of structures support the implementation of this programme and the development of the childcare sector more generally. These include the Childcare Directorate of the DJELR, the Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Childcare Group, the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee and the County/City Childcare Committees. These are returned to in section 1.2.7 below. In addition, ADM provides technical assistance to the EOCP. This involves overseeing the day-to-day implementation and financial management of the programme and appraising applications and making recommendations on foot of these to an appraisals committee. In addition to the DJELR, the NCCC is comprised of representatives of ADM, two Regional Assemblies, the DES, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Health and Children, ICTU, IBEC, the Community Pillar, the Farming Pillar, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, the National Women's Council of Ireland, County/City Childcare Committees, Chambers of Commerce, a number of State agencies and community organisations.

The EOCP provides a range of grants and financial supports to existing and new providers of centre-based childcare facilities and organisations involved in childcare.

In line with the Measure and Sub-Measures under which the programme is funded these are:

- Capital grants for community/not-for-profit organisations and self-employed and private childcare providers towards the cost of building, renovation, upgrading or equipping childcare facilities;
- Staffing grants for community/not-for-profit organisations or a not-for-profit consortium of community organisations and private providers towards the cost of staff for community-based provision in disadvantaged areas;
- Improving quality through (i) the provision of finance to support National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (seven organisations are currently being supported to implement a range of measures aimed at up-skilling their members and creating a greater and better informed awareness of quality in relation to childcare), (ii) developing local childcare networks through the County/City Childcare Committees (see 1.2.7 below), (iii) funding innovative projects with the capacity to be replicated, and (iv) the development of a range of supports for childminders, also through the County/City Childcare Committees.

At the end of August 2002, 1,533 applications for funding under the capital and staffing grants had been approved. These will support the creation of 18,206 new childcare places and support 17,710 existing places.

The Social Inclusion and Childcare Priority also includes the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. Under this, Local Area-Based Partnerships (which have been in existence in disadvantaged areas in Ireland since the early 1990s) and a number of community groups are funded to provide services to the unemployed, develop and deliver community-based youth initiatives and support community development. Within this, a number of Area-Based Partnerships and community groups have supported innovative early education and childcare projects.

The Commission on the Family

The Commission on the Family came into being in 1995 and produced an extensive report, *Strengthening Families for Life* three years later (Government of Ireland, 1998). The Commission comprised 14 experts in the areas of social policy, family law, mediation, marriage and relationship counselling, medicine and psychology, and economic, taxation and income support. Their report was based on the deliberations of these experts, commissioned research and over 500 submissions.

The issue of childcare outside the home, while not central to the report, was addressed by the Commission predominantly from the perspective of supporting families to meet their child rearing responsibilities. The Commission made a number of recommendations in this respect that can be summarised as follows:

- A greater role for the State in supporting the care of pre-school children through direct payments that may or may not be used to pay for external care;
- The introduction of an Early Years Opportunities Subsidy that would be paid in respect of children attending registered childcare facilities;
- The establishment of a national co-ordinating body of childcare provision;

- The further development under the auspices of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs of a specific out-of-school hours services;
- The promotion of the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (Amendment) Regulations, 1997; and
- The development of measures to support childminders and promote the adoption by them of standards of good practice.

Several of these measures coincide with those in other policy documents and most specifically the National Childcare Strategy. As such, a number of these measures have been progressed and are detailed in sections 1.2.6 and 1.2.7 below.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education

In 1998, a National Forum on Early Childhood Education took place from 23-27th March. This Forum was a first step in meeting the commitment given under the programme for Government, *An Action Plan for the Millennium* (Government of Ireland, 1997) to prioritise early childhood education and care and provide specific funding for pre-school education. During this week, thirty-two agencies involved in early childhood education and care made oral presentations to the Forum Secretariat, which was comprised of nine experts. Following this week of presentations and discussion, the Secretariat produced the *Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education* (The National Forum Secretariat, 1998). This is one of the most comprehensive documents ever produced on early education in Ireland. On foot of this report, the Department of Education and Science produced a White Paper entitled *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Childhood Education* in 1999. The overall objective of the White Paper is to

Support the development and educational achievement of children through high quality early education, with particular focus on the target groups of the disadvantaged and those with special needs. (Government of Ireland, 1999c, page 14)

The White Paper examines existing early years provision and, having identified the gaps in this, goes on to propose changes under the headings of improving quality early education in primary schools, meeting the needs of children with special needs, meeting the needs of disadvantaged children, enhancing the involvement of parents, inspection and evaluation, and the establishment of new structures. The National Development Plan allocated €93.98 million (£74 million) to the implementation of the White Paper's recommendations. Of central importance to the present report, this White Paper will be drawn on in many of the following sections.

One of the first steps taken to implement the proposals of the White Paper on early education has been to put in place a centre to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education provision. The *Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)* was established under the joint management of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and the Dublin Institute of Technology. The major objectives of this project are

- to develop a quality framework for all aspects of early education, including the development of a Quality in Education Mark for providers,

- to develop targeted pilot interventions for children up to 6 years of age from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs;
- to prepare the ground for the establishment of a Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged in the White Paper.

In line with these objectives the functions of the CEDCE are

- to develop early education quality standards in relation to all aspects of early education including equipment and materials, staffing, training, qualifications, methodologies and curriculum,
- to develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards,
- to co-ordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, focusing specifically on provision for children with special needs or at risk of educational disadvantage , and
- to undertake and/or commission research to identify and develop best practice in curriculum, teaching methodologies and parent involvement.

A number of crosscutting themes will underpin the work of the CEDCE. These include consultation and networking with the actors involved in the various aspects of early education, bringing international and North/South dimensions to the work of the Centre, the forging of close links with other State bodies with a role in early education and development, consideration of the issues of diversity and equality generally but more specifically when addressing the circumstances and needs of children experiencing disadvantage and those with special needs and the involvement and empowerment of parents in the education of their children. In addition to the management committee made up of representatives of St. Patrick's College and Dublin Institute of Technology, the CEDCE also reports to a Steering Committee, which includes a representative of the DES (which acts as chairperson) and an external expert. Although in its early stages of development, the CEDCE is responsible for the implementation of much of the work outlined in the White Paper on Early Education.

The National Children's Strategy

Based on extensive consultation with various government departments and agencies, experts in a range of child related disciplines, teachers, parents, children and those involved in the provision of services and supports to families and children, the National Children's Strategy came into being in November 2000. This Strategy takes its perspective from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and promotes an approach to children based on this. The vision for children presented in the Strategy is based on the following values:

- Children have an innate dignity as human beings deserving respect;
- Children enrich the quality of all our lives;
- Children are especially vulnerable and need adult protection;
- Children thrive through the love and support of a family life;
- Children should be supported to explore, enjoy and develop their various talents;

- Children need help to learn responsibility as they grow towards adulthood and full citizenship.

The National Children's Strategy has three national goals. These are (i) that children will have a voice, (ii) that children's lives will be better understood and (iii) that children will receive quality supports and services. The operational principles of the Children's Strategy reflect many of those espoused in the National Childcare Strategy. These include the principle that all actions in respect of children should be child-centred, family-oriented, equitable, inclusive, action-oriented and integrated. The Strategy presents an understanding of the children's lives from the 'whole child' perspective, which recognises

- the extent of children's own capacities and abilities and their active participation in life;
- the mix of formal and informal support that children rely on, most importantly family and including childcare and education and
- the nine dimensions of childhood development that must be addressed if children are to enjoy their childhood and make a successful transition to adulthood.

The National Children's Strategy is a wide-ranging policy document that presents a number of objectives that reflect the complexity of the issues it is addressing. Of particular concern to those interested or involved in early education and care is Objective A, which states that "Children's early education and development needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures" (page 50). In respect of this objective, the Strategy identifies placing children's needs at the heart of childcare as one of the key challenges. Objective B of the Strategy is also of direct concern as it relates to the need for a range of educational opportunities that reflect and meet the diversity of needs of children and, as part of meeting this objective, the need for after-school and out-of-school care services.

In relation to early education and care, it is noteworthy that under the goal of giving children a voice in all matters that affect them, in the consultation process undertaken to inform that Strategy some eighty children of approximately 3-4 years gave their assessment of the childcare facility they attended. Their comments reflect the intrinsic value that children themselves place on their playschool experience in terms of play, socialising and learning. Listening to children is seen by the NCO as a critical element of securing quality services, including childcare and one that they are actively promoting in their activities.

While only a small number of the Strategy's objectives are of direct relevance to early education and care, the Strategy proposes a view of children, their rights and their needs that will inform all child related services.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy was first launched by the Government in 1997. This originally had five key themes: income adequacy, unemployment, educational disadvantage, rural disadvantage and urban deprivation. One of the key features of the NAPS is that it set key targets in a number of these areas, as well as an overall target for poverty reduction. The NAPS was reviewed in 2001 and the revised NAPS, *Building an Inclusive Society* (Government of Ireland, 2002b), included two

additional key themes – Health and Housing and Accommodation – as well as specific consideration of particularly vulnerable groups including children and young people, women, older people, Travellers, people with disabilities, and migrants and members of ethnic minority groups. In this revised NAPS a number of commitments are given to combating educational disadvantage by addressing literacy and early school leaving. In the framework document supporting the NAPS (DSCFA, 2001), more explicit measures for the attainment of the NAPS targets are set out. These include an expansion of early education pre-school services, focusing particularly on the disadvantaged areas selected under specific government programmes; making the Early Childhood Education Centre operational by mid 2002; and the incremental build up of pre-school services for children with special needs. Additional measures are funded by the DJELR under the EOCP.

The Programme for Government

The current Programme for Government (2002a) was agreed between the coalition parties (Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats) earlier this year. This contains a considerable number of commitments in the areas of childcare and education. Many of these arise under existing agreements and policies including the national agreement and the NDP. With regard to childcare commitments are made to the implementation of existing provisions, such as the county childcare strategies and the EOCP, as well as to the introduction of some new measures including a special working visa scheme for child minders. A general commitment is given to *improving the level and quality of participation and achievement at every level of education*, with specific commitments being made in relation to *introduce a national early-education, training, support and certification system and expand state-funded early-education places* (p.24). In addition, the Programme for Government prioritises a new national system of funded early-education for particularly vulnerable children, that is, those with intellectual disabilities and children in areas of concentrated disadvantage. Other commitment in relation to the education system more generally, such as continued reductions in the pupil:teacher ratio and the progressive introduction of average size of classes of 20:1 for children under 9

1.2.7 Types and Coverage of Early Childhood Education and Care Provision

Accepting that early childhood spans from birth to 6 years of age, there is a wide variety of services. One way of looking at these is to separate them into provision funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) on the one hand, and early education and childcare provision funded by other sources on the other. This coincides with the widely accepted definition of childcare included in the National Childcare Strategy. However, it is important to remember that care and educational components are incorporated in both early education and childcare services, and that both recognise the need for a continuum of care and education that encourages easy transitions for children between early childcare and early education provision. Table 3 below gives a brief overview of the types and amounts of early education and childcare services in Ireland. More detail on these follows.

Table 3**Main Types of Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Ireland, Facilities and Participants**

	No. of Facilities	No of Participants
DES Funded Early Childhood Education and Care Provision, 2001		
Early Start	40	1,617
Pre-Schools for Traveller Children	48	512
Primary Schools (children aged up to 6 years)	3,161	126,558
Special Schools (children aged up to 6 years)	125	584
Early Childhood Care and Education Funded from Other Sources, 1999 - 2000		
Centre-based Provision - Full-Time Places	2,029	17,285
Centre-based Childcare Provision – Sessional Places	578	39,518
Naonrai	292	3,359
Parent and Toddler Groups (estimated)	230	not available
Childminders (estimated)	37,900	75,800

Sources: DES, forthcoming 2002, ADM, forthcoming 2002, and Government of Ireland, 1999b.

DES Funded Early Childhood Education and Care

Early education provided or funded by the DES includes children attending schools exclusively for children with special needs and specific pre-school programmes aimed at children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It includes the following types of provision:

Infant Classes in Primary Schools: These are the first two years of primary school education and are divided into junior (first year) and senior (second year) infants. Typically, these classes are comprised of 4, 5 and 6 year olds. As indicated above, half of 4 year olds and almost all 5 years olds are in infant classes in primary schools.¹⁰ Infant classes are undoubtedly providing for both the education and care needs of this age group. In January 2001 there were 102,820 children aged 3 to 6 years in ordinary infant classes. This category also includes special classes that cater for children with special learning needs that are attached to ordinary primary schools and children in infant classes in special schools. In January 2001 there were 2,335

¹⁰ The figures for the number of 4 year olds and 5 year olds in schools are collected in January each year. Many children start school at 4 years of age and then turn 5 before the figures are collected in January (i.e. between September and January) so they are counted as 5 year olds. For this reason, the number of 4 year olds in schools and their participation rate is underestimated.

children in special infant classes attached to primary schools and 584 attending the infant classes in special schools (DES, forthcoming 2002). It is the policy of the DES to integrate children with special needs into ordinary primary classes whenever possible. Unfortunately, the number of children with special learning needs in such classes is not currently available. Table 4 below contains further details on pupils aged up to 6 years who attend primary school.

Table 4
Number of pupils aged 0 – 6 Year in Early Start and Primary Schools by Class Type, 2000/2001

Age on 1st Jan. 2001	National Schools							Pupils in Private Primary Schools	Total
	Pupils in Ordinary Classes					Pupils with Special Needs in Ordinary N.S.	Pupils in Special Schools		
	Early Start	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1 st Class	2 nd Class				
3 or under		170	-	-	-	11	59	259	499
4	1,617	24,406	288	-	-	415	91	409	25,609
5		27,341	22,358	296	-	747	181	497	51,420
6		707	27,550	21,030	330	909	253	539	51,318

Note: Private Primary Schools exclude schools/centres not enrolling children aged 6 or over.
Source: DES, forthcoming 2002.

Early Start Programme: this is a programme aimed at pre-school children aged 3 to 4 years in a number of disadvantaged areas. Some 1,617 pre-school aged children were attending Early Start programmes operating in primary schools. A more detailed description of Early Start is included below.

Pre-Schools for Traveller Children: in 2001, the DES grant aided 48 Pre-Schools for Traveller Children. The schools cater can cater for up to 624 children and aim to provide Traveller children with the opportunity to participate in a secure, stimulating and developmentally appropriate environment.

Although parents have the right to educate their children at home, the vast majority of children start their formal education in the infant classes of State supported primary schools. Statistics on their participation in the formal education system are readily available, predominantly through the DES Annual Statistical Reports. However, a number of gaps exist in this data, some of which have already been alluded to. For example, there are no figures available on the number of children with special needs integrated in ordinary infant classes, no comprehensive data on the number of refugee and asylum-seeking children in such classes and no easily accessible data on infants in Gaelscoileanna.

Early Childhood Education and Care Funded from Other Sources

A wide range of early childhood education and care is funded from sources other than the DES. Funding is obtained from a number of sources including fees paid by parents, support received from the Health Boards and grants secured under the EOCP. The most prominent forms of provision in Ireland include the following.

Play Groups and Pre-schools: these usually provide sessional services (that is, less than three-and-a-half hours per child per day) and children normally attend in the morning or afternoon. Typically these services cater for children aged from 3 to 4 or 5 years and combine education and care through structured play. The majority of Play Groups and Pre-schools are privately owned, with the remainder being community-based. Many are voluntary members of the IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation (formerly the Irish Pre-school Play-Group Association), which provides training and support to its members. Currently, IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation has approximately 1,900 members catering for approximately 35,000 children. The majority of these children under school-going age, some after-school places are also being provided.

Nurseries and Crèches: these typically provide full day services and many cater for children from two to three months up to school-going age. Many provide a structured educational element for children aged 3 to 5 years. These are either privately owned and operated or community-based and run. A small number of drop-in crèches operate in shopping centres, leisure centres etc. where irregular and very short-term care is provided. In addition, a small number of workplace crèches are provided by employers, the majority of which are located in the public or civil service. Many crèches and nurseries are affiliated to the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA). The main aim of this organisation is to promote high quality childcare through the development and dissemination of information to its members. The NCNA also employs a full-time training co-ordinator and provides an advisory service and other resources to its members.

Montessori Schools: there are approximately 500 Montessori schools in Ireland catering for children aged three to 6 years. These are privately owned and managed. Training is provided by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Teacher Association and St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland.

Naionraí: these are Irish language pre-schools catering for children aged 3 to 6 years. They are financially supported by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Describing their approach as one of early immersion, there are currently 292 Naionraí in Ireland, 72 of which are located in Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) areas and 220 outside of these areas. This has grown from 26 such playgroups in 1978. In total, 3,359 children are attending Naionraí. These are also privately owned. The umbrella organisation for these Irish-speaking pre-schools is An Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta Teo, founded in 1978. This provides training modules on early education and sociological theories for those working in Naionraí as well as providing intensive and in-service courses in Irish and a course in Childcare. In addition, professional counselling support is provided to the Directors of Naionraí.

Parent and Toddler Groups: these offer opportunities for play for children and social interaction and informal support to parents. Typically catering for children from birth to 3 years and attached to other childcare services such as pre-schools or crèches, there were an estimated 230 parent and toddler groups in Ireland in 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1999b).

After-school and Out-of-School Care: this refers to care provided for school-going children outside of school hours, including after-school hours and during school holidays. Some of the providers of other childcare services also offer after-school and/or out-of-school services. However, evidence suggests that this is minimal and after-school and out-of-school provision remains one of the most under-developed and unregulated aspects of childcare for children of all ages in Ireland.

Until recently, relatively little was known about childcare provision and usage in Ireland. A number of studies in recent years have thrown considerable light on these areas. A survey of childcare arrangements was undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) for the Commission on the Family. This survey revealed that 38% of all parents with children aged 4 years and under availed of some form of paid childcare. However, this was heavily influenced by the employment status of the mother with just 16% of children with mothers working full-time in the home availing of paid childcare. This is in contrast to 58% of children whose mother was in full-time employment (Government of Ireland, 1999b). Overall, this survey found that the most commonly used forms of childcare were formal and paid provision in crèches, nurseries, pre-schools etc. with 21% of mothers with children aged less than five years using such services. Paid childminders who took care of children in their own (minder's) home is the second most commonly used form of childcare, with 14% of all mothers with children aged 4 years or under availing of such services. However, over one-fifth (22%) of mothers with full-time jobs and 47% of those with part-time jobs used no paid childcare at all, indicating a reliance on informal provision provided either by partners, family, friends or neighbours. This survey also highlighted that many parents relied on a combination of formal and informal childcare arrangements.

In 1998 the DJELR published the results of a study undertaken by Goodbody Economic Consultants on the economics of childcare in Ireland (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1998). This report examined the supply of and demand for childcare in Ireland, the economic role such services played in terms of child development and labour market participation and proposed a number of measures to support the demand and supply of services. This study and the ESRI survey outlined above were key in forming the National Childcare Strategy.

In 1999 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), recognising that the lack of information on the number and type of childcare facilities represented a serious data deficit, provided funding for a Childcare Census at county level, in line with developments in the reform of local government and the establishment of County Development Boards and County/City Childcare Committees. This Census was carried out by Area Development Management Ltd (ADM). Drawing on all available lists of childcare services in each area, information was collected from a total of 2,607 centre-based childcare facilities. The National Census Report is currently being drawn up by the Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) on behalf of

ADM and will be available towards the end of 2002. Advance figures have been supplied for this report and the types of services offered by these providers are shown in Table 5 below.¹¹

Table 5
Centre-based Childcare in Ireland 1999 - 2000

	Sessional Service Offered		Full Day Service Offered	
	Number	%	Number	%
Drop-in Crèche	124	5.2	68	6.0%
Playgroup/Pre-school	1,276	53.8	252	22.4%
Montessori School	402	16.9	229	20.4%
Naionra	159	6.7	3	0.3%
Workplace Crèche	22	0.9	40	3.6%
Afterschool Group	97	4.1	-	-
Crèche / DayCare	-	-	414	36.8%
Homework Club	43	1.8	-	-
Parent & Toddler	136	5.7	-	-
Other Service	113	4.8	118	10.5%
Total Services	2,372	100	1,124	100
Total Facilities	2,029		578	
<i>Estimated Number of Childminders</i>	37,900 ¹			

Note: The total number of services offered is higher than the total number of facilities as a number of facilities offer more than one type of service.

1. This figure is taken from Government of Ireland , 1999b.

Source: ADM, forthcoming 2002 *The National Summary of the County Childcare Census 1999/2000*.

Sessional services refer to services that typically last for 3.5 hours or less. What is clear from these figures is the prominence of such sessional services, most typically in the form of play schools, pre-schools and Montessori schools. While these types of provision are also central in the provision of full-day care, crèches and day care centres arise as the most common form of provision.

The Census of Childcare yields much information and represents a significant advance in terms of our knowledge of childcare services in Ireland. However, one of its limitations is that it tells us nothing about one of the most commonly used forms of early childcare in Ireland, that is, formal and, more prevalent, informal childminding. The predominance of informal childminding in the form of regular or irregular paid or unpaid childminding in either the child's or the minder's home is a particular feature of early childhood education and care in Ireland.

Childminders: childminders provide care for children predominantly in their own [minder's] home, although a small number care for children in the child's home.

¹¹ The author would like to thank ADM and the Centre for Social and Educational Research in Dublin Institute of Technology for providing these advance figures.

Childminding is usually a year round service and is arranged on a basis to suit both the parent's and the childminder's needs. Therefore childminders may provide full-day and after-school care. While some childminders have notified their local Health Boards of their services, much of this activity is conducted in the informal or black economy. Indeed, only childminders caring for more than three children are required to notify the Health Boards (for more details on exclusion to the Regulations see section 2.1 below). As such, there is little information about childminders in Ireland. However, recent estimates place the number of childminders at close to 40,000. (Government of Ireland, 1999b)

The survey of childcare arrangements undertaken for the Commission on the Family (Government of Ireland, 1998) referred to above reveals that childminders are the second most commonly used form of childcare. In a recent study of the members of 6 of Ireland's main trade unions, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) found that 86.3% of members with children aged 14 years or less relied on some form of childminding arrangement (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2002). The main childminding arrangements used were

- informally paid [black economy] friend, neighbour or relative minding the child in their own [minder's] home (24.4% of members),
- formally paid childminder in the minders home (17.5%), and
- unpaid family member or partner in the child's home (12%).

This reveals the heavy reliance by working parents on childminding as a form of care. In addition, this survey illustrates the manner in which childcare arrangements change on entry to the formal school system. Fourteen per cent of all children aged up to 4 years were cared for in centre-based childcare facilities. However, this proportion falls to less than 4% for children aged five years and over, when childcare requirements change from full-time to out-of-school hours.

The prevalence of a large number of childminders operating in the informal or black economy raises a number of concerns. Many of these are believed to be untrained (a belief borne out by the high number of children's relatives filling this role) and are isolated by their informal status from the networks of registered childminders. Informal childminding arrangements are precarious for the minders who have no social protection as they are unregistered for taxation and social security and have no employment rights or protection under the law, and for parents with whom no formal contract is made. Consequently, care arrangements may come to an abrupt and sudden end at the discretion of either the minder or the parents. A recent Childminding Initiative being implemented by the Health Boards aims to address some of these issues (see section 1.2.8, Department of Health and Children below).

1.2.8 Provision for Children in Disadvantaged Areas

It is widely accepted that many children from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds experience educational disadvantage in the school system and the repercussions of this throughout their lives. In order to redress this imbalance, a number of specific early childhood measures have been put in place in recent years. Most of these come under the remit of the DES, whose pre-school responsibility is specific to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special learning needs. Many

childcare facilities in disadvantaged area are receiving support through the various measures of the EOCP, while others are receiving support from the Health Boards.

Pre-school Provision

Provision in Community-based Pre-school Facilities

The Childcare Census gives a baseline indication of the number of community-based childcare facilities with there being 1,096 counted in this survey in 1999/2000. Other available figures relate to the involvement of the regional Health Boards in funding pre-school provision for children considered to be at risk of abuse or neglect due to problems and stresses arising in their family. Health Boards provide financial supports to certain pre-school services that cater for children who are regarded as being at-risk or disadvantaged. This function is in keeping with the Boards' overall responsibilities under the Child Care Act, 1991 in regard to the promotion of the welfare of children and the provision of family support services. Funding of approximately €4.9m (£3.9m) (capital and revenue) was provided by the Health Boards towards these services in 1999, supporting roughly 7,000 places in approximately 600 facilities. An additional €2.2m (£1.75m) was provided to the Health Boards for this purpose in 2000. In line with their function regarding the regulation of childcare services (see 2.1.1 below), it is possible to collate the number of notifications of community-based facilities to each individual Health Board and the number of places they offer.

Since 2000, the EOCP has supported childcare in disadvantaged areas, although the Programme is not exclusively concerned with provision in such areas. Staffing grants to community and not-for-profit organisations are only available to services operating in disadvantaged communities, while capital grants to for community-based projects prioritise those servicing disadvantaged areas (but do not exclude services outside such areas). Grants made to self-employed/private providers and those made in respect of quality measures are available to all providers irrespective of their location or client group. Although some recipients of these grants serve disadvantaged communities, it is not possible to say how many. As this programme is the main source of state funding directed to such facilities, an accurate account of this can now be achieved. Table 6 below shows expenditure under each grant type of the EOCP from its inception in mid-2000 up to August 2002. In this period, 339 capital grants were made to community/not-for-profit organisations, accounting for expenditure of almost €43 million or 28% of total expenditure. In addition, 604 staffing grants, accounting for expenditure of €70.3 million or 46% of total expenditure, were also approved. It is estimated that the funding approved under the EOCP between mid-2000 and the end of August 2002 will provide support for an additional 6,889 full-time and 11,317 part-time childcare places as well as an additional 1,781 full-time and 978 part-time staff. A more detailed breakdown of applications and expenditure under this programme is provided in Annex 3.

Table 6**Grant Applications and Expenditure Approved by Sub-Measure of the EOCP,
2000 - 31st August 2002**

	No. of Grants Approved	Expenditure Approved €
Staffing Grants to Community-Based Providers	604	70,343,271
Capital Grants to Community-Based Providers	339	42,852,844
Capital Grants to Self-Employed / Private Providers	453	17,128,248
Grants in Respect of Quality Improvement Measures	137	22,600,190
Total	1,533	152,924,553

Source ADM, unpublished Monitoring and Impact Statistics

Rutland Street Project

The Rutland Street Pre-School Project began in 1969 as an early education for children living in disadvantaged areas of central Dublin involving Rutland Street Junior National School and Pre-School. It took the form of a special education programme for children between the ages of 3 and 8, with the main focus being on the pre-school level (3-5 years of age). It includes a pre-school centre, a special staff teaching allocation, childcare workers, secretary, cooks and cleaners, together with the provision of school meals. Originally financed jointly by the DES and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation of Holland, since 1974 the DES is the sole funder of the project. The Rutland Street Project is now well established and generally well regarded as a positive intervention in meeting the needs of the participating children. This is backed up by evaluations of the Project (see Kellaghan, T. 1977, Kellaghan, T. & Greaney, B. J., 1992). In 2001, the Project employed 6 teachers, 10 non-teaching staff and had 91 children enrolled.

Early Start

The DES introduced the Early Start Programme on a pilot basis in 1994. Its overall aim is to expose children aged 3 and 4 years from disadvantaged areas to a positive pre-school environment to improve their overall development and long-term educational experience and performance. Initially, 8 schools in disadvantaged areas in Cork, Limerick and Dublin were selected and Early Start units were established in vacant classrooms in primary schools. Since 1995, the programme has been expanded and now includes 40 centres, including 16 full and 24 half units. A full unit has two classes of 15 children each morning between 9.00 a.m. and 11.30 a.m., and two classes again in the afternoon from 12 noon to 2.30 p.m.

The educational ethos underlying Early Start is based on a combination of care and education. The programme is informed by the Rutland Street Project and the curricular guidelines for Early Start drew heavily on this earlier intervention (see 2.3.2 below). Early Start aims to provide a programme of structured play that will develop the language, cognitive, personal and social development of the child. This is

achieved through intensive, high quality interaction with staff. Each full unit is staffed by two qualified primary school teachers and two trained childcare workers. Therefore, a child to adult ratio of 15:2 applies, with 56 teachers and 56 childcare workers currently employed nationally. Parents may also be involved on a voluntary basis and the programme seeks to devise strategies that actively engage parents in their child's education and development.

Concerns about the displacement of pre-existing local community-based provision and the appropriateness of using primary school teachers in the pre-school setting were raised in relation to Early Start. However, the conclusions of the evaluation of the first three years of Early Start were mixed (Educational Research Centre, 1998). According to this evaluation, positive outcomes include the integration of Early Start into the participating schools and parental satisfaction with and involvement in the programme. However, standardised tests showed no marked increase in the cognitive or scholastic development. This runs contrary to the evaluation of infant teachers who reported that Early Start participants were more developed than non-Early Start children in terms of their cognitive and language skills and their readiness for participation in a classroom setting.

Pre-Schools for Traveller Children

Forty-eight Pre-Schools for Traveller Children are grant-aided by the DES. Their objectives include the provision of educational experiences through play and active learning, to develop the children's cognitive, language and social skills, to prepare children for entry to primary school and to provide a foundation for further learning. These are usually established by voluntary bodies or Traveller support groups with the DES providing 98% of teaching and transport costs plus an annual grant for equipment and materials. Although part funded by the DES, these pre-schools are not considered to be part of the primary school system (unlike Early Start). They are rarely staffed by fully-trained primary teachers and do not come under the auspices of a primary school Board of Management, but they avail of a Visiting Teacher scheme whereby a trained teacher visits the pre-school and then the parents, usually the mother, of each child. An evaluation of the Pre-Schools for Traveller Children has recently been carried out by the Research Unit of the DES and the final report is currently being prepared.

Supported Provision in Further Education Centres

The DES provides for childcare in a number of their training programmes for early school leavers and adult learners, including Youthreach, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Senior Traveller Training Centres. In the academic year 2000/2001, 1,672 childcare places were supported under these programmes in a total of 270 crèches. These crèches include Vocational Education Committee's own crèche facilities, as well as places purchased in community and commercial crèches. Where places on existing community or commercial crèches are purchased a maximum of €63.49 is available per week per child for full time care or on a pro rata basis for part time provision.

Primary School Provision

A number of programmes designed to combat educational disadvantage now operate in primary schools. Although not targeted specifically at early education, infant classes in primary schools benefit from their operation. However, disagggregated

statistics on these programmes that would allow for the identification of the proportion of infant pupils or classes benefiting from them, or the amount or proportion of expenditure being directed at these classes and pupils is not available. Nonetheless, different schemes are known to place different emphases on either junior or senior classes. On the basis of this we can say that the two main schemes from which infant classes undoubtedly benefit are *Breaking the Cycle* and *Giving Children an Even Break*.

Breaking the Cycle was introduced as a five-year pilot programme in 1996 in schools designated as disadvantaged. The scheme provided for extra staffing, funding, in-career development and a pupil teacher ratio of 15:1. Thirty-two urban schools accounting for 5,652 pupils and 120 rural schools with 6,052 pupils were catered for under this programme. The pilot phase ended in June 2001 and an evaluation of the programme is underway.

Giving Children an Even Break was launched by the DES in 2001. Based on research carried out by the ERC, schools were rank ordered according to their concentration of disadvantaged pupils. Whether or not pupils were disadvantaged was determined on using economic and social criteria associated with educational disadvantage. Using this rank ordering of schools, *Giving Children and Even Break* targets the schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged pupils. Additional resources are made available to schools according to the degree of disadvantage as illustrated by their rank position. In urban areas, where the larger concentrations of disadvantaged pupils were located, these resources resulted in a pupil teacher ratio of no more than 20 to one in from junior infants to second class, as well as funding towards additional in-school and out-of-school activities. In rural areas, a teacher / coordinator was appointed to work with clusters of 4 to five schools with high levels of at risk pupils.

Details of these two programmes and other primary school initiatives to combat educational disadvantage are contained in Annex 4.

1.2.9 Institutional Supports for Early Childhood Care and Education

In outlining the main types of early childhood education and care provision above, a number of the key actors have already been identified. These include the DES, the DJELR and the DHC. In addition to these key government departments, other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, play a central role in the development, provision and regulation of early childhood care and education. This section will identify the main actors involved and briefly outline their areas of responsibility.

Department of Education and Science (DES)

This Department provides for all formal primary education. As such, they are the main provider for formal early education as the vast majority of children aged 4 to 6 years attend primary school. In addition the DES also funds a number of pre-school education programmes targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special learning needs. This is achieved through a number of targeted initiatives outlined above. While providing for primary education for all children, this focus on vulnerable groups is also evident in the various supports and programmes

operated within the primary schools that benefit infant classes to varying degrees. The objective of these is to combat educational disadvantage from an early age by addressing the needs of those most at risk of educational disadvantage.

A number of additional structures exist that, while not focussed exclusively on early education, consider this area in their work, specifically in respect of children experiencing or at risk of educational disadvantage. The *Social Inclusion Unit* within the DES focuses on the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and, in particular, in co-ordinating the Department's input into the NAPS and monitoring progress towards the achievement of the targets set in relation to educational disadvantage. Clearly, the targeted early education programmes and supports of the DES are considered by this Unit. The *Educational Disadvantage Committee* was established in 2002 to advise the Minister for Education and Science on policies and strategies to identify and address educational disadvantage at all levels. As its remit ranges from 'cradle to grave', early childhood education may be considered within this context of lifelong learning. In order to facilitate participation by a wide range of education partners as well as bodies and agencies active in tackling social exclusion, the *Forum to Address Educational Disadvantage* was also established to inform the work of the Educational Disadvantage Committee.

The Education Act 1998 makes provision for the establishment by regulation of bodies to provide educational services. One such body is the *National Council for Special Education*, which it is anticipated will be put on a legislative footing under forthcoming disabilities legislation. The primary functions of the National Council for Special Education will be

- To carry out research and provide expert advice to the Minister for Education and Science in relation to special education issues.
- To provide a range of services at local and national level, which will involve ensuring that individual needs are identified and met,
- To co-ordinate special needs provision at local and national level.
- To put in place an independent appeals mechanism.

It is intended to introduce primary legislation governing the role and duties of the Council in due course. The Council will be appointed by the Minister for Education and Science from among persons who have an interest in or knowledge relating to the education of students with disabilities.

The Council will employ a significant number of Special Needs Organisers (SNOs). Their role will be to act as a single point of contact in respect of a student with special needs with the clear and specific objective of delivering for that student those educational services to which he/she is entitled. The SNO will have a role regarding individual education plans for students with special needs. The SNO will be required to engage in appropriate advance planning in consultation with local schools with a view to meeting the needs of special needs students in his/her area.

In 1999 a review focusing on the operations, systems and staffing of the DES was undertaken. On foot of the recommendations of this report, known as the Cromien Report, a programme of structural reform has been undertaken by the DES. One important aspect of this is the decision by the government to create a regional office

structure. This is based on the conclusion that a significant element in the structural difficulties experienced by the Department is that the first point of contact for the majority of some 4,000 primary and second level schools, as well as parents and others seeking information in relation to the vast array of issues arising in education, is the DES itself. A network of 10 *Regional Offices* will be established. These will provide a focal point for schools, parents, teachers and others. The Regional Offices will also have a representative role on local fora such as County Development Boards. Each regional office will have a Head of Office and a small staff. The role of the regional offices will encompass:

- acting as a first point of contact for schools, agencies, voluntary organisations and communities with the Department,
- information gathering and dissemination,
- supporting locally based initiatives to combat disadvantage and provide for special needs,
- representing of the Department on local structures, including Drugs Task Forces
- co-ordinating across education related services locally (DES Press Release, 15th April 2001).

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR)

This Department was responsible for convening the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare and the production of its report. The DJELR is now responsible for the implementation of the National Childcare Strategy. It is important to remember here that this strategy covers a wide range of childcare provision, but this does not include primary or special schools, which come under the remit of the DES, or residential centres, which are the remit of the DHC. In 2001, all childcare provision previously under the auspices of other Government Departments was consolidated under the remit of the DJELR.

The DJELR has established a *Childcare Directorate* within its Equality Division. The overall function of this Directorate is to deliver on the Department's childcare commitments. These include:

- the provision of grant aid to private and not-for-profit childcare providers to establish and improve childcare facilities;
- to support quality improvement in the childcare sector;
- to develop new funding initiatives in response to emerging training needs;
- to progress and consolidate the County/City Childcare Committees (see below);
- to co-ordinate childcare funding policies and programmes at national level.

Much of the work of the Directorate, and particularly that in respect of providing grant aid and the improvement of quality, is achieved under the EOCP described in section 1.2.5 above. Its remaining aims are pursued through various structures in which the Department has a lead or significant role. These structures are included under the provisions of the National Childcare Strategy and include those outlined below.

Chaired by the DJELR, the *Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Group* is comprised of representatives of the various Government Departments and State

Agencies with an interest in childcare. Initially, the primary functions of this group were to co-ordinate childcare measures and avoid duplication of effort. However, since the consolidation of childcare provision under the DJELR, this group has become dormant and now needs to revisit its terms of reference. It is intended to reactivate this group in the later half of 2002.

The National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC) was established to oversee the co-ordinated development of an integrated childcare infrastructure. It is made up of representatives of the statutory and non-statutory sectors, the social partners and the nine National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCO)¹². The NCCC advises the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on childcare matters, has a role in the appraisal of grant applications under the EOCP and also provides support to the County/City Childcare Committees (see below). The NCCC is currently pursuing a number of key themes and sub-groups have been developed to undertake this work.

The Certifying Bodies Sub-Group has developed a draft framework to address qualification, accreditation and certification issues (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2002). This sub-group has developed a core standard for the occupational role of Childcare Supervisor. This has informed the development of training modules accredited by the Further Educational and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and is currently in pilot phase. In addition, this sub-group is preparing a framework on qualifications in the childcare sector, detailed in section 2.2.1.

The Advisory Group to the NCCC is concerned with the issues of equality and diversity. This sub-group is chaired by a member of the NCCC and is comprised of external experts. The sub-group has commissioned the design of guidelines on these issues for use by childcare providers and parents of children using childcare. When finalised, these will be widely disseminated and, in particular, promoted through the County/City Childcare Committees (see below). It is anticipated that these guidelines will be completed in 2002.

The Working Group on School Age Childcare is an ad hoc group established to examine existing provision for school age children outside of school hours. This group will look at practice in other jurisdictions, develop guidelines for quality in services for school age children and make proposals on provision for school age children on a year round basis. Chaired by the DJELR, it is anticipated that this sub-group will report to the NCCC by the end of 2002.

The National Childcare Strategy proposed the establishment of *County/City Childcare Committees* to promote, develop and support quality childcare at the local level. Thirty-three such Committees have now been established. It is through the County/City Childcare Committees that much of the infrastructure necessary to support childcare will be developed and delivered at local level. Each Committee was required to draw up a five year Strategic Plan to address the particular childcare needs of their county. These contain a detailed action plan for the year 2002 and associated costs. Guidelines were prepared to assist the Committees in developing these plans which were first appraised by ADM. These appraisals were then considered by the

¹² The members of the NVCO are Barnardos, IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation, NCNA, An Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta, Children in Hospital Ireland, St. Nicholas Montessori Society, Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Organisation, ISPC and Childminding Ireland.

Programme Appraisal Committee in the DJELR. All of the County Strategic Plans have now been appraised and approved for funding.

The County/City Childcare Committees are comprised of representatives from a wide range of organisations. Initially chaired by a member of the Health Boards, due to their local structure, they typically include representatives of the childcare providers, parents, County Development Boards, County Enterprise Board, Vocational Education Committees (VECs), FÁS, Local Development Partnership Companies, at least one of the seven National Voluntary Childcare Organisations as well as local community organisations, farming organisations and trade unions. Following their initial establishment, the County Committees will employ a small number of core staff to deliver the County Childcare Plan.

The Guiding Principles of the County Committees mirror those of the National Childcare Strategy. These are the needs and rights of children, equal opportunities and equality of access and participation, diversity, partnership and quality. In addition, a number of key objectives were also identified for all County Committees, which must be reflected in their Strategic Plans. These are set out in the 'County/City Childcare Committee Handbook' as follows:

- to maintain and build the local capacity to establish and sustain childcare places/services across all categories of childcare providers/services;
- to promote initiatives aimed at the support and inclusion of childminders;
- to develop and promote quality standards and targets for the county;
- to enhance and develop co-ordination at all levels;
- to enhance and develop information sharing and learning systems; and
- to lever/attract resources from local and national sources to implement specific actions.

County Childcare Action Plans are only now beginning to be implemented. Each Committee is required to monitor and evaluate its activity and progress towards the goals and targets it has set itself. It will be some time before an overall sense of the success or otherwise of the Committees and Plans will be available.

Department of Health and Children (DHC)

Traditionally, the childcare remit of the DHC was children at risk of neglect or abuse, essentially making their focus one of child protection and welfare rather than care. As part of this function the DHC, through the Health Boards, funds places in community-based childcare facilities primarily as a means of alleviating family stress. The DHC subsequently introduced the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (Amendment) Regulations, 1997 (see 2.1.1 below). The Regulations *inter alia* place a statutory duty on Health Boards to secure the health, safety and welfare and promote the development of pre-school children attending pre-school services. This is achieved through inspectors attached to the 10 regional Health Boards.

In 2001, an additional €1.5 million was made available to the Department of Health and Children to introduce a voluntary notification and support system aimed at childminder's looking after three or fewer children in their own home. These are not currently required to notify the Health Boards of their activity or to be inspected under

the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 (see 2.1.1 below). This funding is to be used towards the cost of employing a childminder's advisory officer in each community care area (sub-divisions of the health board areas) to work specifically with such childminders. Some health boards have already recruited advisory officers, some are currently in the recruitment process. Others have devolved the funding to the relevant County Childcare Committee who will recruit the advisory officer.

This Department also now has responsibility for the National Children's Office (NCO), which in turn has responsibility for the implementation of the National Children's Strategy (see 1.2.6 above). This has brought into being a number of structures through which the National Children's Strategy will be implemented. While not specifically concerned with early education, these structures provide opportunities for all areas of children's needs to be highlighted and discussed. In particular, the wide membership of the *National Children's Advisory Council*, including representatives of the social partners, community and voluntary sector and the research community and its function in advising the Minister for Children and the NCO on the co-ordination and delivery of all services for children, may make this particularly relevant.

The National Children's Office

Reporting to the DHC, the NCO is a cross-departmental office the role of which is to lead and oversee the implementation of the National Children's Strategy (see 1.2.6 above). Individual departments retain responsibility for implementing various aspects of the Strategy and the NCO co-ordinates and monitors their progress in this regard. In addition, the NCO progresses actions under the 3 National Goals of the Strategy in regard to certain key policy areas identified by the Cabinet Sub-Committee as priorities and which require cross-departmental action. The Strategy also provides for a number of new structures through which the National Children's Strategy will be implemented. While not specifically concerned with early education, these structures provide opportunities for all areas of children's needs to be highlighted and discussed. In particular, the wide membership of the *National Children's Advisory Council*, including representatives of the social partners, community and voluntary sector and the research community and its function in advising the Minister for Children and the NCO on the co-ordination and delivery of all services for children, may make this particularly relevant.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA)¹³

The main supports for children provided by the DSCFA are in the form of various income maintenance payments. The most substantial and relevant of these is Child Benefit. This is a universal payment made in respect of all children aged 16 years or under. Child Benefit is also paid in respect of 16, 17 or 18 years who is in full-time education and attending a FÁS YOUTHREACH course, or is physically or mentally disabled and dependant on their parents / guardians. Although not tied specifically to childcare, in recent years Child Benefit has become the main way in which the State supports parents in meeting the costs of childcare. The main advantage of this approach is seen to be the neutral stance that this allows with regard to labour force

¹³ Prior to the general election in May 2002, this department's title was the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

status as Child Benefit is paid in respect of all children irrespective of whether their parents work and engage paid childcare or remain at home to care for their children. Child Benefit therefore can be seen either as compensating parents to some extent for the loss of one income should either parent choose to remain in the home to take care of their children, or as being a contribution towards the cost of paid childcare outside the home. Further details on this and other relevant DSFA payments are included in section 2.5.5 below.

Although not specifically concerned with early childhood education and care, the Pilot Family Services Projects of the DSCFA are relevant here. Located in local offices of the Department in Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Mullingar and Finglas in Dublin, these projects adopt a one-stop shop approach with the aim of providing improved access to information for families through the Social Welfare Local Offices. In addition to providing support to families under stress, the service has a particular emphasis on the local support services available for families and provides basic information on local childcare services among a range of other topics. The Government has provided €15.2 million in the National Development Plan for the progressive expansion of the successful elements of the pilot programme.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)

Early education and childcare arises as a concern of the DETE primarily in the context of supporting labour market access by people experiencing social and economic exclusion. In line with this, its main provisions are attached to Community Employment (CE), Ireland's main active labour market programme. Support for early childhood education and care under this programme takes two forms: the allocation of a childcare allowance to participants on CE programmes for the care of their children, and the temporary employment of CE participants as workers in childcare facilities. It is estimated that over 300 childcare facilities are employing staff via CE and this issue is returned to in section 2.2.1 below.

In addition, the DETE provides staffing grants through the City and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs). Established under the NDP, the overall role of the CEBs is to develop indigenous potential and stimulate economic activity at local level, primarily through the provision of financial and technical assistance, as well as ongoing non-financial enterprise supports. The employment grants made available through the CEBs provide a maximum of €6,350 per new employee. In 2001, approximately €2.3 million was approved for employment grants related to childcare services. It is estimated that this will have the potential to support some 450 full-time and 119 part-time jobs.

IDA Ireland, the state body with responsibility for the development of Irish industry through innovation and investment, recently launched a project to develop high quality childcare services for employees in enterprises in 6 of its Business Parks. Tenders were invited from suitable childcare providers for the design, construction, financing and operation of these services.

Under the current national agreement, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (Government of Ireland, 1999d) the government and the social partners agreed that a *National Framework Committee for Family-Friendly Policies* should be established to support family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise. The DETE is

responsible for the chairing and providing a secretariat to this Committee with, where appropriate, additional support from the DJELR. Comprised of representatives of the Irish Business Employers Confederation (IBEC), public sector employers and ICTU, the Committee is supported by a specific budget within the Human Resources Development Operational Programme of the NDP. The work of this Committee has obvious relevance for early childhood education and care as its considerations cover a range of ways in which family and working life can be reconciled including job-sharing, work sharing, part-time work, flexitime, flexi-place / teleworking and term-time working. Also, the Committee will consider the provisions within existing legislation on Maternity Leave, Adoptive Leave, Parental Leave and Force Majeure Leave (see section 2.4.2 below) and how these are implemented at local or enterprise level.

Department of the Environment and Local Government (DELG)

The principal involvement of the DELG in the early childhood education and care is through the planning authorities, County and City Development Boards (CDBs) and the provision of finance through the Local Authorities for childcare facilities. In 2001, the DELG launched its publication *Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DELG, 2001). These Guidelines promote the allocation of space for one childcare facility to every 75 dwellings built in new housing developments, with the number of places being determined by the location of existing provision and the emerging demographic profile of the area. The Guidelines also advise planning authorities on suitable sites for childcare facilities and assessment criteria for childcare sites. These Guidelines clearly highlight the need for the planning of childcare facilities to be part of broader County, City and Local Area Development Plans.

Reflecting this planning priority, there is provision made for a community facility in the case of all new Local Authority housing schemes. In many cases this either comprises or contains a childcare facility. This is usually funded by the DELG as part of the capital costs of the building project and the ongoing management and operational costs of such facilities is entirely a matter for the Local Authorities.

In the case of existing Local Authority estates, €6.35 million was made available in 2001 to enable Local Authorities to meet capital costs of providing childcare facilities in Local Authority housing estates and other social housing projects. Eleven projects have been approved for funding in principle under this scheme. These will provide up to 370 additional childcare places. The implementation of the programme, including planning and execution of works, is the responsibility of the relevant Local Authorities. In large remedial projects undertaken in public housing estates, part of the project is allocated to the local community for joint use and again, this is often used for the provision of childcare services.

Under the auspices of the DELG, County/City Development Boards (CDBs) have been established in each of the 29 county councils, and in each of the 5 major cities (Dublin Corporation, Cork Corporation, Limerick Corporation, Galway Corporation and Waterford Corporation). The CDBs comprise representatives of local government, local development bodies, State agencies and the social partners operating locally and have now designed a County/City Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development for their area. This will be the template guiding all public

services and local development activities locally, in effect bringing more coherence to delivery of services locally. Each of these Strategies must contain a statement on the provision of childcare and it is envisaged that the CDBs will work with the County/City Childcare Committees (see above) in addressing childcare needs.

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA)

The DCRGA has responsibility for the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme of the NDP under which Local Area-Based Partnerships and a number of community groups have supported innovative early education and childcare projects. In addition, this Department also has responsibility for two specific development programmes: Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID), which is targeted at disadvantaged urban areas, and Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachanais (CLAR) which focuses on disadvantaged rural areas. Applications for funding under these programmes often include childcare or early education elements. These are subsequently directed to the EOCP if relating to childcare and to the DES if they are educational in focus. Alternatively, childcare projects located in these designated areas may apply directly for funding under the EOCP and schools may apply to the DES for inclusion under their various programmes targeted at combating educational disadvantage.

2. POLICY APPROACHES

This section looks at the main policy approaches taken in Ireland to key areas of early childhood education and care. These key areas are regulation, staffing, programme content and implementation, family engagement and support and funding.

2.1 REGULATIONS

2.1.1 Regulating Childcare Provision

Under Part VII of the Child Care Act 1991 the regional Health Boards are given responsibility for the regulation of pre-school provision. Here, 'pre-school service' means any pre-school, play group, day nursery, crèche, day-care or other similar service outside of primary schools, which caters for children under the age of 6 years. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (Amendment) Regulations, 1997 give effect to this part of the Child Care Act, 1991. For ease of reading, these regulations are hereafter referred to as the Pre-School Services Regulations.

These Pre-School Services Regulations were drawn up by the DHC in consultation with relevant groups and cover the following main areas:

- development of the child (in terms of development and expression through the use appropriate materials and equipment);
- health, safety and welfare of the child;
- suitability of premises and facilities;
- adult to child ratios;
- child to space ratios;
- notification, record keeping and provision of information;
- notification procedures;

- inspection;
- insurance;
- annual fees.

On notification of the provision of services, or the intention to supply pre-school services, it is considered good practice that the first inspection occurs within 3 months of receipt of the notification and thereafter on an annual basis, but this is highly dependent on the availability of staff and the number of notifications received. In addition, the Health Boards also provide an advisory service to prospective childcare providers on meeting Pre-School Services Regulations as well as advising current providers on how to address deficiencies in their services. Where there are concerns about deficiencies in a services the Health Board arranges more frequent follow up advice visits or inspections as necessary.

Inspectors of childcare facilities come mainly from a public health nursing (PHN) or an environmental health officer background. There is no specific training required for the role of inspector. In individual Health Boards training may be available on relevant issues such as child protection, fire safety, Information Technology, legal issues etc. A number of the inspectors from PHN backgrounds have undertaken a course - Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education - provided by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). In the early days of implementing Pre-School Services Regulations, the pre-school officers would have had informal information sharing networks within and across Health Boards. Some of these have since become more formalised.

As not all providers are required to notify the Health Boards, not all childcare provision is covered by Pre-School Services Regulations. Only childcare providers caring for three or more children (excluding their own offspring, offspring of their partner/spouse, other relatives or three children from the same family) are required to notify the Health Boards. While it is believed that Pre-School Services Regulations therefore apply to a large number of childminders caring for children in their (the minder's) home, few of these notify the Health Boards. Childminders looking after three or fewer children in their own home are currently not required to notify the Health Board or be inspected under Pre-School Services Regulations. In attempting to improve the rate of voluntary notification by such childminders, €1.5m was made available to the DHC in 2001 to introduce a voluntary notification and support system.

It should also be noted that these Regulations do not apply to Early Start centres as these are regulated as part of the primary school system. They do, however, apply to Pre-Schools for Traveller Children funded by the DES.

The Explanatory Notes that accompany Pre-School Services Regulations include a proposal to monitor their implementation over three years with a review then taking place with a view to further enhancing pre-school service provision. A review of Pre-School Services Regulations is currently underway and a Review Group has been established comprising representatives of the DHC, the Health Boards and pre-school inspectors, other relevant Government Departments including the DES, DJELR and the DELG, the NCO, the NVCOs, parents representative, ADM and a representative of the CECDE. A public call for submissions was placed in the national and local

press in 2002. Health Boards and County Childcare Committees were also invited to make submissions. One hundred and ten submissions were received and are currently being analysed.

The introduction of these Regulations marked a significant development in pre-school services in Ireland. Prior to this, childcare provision was unregulated by the State beyond general regulations relating to health and safety and food safety, if the relevant authorities were aware of the existence or the service of the providers voluntarily notified them. In addition, while not enforceable, many of the umbrella organisations for childcare providers, such as IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation, the NCNA, An Comhchoiste Reamhscoliochta and the Montessori organisations operated codes of best practice and regulations that providers subscribed to on a voluntary basis.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that while the Pre-School Services Regulations provide for a minimum standard, their introduction and implementation have contributed significantly to the quality of pre-school services. While of importance in the respect that they represent a substantial move forwards and in that they are relatively detailed, the Pre-School Services Regulations are limited in their scope and do not cover many of the less tangible aspects of care, including staff qualifications and training, curriculum and methodology.¹⁴ The proposed approach to these issues is outlined elsewhere in the relevant sections of this report. The Expert Working Group on Childcare (Government of Ireland, 1999b) expressed their concern that Pre-School Services Regulations were not uniformly applied across the Health Boards and that the inspectors were insufficiently trained for this role. This conflict between regulation and quality is an ongoing concern for many providers. Despite this, it is reassuring that almost all (96%) of the facilities included in the National Childcare Census had notified the Health Board of their activities (ADM, forthcoming 2002). Almost 900 facilities identified that they would incur costs in meeting Pre-School Services Regulations, with an estimated required total expenditure of €11.6 million (at 1999 prices). Undoubtedly, many of these facilities are benefiting from grants under the EOCP in supporting their efforts to meet the required standards.

2.1.2 Regulating Primary Education

In addition to the provisions of the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, primary schools must also comply with 'Rules for National Schools' which cover all aspects of a school's functioning including, among others, the patronage and management of schools, building, improvement and furnishings, repair, heating, cleaning and painting, the school year, timetable, hours, vacations, enrolment, attendance, books, and fees, religious and secular instruction, and the qualifications of teachers. These rules were originally published in 1965 and have been amended over the years by Departmental Circular Letters issued to all schools. They are currently under review with a view to their updating and consolidation. In addition, schools must also comply with section 7 of the Equal Status Act, 2000 and existing health and safety legislation.

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that teachers, Early Start childcare assistance and childcare workers require Garda (police) clearance to take up employment. This is in contrast to workers in the area of child welfare where Garda clearance is required.

The evaluation of primary schools falls to the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science. The Inspectorate, which was put on a statutory basis by the Education Act, 1998, has the core tasks of inspecting and evaluating the quality of schooling, advising on educational policy, and supporting teachers and school management.

Generally, Inspectors are trained primary or post-primary teachers. Training for the role of Inspector is provided via a formal training programme undertaken within the DES. This mainly involves 'shadowing' an inspector for a period of time and attending training sessions given by outside agencies on specific issues.

Primary schools, and the Early Start units within these, are inspected on a cyclical basis. A report is furnished on each school approximately every 6 years, following a detailed inspection. This inspection examines all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as school planning, the work of the Board of Management, and the school's accommodation and resources. Inspectors also become familiar with the ongoing work of the school through frequent incidental visits. The work of individual teachers is also inspected, with much of this work relating to the evaluation and support of probationary teachers. In addition, the Evaluation Support and Research Unit of the Inspectorate manages evaluations of key aspects of educational provision in schools through a series of programme or thematic evaluations. For example, an evaluation of 25 Pre-Schools for Traveller Children was carried out in 2001 with individual school reports being furnished to the pre-schools management and with a consolidated report is now being finalised by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit. The Inspectorate also has wide linkages with all relevant sections throughout the DES and with external bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the ERC, the NEPS and the Primary Curriculum Support Service. The Inspectorate maintains contacts with international organisations and North/South Bodies in relation to development on regulations and best practice.

Another important regulatory influence on primary education in Ireland is the recently commenced Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. This Act provides a comprehensive new framework for promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. A National Educational Welfare Board has been established to develop, co-ordinate and implement school attendance policy so as to ensure that every child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education. In this regard, the Board is currently appointing Education Welfare Officers to work in close co-operation with schools, teachers, parents and community/voluntary bodies. The Board will also maintain a register of children receiving education outside the recognised school structure and will assess the adequacy of such education on an ongoing basis.

2.2 STAFFING

Reflecting the different stages of development of the childcare and formal education sectors in Ireland, different staff issues arise.

2.2.1 Staffing Issues in the Childcare Sector

A number of issues of concern are raised in the relevant policy documents in respect of childcare staff. Among these is the low status and rates of pay attached to positions

in childcare, reflecting an almost vocational expectation of those working in this sector. In 1999, it was estimated that, at the higher end of the scale, a junior day nursery teacher in a public sector nursery earned between €12,700 and €17,000 per annum. Senior day nursery teachers earned between €15,800 and €24,000 per annum. At the other end of the scale, a survey of NCNA members revealed that junior staff earned approximately €8,900 per annum and senior staff roughly €11,900. (Government of Ireland, 1999b)

In the current economic climate, which has prompted an increased demand for childcare at the same time as providing childcare workers with more attractive alternative employment opportunities, the availability and retention of staff are central concerns. In particular, the lack of suitably qualified staff and the shortage of accessible accredited training for staff are of ongoing concern. Linked to these issues is the lack of clearly defined occupational profiles and roles for those involved in providing childcare services.

In relation to the childcare sector it is important to contextualise the staffing issues that arise. In particular it should be borne in mind that until recently there was little State involvement in this sector, which was essentially unco-ordinated and unregulated to any significant extent. This manifested itself in the ad hoc development of training for childcare workers, as well as the existence of a large number of ‘qualification poor, experience rich’ workers. What training existed was largely paid for by individuals, was of variable quality and, in many cases, uncertified. However, it is important to note the range that existed with, for example, Montessori teachers trained to international standards on the one hand and, on the other, childcare workers with no or only extra-mural qualifications in areas such as child development. Accredited childcare training has existed for some time, however. For example, a nationally accredited training course for those working in the early years sector has been running at DIT since 1977. Originally a national certificate course, this has developed and is now offered at degree level. New accredited courses are also currently being developed by third level colleges, including Carlow Institute of Technology and University College Cork. In addition, while not considered part of the third level system, Post-Leaving Certificate courses in childcare have been developed by FETAC.

The National Childcare Strategy recommended the development of a national qualifications framework. Work on this has been pursued by the Certifying Bodies Sub-Group of the NCCC (see 1.2.7 above). This new *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* is based on a process of consultation with childcare providers and training and accreditation providers. It establishes the core values of the childcare and early education sector, including recognition of the value of childhood in its own right, the rights of children who are active agents in their own development and the role of professional development as a central component of good practice. It puts forward 6 key areas of skill and knowledge necessary in childcare. These are Child Development, Education and Play, Social Environment, Health, Hygiene, Nutrition and Safety, Personal Professional Development and Communication, Management and Administration. Five levels of the practitioner occupation profile are presented – Basic, Intermediate, Experienced, Advanced and Expert – along with the intellectual skills and attributes, the processes in which competence should be achieved and the

level of accountability relevant to each of these levels. The depth of knowledge as well as the number of hours of supervised practice is clearly set out across the 6 key areas of skill and knowledge. The Framework also addresses the issues of progression through a system of accredited learning, Accredited Prior learning (APL), flexible and work-based learning, as well as the relationship with the various qualification and accreditation structures. This framework was launched in September 2002.

Of importance here is the establishment under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), which came into being in 2000. The NQAI has been charged with the creation of a national qualification framework, including a framework for the childcare sector. Within this, a clear role is established for sectoral bodies in informing the work of the NQAI and the two principal accrediting bodies – the Higher Educational and Training Awards Council (HETEC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The Model Framework outlined above has been submitted to the NQAI and will represent the main submission of the childcare sector to this body.

A related issue here is the reliance on staff employed under the CE Programme. As indicated above, this is Ireland's principal active labour market programme. This programme provides temporary opportunities for persons unemployed for a minimum of 12 months on the Live Register and having being in receipt of any of a number of social welfare payments. Participants on the programme work for an average of 19.5 hours per week. Under the programme, public sector and voluntary organisations are grant-aided by FÁS to carry out worthwhile work that they could not otherwise undertake. Suitable projects must show that they are responding to a clearly identified community need that also develops the work skills of participants, thereby enhancing their prospects of obtaining a mainstream job.

Community and voluntary service providers in disadvantaged areas are the largest group of CE project sponsors. Within this, early education and care services are common with over 300 such services currently participating in the programme. Based on an audit of CE supported services in 2001, FÁS report that funding was approved under CE for approximately 2,000 childcare workers at a cost of roughly €22 million. The programme has provided many services with much needed staff. However, the reliance of these services on CE staff has distinct disadvantages. These include the temporary nature of the programme, by which the majority of participants may remain on the programme for one year only.¹⁵ Many of the care and education services involved do not have the resources to retain individual staff members after this time and move on to recruit new CE workers. This has implications not only for the CE participant in question, but also for the continuity of care for children and works to prevent the facilities from building up their complement of experienced staff. In addition, although CE allows for formal training to be undertaken by participants, the limited duration of participation allows for only short-term participation on training courses. In the wider context, CE has inadvertently but almost undoubtedly contributed to maintaining low salaries within the early childcare and education sector

¹⁵ Following the restructuring of CE in 2001 certain programme participants aged over 35 and 50 years who experience ongoing difficulties in gaining employment may apply to remain on CE schemes for up to three years.

as participants are paid an allowance by FÁS that is commensurate with their previous welfare payments but not in line with salaries.

The formalising and mainstreaming of training, the clear articulation of professional roles and career paths as well as the increasing demand for high quality childcare services are all contributing to the professionalisation of the childcare sector, in centre-based provision at least. Undoubtedly, this will improve both the external perception of, and self-esteem among childcare staff. However, issues remain. Primary among these are the development and adherence to appropriate salary scales and other terms of employment, the untrained nature of the majority of childminding services provided in the home and the gender imbalance among childcare staff that sees almost all staff being women.

2.2.2 Staffing Issues in Primary Education

In contrast to the childcare sector, primary school teachers are trained and qualified through State supported and approved training courses. Such has been the case for over 100 years. In 1974, what had been a two-year course was extended to a three years and 1977 saw the conferral of degrees (Bachelor of Education, B.Ed) on students. These degree courses are now offered by five third level colleges and are conferred by the University of Limerick, Dublin City University and Trinity College.

Although differences exist in the number of hours attributed to each element, all of the B.Ed courses involve a mixture of time spent in lectures or tutorials and time spent on teaching practice in primary schools. Education, as a subject, is the main component of all courses, with components on subjects such as the history of education, philosophies of education and educational psychology, along with a religious studies element. In some cases, a core course on early education is taught with the option of further electives in this area. The colleges differ in their requirements in relation to additional academic subjects. It is important to recognise here that primary school teachers are required to be able to teach at all levels in primary school from junior infants to senior classes. From October 2002, the starting point on the primary teacher's pay scale will be €23,096. The highest point on the scale will be €44,891. This does not take account of the various additional allowances payable in respect of deputy principals and principals and for additional qualifications over and above the B.Ed.

The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO, the main trade union for primary school teachers) identified a desire for more pre-service and in-service training among teachers of infant classes (INTO, 1995). The Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education reported in early 2002 (DES, 2002b). Among its recommendations is the restructuring of B.Ed courses and their extension to 4 years, a rebalancing of the content of courses between education based and academic subjects as well as between various modes of teaching.

The Working Group was also clear in articulating its view that pre-service training cannot prepare graduates with the competencies and skills necessary for a mature teacher and highlighted the importance of induction and in-service training. At present, each teacher is in receipt of 4 days in-service training on the new primary curriculum (see 2.3.1 below). In-service training on this is being phased in at the rate of two subjects per year. Therefore, each teacher receives 2 days in-service training

for each subject. This is followed by one-day in-school planning of the implementation of the revised curriculum in the individual school. In addition to this training, the In-Career Development Unit of the DES provide training in a wide range of areas including Information Communication Technologies, Special Education (including remedial teaching), training for involvement in specific programmes including Giving Children an Even Break, Early Start, Refugee Language Support Programmes and Traveller Education, training for newly appointed principals and Relationship and Sexuality Education.

Beyond training, the major staffing issue arising in primary schools and in infant classes is the pupil teacher ratios that exist in many schools. The DES reports an average pupil teacher ratio of 19.2 to 1 in all primary schools, and of 24.5 to 1 in ordinary classes (DES, forthcoming 2002). Some schools have higher ratios. However, the creation of additional teaching posts together with a decline in enrolments has resulted in a significant reduction in the overall pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools in recent years and this will continue to fall over the coming years. For example, the average pupil-teacher ratio in 1996/1997 was 22. By 1998/1999 this had fallen to 21 and in 2000/2001 stood at 19.2. The issue of pupil teacher ratios is returned to in section 3.1.2 below.

Child to adult ratios are more favourable in Early Start, with ratios of 15 to 2 being implemented. In addition, Early Start Teachers and Childcare Workers receive additional training. In the first year of the implementation of Early Start, staff were appointed two to three weeks prior to the commencement of the school year, giving them time to attend a one-week induction course.

2.3 PROGRAMME CONTENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

In the field of early childhood education and care, programme content and implementation are areas in which the distinction between childcare provision and education becomes apparent. Some pre-school settings are clearly informed by a particular approach to learning, such as Montessori and Steiner Nurseries, and Early Start Units have Curricular Guidelines for Good Practice developed by the In-Career Development Team of the DES. However, in the majority of cases the programme content of early childcare provision is not formalised, is outside State regulation and is not informed by education bodies. This is clearly indicated in the National Childcare Census, which shows that, of 2,029 facilities included, over half (1,134) devise their own curriculum for at least some aspects of their services. In more formal early care and educational settings, and in particular in infant classes, a State developed, supported and required curriculum exists. In addition, progress on a voluntary but more structured framework for learning for children aged from birth to 6 years is presently being developed by the NCCA under the Education Act 1998.

2.3.1 The Primary School Curriculum

Until recently, primary schools delivered the Primary School Curriculum (Curaclum na Bunscoile) as revised in 1971. This curriculum built of principles and practice that had emerged over previous years. Central to this development was a child-centred approach that was particularly reflected in the teaching of infant classes. Drawing on this experience, the key aspect of this revised curriculum is that, from 1971 onward,

the child was placed at its centre. The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum conducted a critique of the 1971 curriculum. Based on the report of this Review Body, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was charged with the revision on the primary school curriculum, and the revised curriculum was launched in 1999.

The curriculum is child centred, concentrates on children as active agents in their own learning and details what and how the child can learn most effectively. Its two key principles are the uniqueness of each child and the development of each child's potential to the full. The following are the Primary Curriculum's defining features:

- a focus on learning that recognises different kinds and ways of learning as well as approaches to teaching;
- a relevant curriculum that meets the developmental and education needs of the child in the context of their immediate needs and their functioning in wider society;
- learning through guided activity and discovery;
- a balanced approach that reflects the breadth of human experience and expression and flexible implementation of the curriculum at school level;
- a developmental approach to learning that recognises the integration of the various subject areas covered in order to create a harmonious learning experience for the child;
- a detailed statement of content that supports flexibility in teaching approach;
- a balanced approach to the acquisition and use of knowledge, concepts and skills;
- assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning;
- planning as an important tool in the implementation of the curriculum to maximum positive effect in individual schools. (DES, 1999a)

The curriculum has 6 curriculum areas covering 11 subjects. These 6 areas are (i) Language (encompassing the subjects of English and Irish) (ii) Mathematics, (iii) Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (covering History, Geography and Science), (iv) Arts Education (encompassing Visual Arts, Music and Drama), (v) Physical Education, and (vi) Social, Personal and Health Education. Religious education is to be determined by the individual Churches. It is envisaged that the curriculum will be implemented on a phased basis over a seven-year period, in line with the in-service training exercises outlined in 2.2.2 above. This is organised by the In-career Development Unit of the DES through a Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP). Although this implementation programme will proceed on a subject-by-subject basis, schools may introduce subject areas as they see fit, taking account of the expertise and interests of their staff. However, it is anticipated by the NCCA, supported by experience to date, that most schools will choose to follow the in-career development programme from year to year.

A number of points in relation to the new national curriculum have been raised. The first concerns the issue of flexibility in delivery. While the content of the curriculum is very detailed according to each subject and each level within the school, there is an emphasis on allowing schools to deliver this according to their particular circumstances, the needs of individual classes and the learning needs of individual

children. The second is recognition of the role of families in the education of their children and the need for parental information on the revised curriculum. To this end, the NCCA produced an introductory booklet for parents for the DES entitled *Primary School Curriculum: Your Child's Learning – A Guide for Parents* (DES, 1999b) outlining the content of the curriculum, how parents can help their children learn before and when they start school, how they can help implement the curriculum and how they can help the children in the various subject areas. Finally, the curriculum is designed in such a way that, through effective curriculum differentiation, children may have access to learning experiences appropriate to their learning needs. This facilitates the DES policy of, in so far as possible, integrating children with specific learning needs within the ordinary primary school classroom. These issues are dealt with in more detail below.

2.3.2 Curricular Guidelines for Good Practice in Early Start

While there is no defined curriculum for Early Start, the In-Career Development Unit of the DES has developed guidelines for good practice (DES, 1998), which have been informed by the Rutland Street project (see 1.2.6 above). These guidelines emphasises the following:

- the provision of developmentally appropriate learning opportunities;
- a view of learning as an interdependent and continuous process the elements of which cannot be compartmentalised;
- the active involvement of the child in their own learning;
- recognition of the value of child-initiated, self-directed learning;
- recognition of play as the main medium through which children learn;
- the need for adults to structure the learning contexts of children;
- the active involvement of the adult in collaborative learning;
- the necessity of parental involvement in the child's education and learning. (Byrne, 1999)

These curricular guidelines have been available since 1998 and were updated again in 1999 and 2000. It is intended that these guidelines will be continuously updated in light of best practice and research. The guidelines have both a practical and theoretical emphasis. Considerable attention is given to the identification of learning outcomes for the four main elements of the curriculum: cognitive development, language development, personal emotional and social development, and creative and aesthetic development. Principles of good practice, including assessment and record keeping, adult-child interaction, the teacher-childcare worker relationship, and parent and community partnership are highlighted. Finally, the guidelines provide a series of developmental assessment profiles for each of the curriculum areas (excluding creative and aesthetic development), a set of exemplars for planning small group activity, and lists of additional educational resources.

2.3.3 A New Framework for Early Childhood Learning

Both the Report of the Forum on Early Childhood Education and the White Paper on Early Education (Government of Ireland, 1999c) raise the absence of a curriculum for children aged 0 to 3 years. The need for a range of methodologies and flexibility in curricula to allow for the various developmental needs of young children to be met is central to the development of such a curriculum. The White Paper does not

recommend one curriculum over another and proposes that guidelines on the broad principles that should underlie early childhood curricula be developed rather than a specific curriculum being recommended or imposed. However, the White Paper also recognises that many providers may have difficulty in identifying or selecting an appropriate curriculum and, in light of this, recommends the development of a specimen curriculum that providers may use if they wish. It is also suggested that this will be of use to parents in helping them with the early development of their children.

In pursuing this objective, the NCCA is currently preparing a working paper on Learning Framework for Early Childhood Learning. The Framework will identify (i) children's needs at different ages and (ii) the learning and development experience that will meet those needs. It will not be prescriptive so that diversity of need and provision on the ground can be accommodated. It will contain some broad approaches/learning principles but there will be no compulsion for practitioners to adhere to it. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that should a Quality in Education Mark be developed (see 3.1 below), implementation of the Framework will be an important assessment criteria. While the achievement of a Quality in Education Mark will not be obligatory for service providers, it will be desirable, thereby introducing an incentive to adopt of the Framework.

The proposed Framework for Early Childhood Learning will recognise and draw on the existing and on-going work of early childhood services in the development of learning programmes for very young children, including the work on the Early Start curriculum as well as the work of the various third level colleges and educational institutions delivering training for pre-school and primary school staff. Through this consultative approach, the NCCA aims to develop a framework with clear linkages between provision and needs of the different age groups within the birth to 6 years age bracket. The educational philosophies and principles of other types of early childhood education will be recognised within the framework, thereby making it of relevance to a broad range of provision and providers. The overall aim here is to provide a framework that will recognise the continuum between overlapping stages of development of the child from birth to the age of 6. This will ease the transition of the child from the home or childcare setting to the formal educational system.

Work on the discussion paper on the Framework for Early Childhood Learning is ongoing. When this is finalised, formal consultation on the Framework will commence. It is anticipated that this will happen in the autumn of 2002. This consultation process will involve the establishment of a number of enabling structures that will consult with parents, early childhood education and care providers, professionals and experts in areas relevant to early childhood education and care, relevant Government Departments, third level colleges and training institutions and other concerned and interested organisations. It is expected that this entire process will take 12 – 18 months, giving an estimated completion time of spring to summer 2004.

2.3.4 A Curriculum for Children with Special Needs

Section 1.2.6 above outlines much of the State provision for children with special needs in early childhood education and care. Government policy in respect of children with special needs is to provide them with an education appropriate to their needs. This is legislated for in the Education Act, 1998 and is the subject of pending

legislation under the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2002. The broad policy proposed by these pieces of legislation reflects current practice to a large degree. With regard to young children this focuses on the integration of children with special needs in ordinary classes in primary schools whenever possible or to establish special classes in ordinary primary schools. Where the degree of disability makes neither of these options appropriate to the child's needs they are educated in special schools that cater for the specific disability in question. This policy is well summarised in the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (Department of Education, 1993) which states that it favours '*as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as possible*' (p. 22).

No specific curricula exist for the education of children with special needs. In cases where such children are educated in an ordinary primary school, teachers adapt the national curriculum as necessary to meet the needs of the child. The NCCA is addressing this issue and has developed draft guidelines specifically aimed at children with mild, moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities. This work will be furthered through a process of consultation. In reinforcing the philosophy of integration, these guidelines will be based on the areas covered in the Primary Curriculum and include enabling skills (attending, responding, interacting) and life skills (communication, personal and social skills, aesthetic and creative skills, physical skills and mathematical skills). The guidelines also uphold the principles of the Primary Curriculum with respect to the uniqueness of each child and the development of their full potential. The key areas covered in these guidelines are as follows:

- broad principles and aims of education for children with general learning disabilities;
- the identification and use of realistic, time-referenced targets;
- the development and use of individual education programmes for each child;
- the use of a variety of appropriate assessment tools;
- lines of development in the skill areas, with short exemplars illustrating how these can be developed;
- new content and linkage points with the national curricula;
- whole-school and classroom planning approaches;
- a range of multi-disciplinary approaches in the education of students with special needs.

While the curriculum for children with learning disabilities has been the area of priority in recent years, the NCCA is also now beginning to examine the adaptation of the Primary Curriculum for specific use with children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of educational disadvantage. This work is at a very early stage.

2.4 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

2.4.1 The Involvement of Parents in Early Education and Childcare

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education highlights the importance of involving parents in their children's education, taking the perspective that, as parents

are enshrined in the Constitution as the natural and primary educators of their children, their involvement is of particular importance.

In the primary school sector, this key role of parents is given specific recognition in the Education Act, 1998. Section 26 of this Act provides that parents of students in a school may establish a parents association to promote the interests of students in co-operation with the Board of Management. In addition, the Board of Management, on which parents are represented, is required to promote contact between the school and parents and to give all reasonable assistance to a parents association.

The advancement of partnership with parents in the formal education sector can be seen in the work of the National Parents Council – Primary, the nationwide organisation of parents of primary school children. This represents parents' views on educational issues such as curriculum, class size and school transport as well as supporting the process of building partnership in education. The Council also provides a number of services to parents:

- an advocacy service for parents taking a formal complaint to the Board of Management of their child's school;
- a parents programme to improve and enrich the education of children by supporting the involvement of parents in their children's education;
- a help-line to provide support, encouragement and information to assist parents in responding to their children's educational needs;
- training courses and workshops funded by the DES and the European Social Fund.

The National Parents Council – Primary has representatives on the NCCA, the National Educational Welfare Board and various other education bodies.

Many of the initiatives of the DES targeted at children at risk of educational disadvantage seek to encourage parental involvement in education. For instance, some of the main aims of the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (see section 1.2.6) are to promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in advancing the educational interests of the participating children, raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. Another example of this is the Visiting Teacher Scheme, which works to involve Traveller parents in their children's early education in Pre-Schools for Traveller Children.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education discusses a strategy to facilitate and encourage parental involvement. It suggests that parents should be provided with advice and support regarding the learning process; be supplied with information and recommendations on how they may best assist their children's education and development; and be facilitated and encouraged to get involved in the provision of early childhood education. Responsibility for progressing this strategy and for co-ordinating and enhancing parental involvement in early education has been given to the recently established CECDE. The Centre will also undertake and/or commission research and development through which best practice in regard to parental involvement may be implemented and evaluated.

In the area of childcare, each County Childcare Committee has at least one parent's representative and parental involvement in the management of community-based facilities is common. However, evidence would suggest that many services are still struggling with the idea and practice of parental involvement and a partnership approach. In the National Childcare Census, only 40% of facilities had a policy on parental involvement and only 19% had a written policy on this area. Where parents were involved, this most commonly took the form of providing parents with information, holding open days for parents and involving parents in outings.

2.4.2 Family Friendly Policies: Reconciling Work and Family Life

Increasing employment among women and the need to attract and retain women in the work force have led to a greater emphasis on family-friendly policies that assist parents, and particularly mothers, in reconciling work and family responsibilities. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) recognises that policies to support childcare and family life are a cornerstone of future social and economic progress in Ireland. In meeting the challenges this presents, the PPF aims not only to increase the quality and quantity of childcare provision but also to further policy measures to reconcile work and family life, including family-friendly employment policies.

In Ireland, family-friendly policies have a primarily labour market focus. They are considered to be policies that (i) help workers to combine employment with their family lives, caring responsibilities and personal and social lives and (ii) facilitate equality of opportunity for men and women in the workplace. This definition includes statutory entitlements such as Maternity Leave, Adoptive Leave, 'Force Majeure' Leave, Parental Leave and Carer's Leave as well as the provision of non-statutory atypical working arrangements. Obviously, all employers must honour the statutory entitlements of their employees. Other non-statutory arrangements, however, are at the discretion of the individual employer.

Statutory Entitlements

Maternity Leave: Following a review of the maternity protection legislation in 2000, the period of maternity leave attracting a social welfare payment was increased by 4 weeks to 18 weeks and the period of unpaid maternity leave was increased by 4 weeks to 8 weeks with effect from March 2001. In essence, therefore, expectant women and new mothers may avail of up to 26 weeks leave. This is highly dependent on the individual's financial situation, which, in turn, is heavily influenced by the practice of employers in relation to pay. Maternity Leave is calculated by dividing gross income in the Relevant Tax Year by the number of weeks worked in that year. Seventy per cent of this amount is payable, subject to minimum payment of €135.60 and a maximum payment of €232.40 per week (rates applicable from January 2002). However, in many instances, and particularly among large employers, women are paid their salary for 18 weeks and in turn they give their welfare payments to their employer to off set this cost. This obviously makes longer maternity leave and unpaid leave more attractive.

Adoptive Leave: With effect from 8th March 2001, an adopting mother or sole male adopter is entitled to 14 weeks paid and 8 weeks unpaid adoptive leave.

Parental Leave and Force Majeure Leave: The Parental Leave Act, 1998, which gives effect to the EU Parental Leave Directive (96/34/EC), introduced for the first time in Ireland a statutory right to Parental Leave. The Act entitles parents to 14 weeks (per child) unpaid Parental Leave from work to take care of children under 5 years of age. Its unpaid nature has meant that there has been limited take up of Parental Leave and it can reasonably be expected that this has been particularly low among lower paid workers.

This Parental Leave Act also provides an entitlement to limited paid 'Force Majeure' leave for urgent family reasons owing to injury or illness of an immediate family member. The employee may not be absent for more than 3 days in any period of 12 consecutive months or 5 days in any period of 36 consecutive months.

Carer's Leave: The Carer's Leave Act, 2001 entitles employees to take unpaid leave from employment for the purpose of providing full-time care and attention to a 'relevant person' for a period not exceeding 65 weeks. Again, the unpaid nature of this leave has restricted its uptake. Its advantage, as with Parental Leave, is that employment must be held open for those taking leave.

Non-Statutory Atypical Working Arrangements

Atypical working arrangements are the way in which many parents meet their long-term family responsibilities. The provision or availability of these is not subject to legislation and is dependent on the positive perspective of employers towards such arrangements. It is also the case that the majority of those availing of atypical work arrangements are women. The following are among the most common forms of atypical work arrangements in Ireland.

Part-time Working: Part-time working means working fewer hours than a comparable full-time worker in the same organisation. Typically, this involves working a half-week of approximately 18 to 20 hours. The number of people working part-time in Ireland has soared in recent years. According to the Quarterly National Household Survey, 17% of those in employment are in part-time employment. However, this is true of almost 31% of women in employment, compared to 7% of men (CSO, 2002b).

Job-Sharing: This is an arrangement where one full-time job is divided or the work is shared between two people. The responsibilities and benefits of the job are shared between the holders. The job can be shared in a number of ways, for example, on the basis of a split week; (alternating 2 and 3 day weeks), on the basis of a split day; or on a week on-week off basis.

Work sharing: Work sharing is a development of the job-sharing concept. It attempts to achieve business tasks while allowing for a wider range of attendance patterns. It requires a high level of employer / employee co-operation with a view to achieving the tasks that make up the job. It is important that the tasks are clearly defined, targets identified and the level of service decided upon before the workload is divided up. At this stage, the manager and jobholders can agree on a system of work attendance to complete the work that best accommodates the staff.

Flexitime: This is an arrangement whereby employers and employees negotiate hours of work that are of advantage to both. It usually involves defining 'peak' hours when all employees must be in work. Starting and finishing times, on the other hand, are normally flexible and there is usually provision for taking leave in lieu of additional hours worked.

Other non-statutory leave and atypical work arrangements are becoming increasingly common in Ireland as the need for a flexible approach to recruiting and retaining staff emerges. These include the following.

- *Paternity Leave:* There is currently no entitlement to paid or unpaid paternity leave. However, a number of employers are recognising the importance of making some provision for such leave.
- *Compassionate or emergency leave:* Most employers recognise the need for leave in emergency situations. Arrangements vary from organisation to organisation and are frequently informal.
- *Term-time working:* This system means that the employee works during school terms but not during the school holidays. It appeals, in particular, to parents of school going children. Operational in a number of Government Departments, this has yet to be taken up by many private sector employers.
- *Employment or career break:* A growing number of organisations provide such breaks on either a formal or less structured basis. The facilitating of such breaks for study / travel / child rearing can assist in retaining valued staff.
- *Sabbaticals:* This is a period of absence from work, which may or may not be on full pay, and duration is normally related to length of service. They provide an opportunity for employees to take a break from or reflect on their work, or engage in new activities.
- *Alternative work arrangements:* Innovative ways of working are no longer confined to the workplace. Models that have been developed include such concepts as teleworking or e-working. This means working at a distance, or even a remote location, and using technology to ease communications. It can also include a combination of e-working and office-based work. It is well suited to performing information technology tasks and works well in certain situations where the employee has a high degree of autonomy, e.g. architecture or journalism. Difficulties to be overcome can include issues of control, lack of face-to-face contact and consistency of service provision.

2.5 FUNDING

The current and capital costs of a small number of specific pre-school initiatives targeted at disadvantaged children and primary schools, including the full cost of teachers' salaries, are funded by the State through the DES. Total expenditure on primary education amounted to some €1,407 million in 2000. While it would be useful to be able to disaggregate expenditure by class for the purposes of this report, such disaggregated statistics are not currently available.

The primary source of funding for childcare is the EOCP. This has been detailed above and the financial element is covered in 2.5.1 below.

2.5.1 DES FUNDED PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

As already indicated above, the DES main pre-school intervention is through the Early Start Programme. Each full Early Start unit receives a start-up grant of €11,428 (€5,714 for a half unit) for the purchase of a range of suitable equipment and €2,539 per annum (€1,524 for a half unit) for the purchase of materials/equipment. In addition, each full unit receives €1,905 per annum (€952 for a half unit) for the development of parental involvement. The Board of Management of the school also receives an annual capitation grant of €95.23 per Early Start participant to meet the day-to-day running costs of the unit. A total current per capita cost of the programme is not available due to the provision by both the DES and FÁS of teaching assistants to the programme. However, an estimate based on teacher salaries, capitation grants, Start up and annual grants towards teaching materials and equipment, and grants for the development of parental involvement places the minimum per capita cost at €2,330 in the school year 2000/2001.

The DES provided a total of €1.11 million in 2001 to Pre-Schools for Traveller Children and also provided funding of €203,979 to the Rutland Street Pre-School Project.

2.5.2 Core Funding for Primary Education

Teachers' salaries constitute the State's main financial support to primary education. In 2000, this amounted to €855 million. This level of expenditure reflects not only the level of teachers' salaries, but also the number of primary teachers which in the school year 2000/2001 was 22,850. Capitation grants constitute the second main form of government funding for primary schools and are intended to contribute towards the cost of such items as heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, general up-keep and general teaching aids required in the schools. The rate of this grant has been steadily increased in recent years and currently stands at a rate of €111.58 per pupil. Special enhanced capitation rates are paid in respect of children with special needs who attend special schools or special classes dedicated to children with particular special needs, although not to children with special needs who are in ordinary primary school classes. Higher capitation rates are also paid for children in schools with designated disadvantaged status and for children benefiting from the Giving Children an Even Break programme (see 1.2.6 above). This rate is currently €38.09 - €20.31 towards general running costs, €11.43 for classroom materials and equipment and €6.35 for home school liaison activities. In addition, grants are provided to primary schools for secretarial and caretaking services, with the rates currently standing at €102 per pupil.

Prior to the school year 2001/2002, primary schools were required to raise a local contribution towards their operating costs. While this traditionally amounted to at least 25% of the State grant, the local contribution has now been abolished with 100% of funding now arising from the State.

A grant scheme to enable minor works to be carried out to primary school properties is also in place. Payment is made every school year at a rate of €3,809 per school plus €12.70 per pupil. The scheme is intended to cover minor improvements to school buildings and grounds, replacement of mechanical and electrical services, the purchase of furniture and the provision of floor coverings and blinds.

2.5.3 ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

As indicated in 1.2.6 above, in addition to the core funding the DES provides additional support to schools with pupils encountering or at risk of educational disadvantage through a range of programmes. These supports take the form of enhanced capitation grants to designated schools for the purpose of assisting them in meeting management costs, purchasing teaching and learning materials and developing home/school links. Other supports include concessionary or ex-quota staffing.

Furthermore, over the past 4 years, the State has provided primary schools with a number of additional grants to assist them with the purchase of various resources and materials. They include:

- An annual physical education grant. This is made available to all primary schools. Schools designated as disadvantaged and schools in the rural phase of the Breaking the Cycle scheme receive an annual grant of €1,270 per school while all other schools will receive €635 per school.
- Schoolbooks for Needy Pupils Grant Scheme. These grants are paid to school principals to assist with the purchase of textbooks for children who come from needy homes. Funding provision for these grants in 2002 is in excess of €3.6 million.
- The School Transport Scheme was established in 1967 and it currently carries about 130,000 pupils each school day, 50,000 of which are primary school pupils. The total cost of the scheme is approximately €90 million per year, about 5% of which is covered by parental contributions.
- A grant for schools enrolling refugee children. Schools with between 3 and 8 such pupils receive grant assistance to the amount of €6,349 and schools with between 9 and 13 such pupils receive €9,523. This grant aid is designed to enable schools to take appropriate measures to improve the standard of English of the non-national pupils. Schools with 14 or more non-English speaking non-nationals are entitled to an additional full time temporary teacher.
- Grants available under the Schools IT Initiative. Funding of €108 million is being made available over three years (2001-2003) to build upon the achievements made in the Schools IT2000 Programme. Schools are empowered to allocate funds available for Information and Communications Technology within the context of their own IT planning process.
- Once-off grants such as a Library Grant, a Science Grant, an Equipment Grant for infant classes and a National Reading Initiative Grant.

2.5.4 Funding for Childcare

The main source of funding for childcare providers is the EOCP administered by the DJELR. As outlined above, the NDP allocated €317.4 million to the DJELR for childcare measures, with this subsequently augmented by an anti-inflationary package and the transfer of childcare schemes and their associated funding from other Government Departments to the DJELR. The total funding available to the Department is now €436.7 million for investment in childcare over the period 2000-2006. This is made up of a combination of exchequer funds (€119.93 million or 27% of the total) and European Funds (318.86 million of 73%).

As indicated above, the EOCP provides a range of grants and financial supports to existing and new providers of centre-based childcare facilities and organisations involved in childcare for capital, staffing and quality improvement. The level of grant provided varies as follows:

- Capital Grants for Community-Based/Not-For-Profit Groups: there is no upper limit to the amount that can be awarded here.
- Capital Grants for Self-Employed Childcare Providers: the maximum grant available is €50,790. In addition, 35% of the total cost of the project must be secured by the applicant from private sources.
- Staffing Grant for Community-Based/Not-For-Profit Groups: these are not made in respect of individual staff members but are awarded towards the overall staff costs of the facility. The maximum grant for facilities providing full-time services is €63,487 per annum and €31,743 per annum for sessional services.
- Sub-Measure 3/Quality Improvement Grants: there is no limit to the amount of funding available under this Sub-Measure and the amounts awarded vary in accordance with the quality of the application and the anticipated impact on quality.

At the end of August 2002, 1,533 grant applications had been approved for funding under the EOCP. In total, just over €152.9 million was allocated through these grants (see Annex 3 for further details).

Other smaller sources of funding for childcare providers include contributions by the DHC for facilities delivering services for children at risk due to family stress. These are delivered via the regional Health Boards. In 1999, approximately €4.9 million was made available in grants by the Health Boards, supporting roughly 7,000 in approximately 600 facilities. An additional €2.2 million was provided in 2000.

The DETE also provides funding for childcare providers via employment grants administered by the CEBs. In 2001, approximately €2.3 million has been made available through these grants. In addition, as outlined above, Community Employment supports roughly 300 childcare facilities through the provision of staff. In May 2001, FÁS estimated that approval had been given for 2,000 CE workers in childcare facilities at an average cost of €11,000 per place.

In 2002, the DELG made €2.5 million available to Local Authorities for projects associated with the provision of childcare facilities connected with Local Authority housing estates and other social housing projects.

Finally, the capital costs of constructing, refurbishing or extending a premises for the provision of childcare services are eligible for tax relief at 100% for the first year of operation.

2.5.5 Supports to Parents

The main child-related payment in Ireland is universal Child Benefit (see 1.2.9 above). The rate of Child Benefit was increased by over 50% in 2001 and by over 37% in 2002. These increases are part of a three year strategy to substantially increase child income support in real terms. Currently, the rates of payment are

€117.60 per month in respect of the first and second child and €147.30 per month in respect of the third and subsequent children. The final step in this programme is expected to raise these rates to €149 and €185 respectively in 2003. This will bring total expenditure on Child Benefit to an estimated €1.27 billion, up from approximately €0.6 billion in 2000. While undoubtedly contributing to childcare expenses in many households, it is also important to note that Child Benefit is also a key instrument in addressing child poverty. (DSFA, 2002, unpublished)

The other major payment related to early childhood education and care is Maternity Benefit which is payable to mothers for 18 weeks – 4 weeks prior to birth and 14 weeks following birth. Adoptive Benefit is paid on the same basis to women who have adopted a child. The Homemaker's scheme is also worth noting here. This allows men or women to give up work to care for a child aged under 12 years (or an incapacitated person aged over 12 years) and maintain a social insurance record for the purposes of qualifying for an Old Age (Contributory Pension). Time spent on this scheme is disregarded when assessing average annual social insurance payments that determine eligibility for this Pension. Prior to the introduction of this scheme in 1994 women in particular lost out in respect of such pensions due to time spent in child rearing.

In addition, other payments by the Department that are explicitly linked to people in receipt of social welfare payments target support at children at risk of educational disadvantage. The main scheme of relevance here is the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance designed to help low income families with the costs of school uniforms. The scheme is administered by the Health Boards as part of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme and, generally, Community Welfare Officers determine entitlement to this Allowance. The value of this Back to School payment currently stands at €80 per annum for each child aged 2 to 11. Covering both primary and second-level pupils, in 2001 the DSCFA spent just under €13 million on this allowance and made payments in respect of 143,029 children. (DSCFA, 2002)

Although primary education is provided for by the DES, a number of costs arise in attending schools, such as the costs of book and uniforms. A number of supports are available to families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage to help meet such costs. These include the DES School Books for Needy Pupils Grant Scheme outlined above in section 2.5.2.

In community-based care a number of places may be provided free of charge and fees tend to be very low in order to allow families experiencing poverty or disadvantage to access them. This is made possible, by-and-large, through State grants and subsidies. Parents experiencing disadvantage and seeking to return to education or the labour market may receive childcare supports under the various employment, training and adult education programmes aimed at increasing employability. In such cases, the DETE provide specific subsidies for childcare costs or, in some instances, make crèche facilities available. In addition, lone parents in receipt of a Lone Parent payment and in employment receive an additional top up payment to contribute to the costs of childcare in the absence of a partner.

Parents who use private sector childcare facilities or childminders are largely responsible for meeting the fees charged by the providers for these services. Had childcare fees remained static at 1999/2000 prices, they would now average approximately €83 per week per child for full-time care in centre-based provision. In a recent survey of their members the NCNA found that average costs of services in their centres ranged from €94 to €137 for children and between €107 and €145 per week for babies (usually defined as under 1 year) depending on location (NCNA, 2002). The only direct State payment to assist such parents is Child Benefit (see section 1.2.8 above). While intended to contribute to the overall cost of raising children, this substantial increases in Child Benefit in recent years have been closely connected with assisting parents meet the costs of childcare. At current levels, Child Benefit would pay for between 1 and 1.5 weeks of care per month.

3. POLICY CONCERNS

3.1 QUALITY

3.1.1 Conceptualising Quality: Indicators and Criteria

It would be true to say that the issue of quality in childcare and early education has been to the fore in recent policy debates in Ireland. Virtually all documents concerned with such policy and provision use ‘quality’ as an indicator of good rather than bad or poor services and the attainment of ‘quality’ is almost always embedded in statements relating to the provision or development of early childhood education and care. Informed by research and wide consultation exercises, some of the most important conceptualisations of quality are contained in the Report of the Forum on Early Childhood Education, the White Paper of Early Education and the National Childcare Strategy.

The Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (National Forum Secretariat, 1998) identified a range of quality indicators that can be grouped under five key areas. These are

- Child Indicators - developmentally appropriate programmes, child progress assessments, programme assessment and the size of the group;
- Staff Indicators - appropriately trained staff, appropriate pay and conditions, continuity of care and child staff ratios;
- Physical Environmental Indicators - health and safety standards, quality of space and physical resources;
- Social Indicators – affordability, accessibility and parental and community involvement;
- National Indicators – a national policy provision for regulation, provision and supervision, co-ordination of responsibility for services (p. 55-56).

These indicators are reflective of the work and articulated position of the European Commission Network on Childcare. The National Childcare Strategy, in which quality is a key concern, adheres to the work of this European Network and in line with this defines quality as a dynamic, continuous open-ended process that should be subject to regular review. The Strategy goes on to identify the key components of a

quality service that are closely related to the indicators outlined above. These key components deem a quality service to be one that:

- offers both appropriate care and play-based opportunities based on the age and stage of development of the child;
- provides a quality environment with appropriate equipment, materials, activities and interactions;
- has a high adult to child ratio;
- has suitably trained staff that are registered with the relevant lead agency;
- offers continuity of relationships with adults and other children;
- works in partnership with parents;
- listens to and gives due consideration to the views and wishes of the children;
- provides equal opportunities for all children attending as well as for staff;
- recognises and promotes the cultural needs of children;
- provides adequate remuneration for staff;
- provides opportunities and support for in-service training of staff;
- through a partnership approach with parents, links in with other community activities and services;
- positively asserts the value of diversity;
- is accessible for all (p. 49).

The National Childcare Strategy states that removing the obstacles to attaining these indicators, key amongst which are a lack of information and insecure funding, is central to the recommendations of Strategy. Nonetheless, in the work that informed the National Childcare Strategy, the National Forum of Early Childhood Education, and the White Paper on Early Childhood Education the need for a wide range of areas to be recognised and addressed in quality assurance was an issue of paramount importance.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education raises a number of important and universal concerns in respect of the concept of quality. These include the fact that quality means different things to different people and can be defined by children, parents, teachers or care workers. The White Paper also recognises that no one standard of quality can exist for all children in all types of services. Instead, the White Paper conceptualises quality as a set of core criteria to which services can progress and against which their progress can be measured. These include tangible criteria, such as staff-child ratios, space and equipment, as well as non-tangible criteria such as staff-child interaction and appropriate activities for the age and developmental stage of the child. In going on to identify a programme of work in developing quality standards in these less tangible areas, the White Paper focuses on curriculum and methodology, qualifications and training, staff retention and equipment and materials.

Progress on number of areas related to the quality indicators identified above has been made under a number of the areas of work outlined in this report. These include the introduction of the Pre-School Services Regulations (see 2.1.1), the development of an Early Childhood Learning Framework (see 2.3.3) and the development of a Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (see 2.2.1). In addition, the development of

new institutional structures, as promoted in the National Childcare Strategy and the White Paper, in itself marks progress towards a national policy framework and co-ordinated provision viewed as central to the development of quality services.

3.1.2 Measuring Quality

The measurement of quality and the regulation of services are closely related. In Ireland, quality is currently measured or regulated through the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 (see 2.1.1) and the Inspectorate of the DES (see 2.1.2). It is important here to remember that much of the work identified throughout Section 2 above is inherently concerned with quality measurement, control and improvement. In addition, further ongoing and proposed work will add considerably to this arena.

One of the measures proposed in the White Paper on Early Childhood Education concerns the development of minimum standards for some of the areas not covered by the Child Care (Pre-School) Regulation and the establishment of best practice in others. Meeting these standards will be obligatory for those receiving State funding for the provision of developmental/educational places. Non-State funded providers may voluntarily adopt these standards and apply for the Quality in Education (QE) Mark. The QE Mark or its equivalent is to be devised by the CECDE and will cover curricula, methodologies, staff qualifications and training. It is hoped that this development will lead to an increased recognition of the need for quality standards both to improve services and to guide parents in their choices. It was proposed that attaining of a quality standard would be based on inspection and evaluation visits.

Work on the development of quality standards is being progressed by the CECDE. The programme of work for the Centre proposes the development of a conceptual framework describing how children from birth to 6 years learn and identifying appropriate learning goals and objectives. Consultation with all relevant stakeholders will be a key aspect of this work. This framework will be developed into a set of guidelines that will aim to be adaptable enough for application across the diverse range of early years provision. These guidelines will be extensively piloted over a 15 to 18 month period.

In order that providers do not have to submit to two separate inspections, one from the Health Boards and one from the DES, the White Paper on Early Education proposed the development of a system of single inspections that would cover both the health and safety aspects of provision and the educational input. This would apply to all services outside the primary schools. The development of such a system will require significant time. In recognising this, the CECDE will undertake work to encourage compliance with quality standards in the interim. This will involve work on the development of the proposed inspection system and the provision of support to State-funded services seeking to meet new educational standards as they are phased in. The CECDE will also work to put in place a monitoring infrastructure.

The DES Inspectorate, in consultation with the education partners, is currently working on objectively defined evaluation and quality criteria for use in the evaluation of primary school, including the early education components of this. These criteria will help schools in conducting self-evaluations and assist the Inspectorate in external evaluations. The criteria will cover areas already addressed

by the Inspectorate, including curriculum and teaching methodologies, and are based on definitions and common understandings to be agreed between schools and the Inspectorate. A final draft of these is currently being prepared and will be circulated to teachers for final comments in autumn 2002. These will contribute to an increased awareness of the concept and measurement of quality services among schools.

Adult child ratios are a central factor that impact on quality. These ratios are known to have an impact on the quality of early years experience and outcomes, and are frequently one of the visible and discussed indicators of quality. The following are the ratios that apply to children in childcare and early education settings.

- **Centre-based Childcare Full-Day Services**
 - Babies (under 1 year): 1 care staff to every 3 babies
 - Toddlers (1-3 years): 1 care staff to every 6 children
 - Infants (3 – 6 years): 1 care staff to every 8 children

- **Centre-based Childcare Sessional Services**
 - Children aged 0 to 6 years: 1 care staff to 10 children

- **Primary School**
 - Ordinary Classes**
 - Infants (ages 4-6) 1 teacher to a maximum of 30 pupils

 - Classes in Disadvantaged Programmes**
 - Infants (ages 4-6) 1 teacher to 20 pupils

However, despite progress in recent years, DES figures show that a significant proportion of infant pupils are in classes above the recommended maximum size. Table 7 shows that in 2000/2001, 24,661 infant pupils, accounting for 24% of all such pupils, were in classes of 30 pupils or above. It is important to note that progress is being made in this area. The proportion of children in infant classes of 30 or more has fallen from 36.7% in 1996/1997. It is also encouraging to see that the current Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2002a) contains a commitment to *‘reduce the pupil / teacher ratio in our schools....which will ensure that the average size of classes for children under 9 will be below the international best-practice guideline of 20:1 (p.24).*

Table 7

Proportion of Pupils in Junior and Infant Classes by Class Size, School Year 2000/2001

	Class Size						Total
	0 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40+	
Junior Infants	17%	28%	37%	17.1%	1.9%	0%	100%
Senior Infants	14.5%	26.4%	34.2%	22.8%	2%	0.1%	100%
Total	15.7%	27.3%	34.8%	20.1%	2%	0.1%	100%
N	16,349	28,319	36,120	20,932	2,072	40	103,832

Source: Department of Education and Science, forthcoming 2002, Table 2.5.

3.1.3 Quality Initiatives Under the EOCP

While quality remains a national issue, as reflected in the various national policy documents, this is also an issue being addressed by organisations involved in the delivery of childcare services or their umbrella organisations. Under Sub-measure 3 of the EOCP 137 quality initiatives are being funded in August 2002. This includes

- funding for specific quality actions under the County Childcare Committees' Strategic Plans;
- the provision of development support for the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations;
- a number of nationally or regionally focussed innovative quality improvement initiatives. Here, a small sample of these initiatives is presented to highlight some of the ways in which quality is being addressed on a day-to-day basis.¹⁶

The IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation Quality Initiative holds that the biggest single indicator of a quality service is the ability of staff to reflect on how they work and to use this to effectively plan and implement their curriculum. For staff to become reflective practitioners, they must develop their understanding of how children learn and how they support children's strengths and interests. This then has implications for how they organise each dimension of the service. In supporting practitioners in this practice, this quality initiative provides intensive support to: (i) evaluate their services and implement quality improvement plans; (ii) develop a curriculum framework for each particular services and their clients; (iii) to become reflective practitioners through, observation, listening and reflection; (iv) to safeguard the child's right to play; and (v) to document their work and share this with families, funders and inspectors. The programme is based on an extensive review of relevant international research. Training and support is delivered through workshops that focus on a range of areas including values, aims and objectives of individual services, the physical educare environment, working with parents, interactions with children and staff and management. Participants are supported to develop action plans to improve quality in these areas. The further development of the work undertaken in these workshops and the implementation of action plans is supported through onsite support visits by Quality Officers.

The aim of the *FÁS/Barnardos Quality Assurance Programme* is to introduce the concept of self-assessed quality assurance in to FÁS childcare projects. This is organised as a three-staged process, based on the three basic elements of quality assurance systems - standards, assessment/monitoring and response mechanisms. The process involves a series of training days accompanied by an assessment/resource manual and ongoing support. The philosophy guiding the process is based on community development principles. The project is targeted at FÁS childcare projects. These differ from each other in many ways including the type of premises they operate from, training/experience of team members, numbers of children, indoor and outdoor activities, systems for recording, cleaning etc. Quality Assurance Programme so as to respect these differences. It allows for the identification of project specific standards, assessment of each projects own strengths and areas for improvement

¹⁶ The author would like to thank IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation, Barnardos and the Border Counties Childcare Network for providing materials and text used here to describe their quality initiatives.

(using the accompanying manual) and then returning for guidance on what is and how to make the next step.

Stage 1 – Standards

Participants are assisted in the development of standards for their individual projects. Training is delivered on each of the topics identified as key criteria for a quality service. These are Service Details, Aims and Objectives, Policy and Procedures, Management and Administration Systems, Planning, Monitoring and Reviewing Systems, Human Resources, Relationships and Communications, Child Centred Environment, Curriculum to Include Child Development and Play, Child Observation and Assessment Systems, Equal Opportunities, Accessibility, Parental, Community and Statutory Involvement, and Health and Safety.

Stage 2 – Assessment/Monitoring

Participants assess their own projects in situ with the aid of questionnaires included in the manual and ongoing telephone support. Participants return for a further five days training to review their completed assessments and identify elements of their projects which are working well and elements which require alteration or enhancement.

Stage 3 – Implementation/Response

Having identified areas for change in Stage 2, participants return for a further four days training to generate development plans, which will bring about that change. The final stage of training is followed by a site visit by the trainer(s) to consult with the project team.

The Border Counties Childcare Network - Quality Assurance Programme (BCCN QAP) aims to support the development of a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of high quality early years services in the border counties of Louth, Meath, Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan, Sligo and Leitrim. Based on research carried out in 1998, the programme has developed an efficient, effective, user-friendly, and consumer-led process of Quality Improvement. This involved the development of a two pronged approach based on the Service Evaluation System (checklists) and Performance Indicators of Good Practice (evidence gathering procedures). Assessment of quality is concerned with 6 key areas or units: premises; the learning environment; legislation and management, safety health and hygiene; partnership with parents; and, the pre-school curriculum. Support and Development workers from the County Childcare Committees and other relevant workers are issued with BCCN QAP Service Evaluation Systems for each of the 6 units and use these to work with all service providers. Participation by services in the QAP is voluntary. For those who join the programme the Support and Development workers continue to support and advise as the service providers gather the evidence to demonstrate how they are meeting each of the performance indicators of quality. Assessments are carried out at three levels: first, by an assessor from the BCCN Assessor Team; second, by the BCCN Quality Officer; and, third, by the accreditation board.

NCNA Centre of Excellence Award

NCNA members have always recognised and promoted the value of providing quality day care for each child in their care, based on the premise that high quality provision positively influences children's earliest experiences in day care and plays a vital role in their future development. Prior to the spring of 2002, the achievement of

excellence in day care in Ireland had not been formally recognised by an awards scheme. As part of the NCNA's commitment to its members, the organisation developed the Centre of Excellence Award. This mark of distinction acknowledges member services that are providing excellent standards of care for children throughout Ireland.

The Centre of Excellence Award has several criteria, which forms the basis of the Self Evaluation Profile (SEP). The SEP's enables members to assess their own services under the following headings:

- Activities and Programmes for Children
- Relationships in the Nursery
- Partnerships with Families
- Health, Safety and Hygiene
- Staff Conditions and Professional Development
- Physical Environment
- Food and Nutrition
- Management and Administration
- Implementation of Policies and Procedures
- Evaluation and Review of Nursery
-

This self-evaluation process takes approximately five months for participating members to complete.

Each member service returns a completed SEP for appraisal by the NCNA. This appraisal stage involves a validation process, in which the NCNA staff review each SEP received and arrange validation visits to the childcare services, enabling the NCNA to assess the services.

3.2 ACCESS

It is clear from the discussion of quality above that access to early childhood education and care services is seen as a quality issue. However, access is a multi-dimensional concept in itself and encompasses physical access as determined by the location and design of premises, financial access in terms of affordability, equality of access in terms of appropriate services for various groups of children, including children of different ages, religions, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and of different physical and intellectual capabilities.

3.2.1 Availability of Places: Supply and Demand

In many senses, access to childcare and education depends on the supply of, and demand for services. The first point to be made here is in respect of the right to such services. As stated above, under the Irish Constitution and the Education Act 1998 every child in the State is entitled to an education appropriate to their needs within the school system. Therefore, access to infant classes in primary schools is universal and the obligation of the State to provide access to appropriate education for children is clear. In relation to childcare, however, and to provision outside the education system, there are no established rights to provision. Access, therefore, remains highly market driven and is determined, at least in part, by the available supply of and demand for childcare places.

The most comprehensive data on supply and demand in respect of childcare is the National Childcare Census. Table 8 below shows the number of 0 – 6 year olds attending a childcare facility and the number on the waiting lists of these facilities. This clearly indicates the particular shortage of available places for babies aged under one year and the impact of primary school attendance at 4, 5 and 6 years. The high number of 3 to 6 year olds availing of childcare services is an indication of the prevalence of pre-school and play school provision in Ireland that primarily caters for children in the year(s) immediately before primary school. It should be noted here, however, that these figures relate to 1999/2000, before the provision of large scale funding under the EOCP.

Early Start has provided access to pre-school services and illustrated that there is a demand for such services in disadvantaged communities in particular. However, the number of places provided is limited. However, the framework document that supports the revised NAPS proposes the creation of a more widespread pre-school initiative and the expansion of early childhood education to all children in designated disadvantaged areas. (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2001).

Table 8

Number of Children Attending and on Waiting Lists for Centre-Based Childcare Services, 1999/2000

AGE	Children Attending	Children on Waiting List	Children on Waiting List as a Percentage of those Attending
Under 1 Year	1,471	1,137	77.3
1 to 3 Years	7,590	1,992	26.2
3 to 6 Years	23,065	4,313	18.7
Total Places	32,126	7,442	23.2

Source: ADM, forthcoming 2002 *The National Summary of the County Childcare Census 1999/2000*.

3.2.2 Location of Services

The issue of the location of services has a number of dimensions. Key among these in the Irish debate is the provision and location of services for children in disadvantaged areas, and, more broadly, the availability of suitable premises. It is important in the first instance to acknowledge the existence of high quality early years services in disadvantaged urban and rural areas, including those provided under Early Start and those provided by private and community-based not-for-profit organisations. However, issues remain and the National Childcare Strategy clearly recognised that there are substantively different issues arising in urban, primarily disadvantaged, areas and rural areas. In addition, many of these issues also arose in an evaluation of the Community Support Childcare Initiative of the previous EOCP that ran from 1998 to 2000. (ADM, 2002)

In urban disadvantaged areas, the pertinent issues include the dependence on voluntary services that are largely under resourced, the inability of these services to attract and retain trained staff, a reliance on CE staff, poor physical facilities and premises and the difficulty experienced by parents in meeting even minimal childcare costs. In rural areas, problems arise due to low population densities and scattered populations. In many cases this makes typical centre-based care unsuitable. Additional issues concerning limited public transport, the fragmented nature of many services in rural areas, high staff costs due to the existence of small services and shortage of appropriate premises also impact substantially on childcare provision in rural areas. In both urban disadvantaged and rural situations, these issues become even more significant when addressing questions of access for specific groups of children such as those with physical and intellectual disabilities or from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The National Childcare Strategy identifies measures and supports necessary to address these problems including information strategies and suitably flexible training provision for staff. Ultimately, the development of appropriate strategies is left to the County/City Childcare Committees, the membership of which is seen as vested with the necessary local knowledge to develop measures tailored to the needs of their own areas.

The issues raised in the National Childcare Strategy are also pertinent to access to primary schools. Many primary schools in disadvantaged urban areas experience difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers and in meeting the needs of disadvantaged children. Similar staffing problems are experienced in rural areas due to their physical isolation. In addition, in rural areas, dwindling populations result in children having to travel and be transported over long distances, adding another dimension to the question of access and quality of education experience. The DES programmes aimed at addressing educational disadvantage outlined in section 1.2.6 above are working to counter some of these difficulties.

Although not representative of all childcare facilities the county and regional location of childcare facilities that have secured funding under the EOCP is available. This is included in the information presented in Annex 3 below.

A concern that arises in both urban and rural areas is the recognised shortage of suitable premises for pre-school and after-school provision. One way in which this could be addressed is through making the spare capacity in primary schools (arising due to falling school enrolments by virtue of falling fertility rates) available for the delivery of pre-school and out-of-school care and education. This approach, recommended by both the Commission on the Family and the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, has a number of advantages. These include the establishment of a close relationship between pre-school and school services, ease of transition for children between these services and the improved quality of premises in which pre-school and out-of-school services are delivered. Concerns have been expressed about the longer term effects of placing very young children in classroom and school environments. It has also been suggested that should negative effects arise, these can be minimised or eradicated by locating pre-school services in classrooms not used by primary school classes and by creating a physical environment in these that is substantially different to primary classrooms. The Early Start Programme has taken this approach. The use of schools as premises for after-schools provision comes with similar caveats that children should not remain in the same classroom for in-school

and out-of-school hours and that there should be a clear shift in the type of activities pursued so that out-of-school activities do not simply represent an extension of the school day and year.

3.2.3 Affordability

In policy debates in Ireland the issue of affordability is closely linked to quality, access and equal participation in early childhood education and care. Affordability is generally only discussed in relation to pre-school provision in Ireland due to the universal availability of free primary education. However, as is illustrated in section 2.5.4 above, parents still incur costs in relation to books, uniforms, transport to and from school, etc. The significance of these costs will be relative to the economic position of families but for low income families they may be considerable and a number of supports are available to help them meet these costs.

Affordable childcare is like many other areas to which the concept of affordability is attached. These, by-and-large, result in general statements in respect of an average cost for a typical service. However, in a situation such as Ireland's, where the supply of and demand for childcare is predominantly market-led and there is no universal or widespread State provision, affordability in childcare as in all such areas is a relative concept and will depend on the financial position of individual families. The difficulty of determining a definition of affordability in such circumstances is reflected in the lack of attention paid to this area in the various policy documents. While these contain assertions of affordability as a key aspect of quality and access, none has determined what the term means either in real terms or as a proportion of family income.

3.2.4 Equality of Access: Reflecting Diversity

The need for children of all religious denominations, physical and intellectual abilities and from varying socio-economic backgrounds to have access to appropriate early years care and education is widely accepted among policy makers and providers of such services. In addition to having its own indigenous ethnic group in the Traveller Community, Ireland is now becoming an increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-racial society through immigration from a range of countries.

This cultural and racial diversity is a challenge to the providers of early years care and education services. It is reassuring to note that the National Childcare Census shows that over three-quarters of facilities (78%) included in the Census claim to operate an equal opportunities policy. Less encouraging, and perhaps more realistic in terms of practice, is the finding that less than one quarter (24%) have a written policy on equal opportunities. As indicated above, in relation to pre-school and out-of-school provision, the Advisory Group to the NCCC is concerned with the issues of equality and diversity and is commissioning the design of guidelines on these issues for use by childcare providers and parents of children using childcare services. The DES supported Pre-Schools for Traveller Children, Early Start, special programmes to support children at risk of educational disadvantage, provisions for non-national children in primary schools and services for children with special needs are all part of an overall policy to cater for children with diverse needs and from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the INTO has produced and widely disseminated its *Intercultural Guidelines for Schools: Valuing Difference, Combating Racism, Promoting Inclusiveness and Equality* (INTO, undated). Produced in English and

Irish, these cover areas such as enrolment policy, inclusive strategies for parents, whole school and classroom guidelines, bilingualism in the classroom and dealing with racist incidents.

However, this is an area in which much remains to be done. In particular, recognising the ability of children to recognise and deal with diversity is an issue of some concern. Adults, including many of those involved in the provision of early childhood education and care, frequently do not realise that children are not insensitive to such issues. This is captured by the following quote that appears in a recent report entitled *Éist – Respecting Diversity in Early Childhood Care, Education and Training* (Pavée Point, 2001).

‘I treat all children the same in my group; children accept everyone and see no difference. Why can’t we leave well enough alone and not burden children with all this stuff about difference.’ Anonymous

This report goes on to make recommendations targeted at the Government, at training, accrediting and certification bodies and at providers of early childhood education and care services and will be instrumental in informing the work of the Advisory Group to the NCCC. It is clear, however, that there is a need and a demand for specific training to help providers cope with the increasingly common issue of diversity. A diversity training course has been developed as part of the *Éist* project in Pavée Point and this will be included in the Degree course in Early Childhood Care and Education in DIT in the academic year 2002/2003. This pilot course consists of ten training sessions in which students will be encouraged to explore their attitudes, assumptions, experiences and feelings regarding diversity. There are five themes that will shape the course (i) an introduction to the concepts of diversity and equality; (ii) personal identity and group identity; (iii) the value of policies and their implementation; (iv) approaches to diversity education and the anti-bias approach; and (v) evaluation and reflection.

An important development in this area is the proposed work programme of the CECDE. One of the functions of the CECDE is to co-ordinate and enhance provision for disadvantaged children and children with special needs. The Centre has taken a wide interpretation of this function and includes consideration of inequalities, such as those based on gender or ethnicity, which result in educational disadvantage. The Centre proposes to undertake an audit of all existing provision relating to disadvantage and special needs and use this to consider how existing provision could be improved or extended and to identify innovative means by which gaps in provision can be filled. In addition, the CECDE sees an implementation role for itself in these innovative measures. All of this work will be undertaken in consultation with relevant structures and stakeholders, including parents.

3.3 CO-ORDINATION

3.3.1 Co-ordination Structures

As indicated in section 3.1.1 above, a co-ordinated national strategy on early childhood education and care, as well as co-ordinated services, are considered to be key aspects of a high quality system of provision. In Ireland, there are a number of

structures specifically concerned with the co-ordination of services. These have been identified in section 1.2.7 above. In relation to childcare, the main structures are

- the Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Group - this aims to co-ordinate relevant provision and policy across Government Departments and Agencies;
- the Childcare Directorate of the DJELR – this draws together the work of the DJELR in their roles as the implementing agent for the childcare measures under the NDP, primarily the EOCP, and their function as the chair of the NCCC;
- the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee – this aims to co-ordinate the measures being undertaken to implement the National Childcare Strategy and acts as a support to the County/City Childcare Committees;
- the County/City Childcare Committees – these are responsible for the co-ordination of local childcare services.

The main co-ordination structures in the education field are:

- the DES – this is responsible for the co-ordination of all educational measures nationally and is represented on the Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Group identified above. Its remit covers but is obviously not exclusive to early childhood education;
- the CECDE, which has responsibility for co-ordinating early education provision, including parental involvement, with a particular emphasis on children experiencing disadvantage and those with special needs.

Other relevant co-ordinating structures include the NCO, which is responsible for the implementation of the National Children’s Strategy and the National Children’s Advisory Council.

3.3.2 Effective Co-ordination: Progress and Challenges

On a positive note, it must be recognised that there has been very substantial progress made in relation to co-ordination in recent years. This is particularly the case in relation to childcare policy and services. Prior to the National Childcare Strategy, there was relatively little State involvement in this area. This applied to services on the ground as well as management and policy structures. In less than 4 years this situation has changed dramatically to one where there is significant State investment in this area, primarily through the EOCP, the creation and operation of national and local co-ordinating structures, as well as a consolidation of initiatives under the auspices of the DJELR.

A brief survey of the list of co-ordinating structures listed above may suggest that the co-ordinating structures are themselves in need of co-ordination. In the interviews with key actors to inform this report, the issue of co-ordination was the one raised most frequently and with the greatest sense of frustration. In the main, the issues raised related to a perceived lack of co-ordination between the main structures and initiatives concerned with ‘childcare’ on the one hand and ‘education’ on the other. In essence, while the actors in these two sectors profess to a philosophy of a continuum of child development in which care and education are inseparable, essentially these are separated into ‘out-of-school’ childcare according to the

definition applied by the National Childcare Strategy and primarily now under the remit of the DJELR, and 'in school' provision, primarily the services funded, managed and administered by the DES. To further add to the picture, the NCO was ascribed the role of *ensuring inter-departmental co-operation and the integration of activities on children's issues*. (Government of Ireland, 2000, p.85) Presumably this includes early childhood education and childcare services.

The need for still greater co-ordination and for the articulation of how this is to be achieved is clear. One example of this is in relation to the proposed work of the CECDE in respect of establishing quality standards. As of yet, it remains somewhat unclear how these will relate to and interface with the Child Care (Pre-School) Regulations 1996 and (Amendment) 1997. The recent Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2002a) that to '*introduce a national early-education, training, support and certification system and expand state-funded early-education places. Priority will be given to a new national system of funded early-education for children with intellectual disabilities and children in areas of concentrated disadvantage*' (p.24). Implementation of this aspect of the Programme for Government raises the issues and challenges of co-ordination with existing provision.

A number of co-ordination structures have been suggested in the various policy documents that underpin early childhood education and care. In relation to childcare provision, almost all of the structures proposed in the National Childcare Strategy are now in place. With regard to early education, both the Report of the National Forum for Early Education and the White Paper which followed on from this identify potential co-ordination structures. In the Forum discussions, a number of options were considered, but these centred on the creation of central Early Years Development Unit that would have responsibility for the co-ordination of all services. While the establishment of such a Unit received unanimous support its location within the government structures was less easily resolved. Possible locations considered were the Department of the Taoiseach, the DES and the DHC. The difficulties of establishing and ensuring the effective operation of the Unit was not overlooked and it was suggested that, if created, its operations should be reviewed after 3 years.

In its consideration of co-ordination structures, the White Paper on Early Education recommended the creation of two structures. The first is an inter-departmental committee, comprised of the DES, the DJELR, the DHC, the DSFA and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, as well as the relevant agencies that act on behalf of these departments, including the Health Boards. The purpose of this committee was seen to be the co-ordination of policy and provision at a high level. The second structure proposed was an advisory expert group, comprised of representatives of parents, providers of services, trainers, researchers, academics, staff organisations, national early childhood organisations, relevant Government Departments and agencies and other interested parties. The overall role of this group was seen as promoting co-ordination and understanding between the various stakeholders in order to minimise duplication and overlap of effort. More specifically, it was anticipated that this group would provide advice to the proposed Early Years Development Unit and the Early Childhood Education Agency, evaluate and select research and development projects, oversee the evaluation and inspection function of the Early Childhood Education Agency and assist in the development of early childhood curricula and methodologies.

Given recent developments and the creation of a number of agencies and structures concerned with co-ordination another possibility that might be considered here is the creation of a co-ordination mechanism that would draw on the experience and work of the CECDE, the NCO and the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee. Such an approach would allow for the combination of early education expertise, childcare expertise and the location of this within a broader framework of children's lives.

4. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

There are two main sources of data available on early childhood education and care. These are administrative data that arise from the management and administration of various services and programmes and which is primarily held by Government Departments or agencies, and data arising from research and evaluation studies.

4.1 Administrative Data

Most frequently, the core function of administrative data collected by statutory and other bodies is the planning, administration and management of services and financial management. Nonetheless, much of this data has been drawn on for research, monitoring and evaluation purposes.

The DES is clearly one of the main sources of administrative data on early childhood education and care. Data is regularly maintained by the Department on staffing, pupils and funding in relation to their services. Much of this data appears in the annual statistical reports of the DES. The following are examples of the data reported in relation to pre-school and primary education:

- the number of schools, pupils, teachers and childcare assistants in Early Start programmes by county;
- the number of pupils in primary schools by age and gender;
- the number of pupils by age and grade by type of school (ordinary primary school, special schools and private primary schools);
- the number of new entrants to ordinary classes and the origin of these (previously not at school, entrants from Early Start, entrants from other national schools within the State, entrants from schools in Northern Ireland, entrants from schools outside Ireland);
- a statement of annual expenditure of public funds on primary education.

It is noteworthy in the context of administrative data that no central primary pupil database currently exists, as is the case for second-level pupils through which the participation of students can be tracked using their Personal Public Services Number (Corrigan, forthcoming 2002). Consideration is being given to the creation of a new primary pupil database in conjunction with the tighter monitoring of participation and absenteeism under the Education Welfare Act, 2000.

Central administrative data on childcare is predominantly held in relation to the EOCP. This is collected and managed by ADM on behalf of the DJELR as part of their Technical Assistance remit. The primary function of the data collected is the

management and monitoring of expenditure and financial reporting to the Department of Finance. Examples of the data collected and included on the ADM database include:

- the number of applications received, approved and declined,
- the amount of funding awarded to each approved applicant,
- the location (county) of each applicant and approved grant;
- the type of grant awarded (capital, staff or quality development);
- the number and type of new employment posts created and maintained;
- the number and type of childcare places created and maintained;
- expenditure by measure.

This information is essential to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the EOCP and will be central to consideration of the programme in the forthcoming ESF Mid-Term review of the NDP.

The Health Boards maintain data on the number of childcare facilities notified to them, inspections carried out and the outcome of these inspections, but this data is not regularly collated on a national basis. In order to determine the number of facilities notified, the number of inspections carried out and their outcomes at a national level, each of the 10 Health Boards must be contacted separately.

The DHC and the Health Boards have identified the need to develop and improve management information to facilitate the provision of accurate and timely information in the child care area. Chief Executive Officers of the Health Boards have recently begun to develop of an agreed suite of Performance Indicators for each of the care group areas. Among the Performance Indicators for Child Care are (i) the number of operational pre-school centres, which were notified in accordance with the Pre-school Regulations 1996 and (ii) the percentage of operational pre-school centres, which were notified in accordance with the Pre-School Regulations 1996 and were inspected in accordance with the Regulations. Once a system for the regular reporting on these indicators is in place in each of the Health Boards, the collation of data at national level should be more easily achieved. In addition, a major review of child care information is currently reaching conclusion and is likely to recommend that the DHC and Health Boards conjointly commission the development of a single national child care information system, which defines the core operational requirements for child care and the management information to be derived from those requirements. If such an information system is developed it will include information on pre-school services.

4.2 Research and Evaluation Studies

There are a number of major research projects have been undertaken or are ongoing that are of significance in this area. Some of these have been referred to above and include the National Childcare Census undertaken by ADM on behalf of the DJELR and the first evaluation of Early Start. Also, some of the structures identified above have burgeoning research programmes, as in the case of the Educational Disadvantage Committee, which will contribute to our knowledge. Research by post-graduate students in a number of third-level colleges including the DIT, the Early Years Unit of the Department of Education in University College Cork and the various teacher training colleges are also a valuable source of research material.

In addition, evaluation is an inherent component of the work of other structures and this has the capacity to increase greatly our knowledge and understanding of the working of these structures. A particular case in point here is the County/City Childcare Committees, which are charged with the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their work. Finally, Government Departments conduct or commission evaluations of many of their programmes and schemes. Relevant examples here include the evaluation of Early Start and the evaluation of a number of Pre-Schools for Traveller Children.

Research and evaluation also forms a key element of the work of many early childhood education and care projects and organisations. Some of this work, particularly in the area of evaluation, has been undertaken in line with funding requirements. At present, for example, each project funded under the EOCP completes an annual evaluative questionnaire for analysis by ADM. This is in addition to ongoing monitoring and reporting requirements. Many organisations have also conducted more detailed evaluations of their projects and services. For example, Barnardos have undertaken and published an evaluation of their work and services in the Dun Laoghaire and Loughlinstown/Ballybrack areas of Dublin. (Barnardos, 2000a) This evaluation, which involved interviews and group discussions with relevant Barnardos staff, the children attending the services, parents, support agencies and members of the local community. It also involved observation of the activities and documentary analysis. In addition, Barnardos also commissioned a broader evaluation of their early years services, based on a representative sample of their services. This focused on issues such as the structure of the services, their curriculum, resources, user profiles, staff profiles and training needs. (Centre for Social and Educational Research, 2000) Another example is that of County Wexford Partnership, which commissioned an evaluation of their Childcare Programme 1996-1999 in order to assess the impact of this programme and to inform the Strategic Plan of the Wexford County Childcare Committee. This evaluation involved interviews with the Childcare Sub-Committee and Childcare network, childcare providers, parents and other relevant agencies. (County Wexford Partnership, 2000)

There are now a number of bodies in Ireland that are specifically concerned with research and evaluation in respect of early childhood education and care. For some, this is their sole area of research and evaluation activities, while others locate their work in the wider context of social, economic and educational research.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Government of Ireland, 1999c) clearly recognises the need for policy and provision that is underpinned by research and the importance of evaluation in determining and improving the effectiveness of these in meeting the needs of children. Much of the research and evaluation work highlighted in the White Paper now falls within the remit of the CECDE. While there is a research component to all areas of its work, the Centre will also develop a programme of relevant research. This research will focus on identifying best practice in curriculum, teaching methodologies and parental involvement and longitudinal studies that examine long-term impact of early education interventions, with a particular emphasis on the experience of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs. In its first year of operation (2002/2003), the

CECDE plans to carry out a comprehensive review of relevant national and international research with a view to establishing where significant gaps in this lie. Following this, the Centre will design a research programme aimed at filling at least some of these gaps.

The Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER)

The Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) was established in 1997. Located in the Dublin Institute of Technology, the CSER is an independent research and policy analysis body carrying out applied social research studies and evaluations. The Centre has three research units: the Families Research Unit; the Early Childhood Care and Education Research Unit and the Residential Child Care and Juvenile Justice Research Unit. In addition, projects dealing with transversal themes are also undertaken from time to time. The Centre has links with a range of international bodies, European academic institutions and national research centres, third-level institutions and voluntary organisations.

The work of the Early Childhood Care and Education Research Unit is of particular significance here. One key area of the work of this Centre is the ongoing International Association for the Evaluation of Early Education Achievement (IEA) Pre-primary project. This is a cross-national study that examines education and care in the pre-primary years, the transition into formal education and the experience of the early years of school. Starting from a position where there was little or no information on these areas, the study has yielded valuable information on the development of Irish children in these early years (see Hayes and O'Flaherty, (1997), and Hayes and Kernan (2001)). The CSER has also conducted a number of evaluations of childcare provision in a number of local areas, including Tallaght (Dublin) and Loch Gorman (Wexford). This Unit is responsible for drawing together the ADM National Childcare Census on the basis of county reports and also for the OMNA project, which has prepared the Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector on behalf of the NCCC.

The Education Research Centre (ERC)

The Education Research Centre (ERC) is located in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Established in 1966, the ERC has been involved in many national international research and evaluation projects. Some of the areas involved have been:

- programme evaluations, including that of Early Start,
- educational policy, including that relevant to early education;
- national assessments of educational achievement
- the functioning of the education system
- research in curriculum areas (e.g., reading)
- educational disadvantage.

The current programme of work includes a number of projects that are of particular relevance here, including an evaluation of the Breaking the Cycle Programme, a review of the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme and the further evaluation of Early Start. The ERC has been involved in a major survey of all primary schools in Ireland in order to establish the number of disadvantaged pupils in each. This survey was instrumental in developing the Giving Children an Even Break programme of the DES. All primary schools were requested to participate in a comprehensive survey

that was designed to identify the level of concentration in each school of pupils with characteristics that are associated with educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Approximately 75% of schools responded, making this the most comprehensive survey of primary schools available.

The Quarterly National Household Survey: Module on Childcare

The Quarterly National Household Survey replaced Ireland's National Labour Force Survey in September 1997. Based on a total sample of 39,000 households in each quarter, data are collected by interviewers and are entered directly onto laptop computers. The principal purpose of the QNHS is to collect up-to-date information on the labour force.

However, the QNHS also carries occasional or regular additional modules covering a range of supplementary issues. In September 2002, the QNHS will contain such an occasional module on childcare. Distinguishing between pre-school children and children attending primary school, this module will collect information on the types and combination of childcare arrangements used during the day and school term, during school holidays and after-school hours, the number of hours spent in care, the main reason why parents are availing of childcare, distance to the childcare service and principal means of transport there, the cost of such services, the preferred type of childcare and whether or not this is currently available. A copy of the Childcare Module is contained in Annex 6.

This module will provide valuable and up-to-date information on a number of issues central to the provision of childcare services and address a number of gaps in current knowledge. In addition, as it is collected as part of the QNHS, this information can be cross-tabulated with labour market information that will increase the depth of our knowledge in how these two facets of life are related. To be carried in the September – November 2002 quarter, results from this module can be expected in mid-2003.

Research and Evaluation under the EOCP

ADM have commissioned a review of the beneficiaries of grants to Small Scale Private Childcare Providers funded under the EOCP in 2000 – 2001. The terms of reference for this review states the following aims to:

- document the impact, progress and experience of the first round EOCP beneficiaries;
- identify benefits to children/families using the services provided by projects;
- record the number of childcare places (full and sessional), total capacity of all projects and the number of additional places as a result of this funding;
- document the employment and training opportunities created directly (number of staff employed by projects);
- document the employment and training opportunities created indirectly (parents returning to work/education due to crèche facilities being available);
- document (via a case study overview) the variety of childcare models funded, e.g. new/existing/upgrade, urban/rural;
- comment on the value for money emanating from the investment;
- review the differentials in projected project costs and actual project costs;
- recommend any policy implications which could impact on future development of the EOCP;

- make recommendations on the future development of the EOCP in terms of administrative procedures.

This review is now underway and it is expected to be completed in early 2003.

The NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit has responsibility for the evaluation of activity and expenditure under the various Operational Programmes of the NDP, including the Human Resources Operation Programme, which includes early education, and the two Regional Operation Programmes under which the EOCP is funded. At present, this Unit has drafted terms of reference for the evaluation of these Operational Programmes. The relevant monitoring committees will discuss these in September 2002. Assuming their approval, evaluation of these Operational Programmes will commence before the end of the year.

In addition, the Unit is undertaking an evaluation of the EOCP. According to the agreed terms of reference for this evaluation, its overall aim is to determine *whether the Childcare Programme is likely to achieve the objective of increasing both the quantity and quality of childcare places and support greater social inclusion by facilitating women and men to participate in/return to, education, training and employment*. The objectives of this evaluation are to establish:

- how the Childcare Programme is progressing and whether any adjustments are needed to ensure its objectives are fulfilled;
- more specifically, is the Programme meeting the key objectives of:
 - increasing the number and the quality of childcare facilities and places;
 - addressing staffing issues with a particular focus on increasing the number of trained staff, and up-skilling existing staff, in the childcare sector;
 - promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion;
 - improving the quality of childcare provision.
- is the Programme being managed and delivered in an efficient and effective way?

The evaluation is being carried out by staff of the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit and overseen by the NDP/CSF Evaluation Steering Committee. It involves desk research, a survey of a sample of funded projects, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in programme management and delivery and focus groups. It is anticipated that the evaluation will be complete by April 2003.

Research under the National Children's Strategy

One of the goals of the National Children's Strategy is that *Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and effectiveness of services*. (Government of Ireland, 2000), p38) Under this goal, several research studies are planned. Two of the most significant of these are the Longitudinal Study on Children and the State of the Nation's Children Report.

The National Children's Strategy and the Report of the Commission on the Family both proposed a longitudinal study of children in Ireland. In April 2002, the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Minister for Children announced the decision of the Government to establish Ireland's first long-term study of children

growing up in this country. This study will be jointly managed by the National Children's Office and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, and is a key mechanism in implementing the second goal of the National Children's Strategy that children's lives will be better understood..

The study will monitor the development of 18,000 children from different backgrounds from two age cohorts. It will follow 10,000 children from birth and 8,000 from nine years to adulthood, yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives. It will seek to identify the circumstances which allow children to thrive and those which hinder children's development. Information on three main areas will be collected in the course of this study: (i) social, economic and demographics, (ii) education and psychology and (iii) health. By looking at factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families the study will contribute to formulation of policy and the design of services for children and their families.

A consortium of 117 experts from 20 different organisations produced a design for the study. Preparations for a request for tender are currently underway and it is anticipated that this will be issued in autumn 2002. It is expected that the contract will be awarded before the end of 2002 with a 12 to 18 month lead-in period before the study is fully operational. The Government has allocated €1.27 million to the study in 2002 to cover the start up costs of the study.

The State of the Nation's Children Report will be produced on a bi-annual basis and will provide a regularly updated and easily accessible statement on children's well being as this is reflected in a number of indicators. These indicators of child wellbeing will relate to the three national goals of the Children's Strategy – Children will have a voice, children's lives will be better understood and children will receive quality supports and services. Other work, including an EU wide feasibility study on the development of a system for sharing information on an inter-agency basis to support children in crisis will be drawn on in the development of an appropriate set of child wellbeing indicators for Ireland. International examples of data, such as that of the UNICEF, WHO and Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, will also inform this work. The work will also pay due attention to the goals on combating child poverty identified in the NAPS. Work on these indicators and the first State of the Nations' Children Report has not yet begun.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

The issues of early childhood education and care have been central concerns of many organisations in Ireland for many years, most particularly those concerned with the needs and rights of children and women. It is, however, only in more recent years that these issues have come to the fore of national policy discussion and provision. This is particularly true of childcare. The factors encouraging this have been outlined earlier, and various weights can be, and have been attributed to these. Whatever the principal driving forces, it is important to acknowledge that much progress has been made in this area in recent years. Again, this is particularly the case in relation to non-school based early education and care. This sector has moved from being unco-

ordinated and virtually unfunded by the State to one that has inter-connected structures to support its development at various levels and very considerable State funding through the NDP. In relation to early school-based education much has also been achieved in recent years with the introduction of Early Start and a range of primary school schemes targeted at those children most vulnerable to educational disadvantage and the problems that this brings in later life. These developments have been made possible due to the commitment and vision of those involved.

This report aims to provide an overview of the context and background to early childhood education and care in Ireland, the main policies in this area, the principal types of provision and the policy concerns arising. Throughout, a number of issues have been flagged. These are returned to here as it is considered that they warrant further comment. It is without doubt that not all of the relevant issues will be addressed, and the intention is not to be exhaustive in this regard. To do so would require significantly more analysis than is possible here. However, the following are a number of issues and concerns that arise in the early childhood education and care arena in Ireland.

The Focus of Early Childhood Education and Care

Having acknowledged progress in recent years, it is important to highlight some of the issues that remain outstanding in the early childhood education and care arena in Ireland. One such issue relates to the different rationales underlying State provision in these areas: combating educational disadvantage, promoting social inclusion and facilitating labour force participation by parents, and mothers in particular.

While a number of factors have influenced the increased concern with childcare, primary among them has been the growing economy and its adherent demand for female labour. This has generated an unprecedented demand for early childhood education and care services. Recognition of this is clearly stated in the National Childcare Strategy. While the EOCP seeks to develop high quality provision and ensure that the needs of children are paramount, to promote greater gender equality and to attain greater social inclusion, it also emphasizes the provision of services for parents trying to reconcile work and family life and the achievement of gender equality in the labour market. The other main source of support to this sector has been through the Community Employment Programme aimed at easing the transition to employment for the long-term unemployed. In this regard, while the development of early childhood services may well be critical in addressing the needs of the labour market and promoting participation, it is unlikely that such provision alone will address the many and diverse needs of those experiencing labour market disadvantage and long-term unemployment.

Where the labour market needs of parents are referenced in terms of early childhood care and education, it is not uncommon to find a negative tone. However, a growing economy, increased employment, and greater gender equality in the work force are, generally, positive developments in a society. In Ireland, they have coincided and provided a context for the development of quality early childcare and education services that work to the benefit of children. The contribution of the EOCP to this development is considerable as it is through this Programme that many of the recommendations of the National Childcare Strategy have been implemented and substantial financial support has been channelled to providers. Using a partnership

approach that has built on existing provision and tapped into existing experience and expertise, this Programme has contributed significantly to the development of the childcare sector.

The aims and immediate policy context of early education services in the school system are often articulated in terms of the education and development of the child in order to allow them to participate fully in their communities and society. Specific measures to combat educational disadvantage have been introduced, which also have a social inclusion function.

These different approaches and underlying rationales have implications for the development of co-ordinated policies and services and this issue is returned to below. It is important here to also note the absence of universal pre-school provision in Ireland. This key issue was debated in the policy fora identified above, with the government of the day making a decision that the needs of the most vulnerable should be given priority through targeted interventions. However, the debate on universal provision is now beginning to re-emerge in Ireland in the context of the debate on the rights of the child.

Continuum of Education and Care

It has already been stated above that almost every policy document concerning early childhood education and care in Ireland professes a view that care and education cannot be separated but must be viewed as part of a learning continuum that starts at birth. Despite this, in looking at education and care in Ireland, it is difficult not to conclude that these two concepts separate into the two main categories identified earlier in this report: childcare on the one hand and early education on the other. In essence, this is an administrative divide and separates provision into non-school based childcare and school-based early education, even though childcare services embrace education components, and early school-based education provides elements of care.

In the course of meetings to inform this report this administrative separation was referred to repeatedly and was often seen as the result of so-called ‘turf wars’ or competition over the control of resources or policy areas. However, this does not appear to be the case. Instead, there appears to be a genuine lack of understanding of how and where ‘care’ and ‘education’ overlap, a lack of opportunities to discuss this and the absence of clear channels of communication between those responsible for relevant policies and programmes. This issue was also clearly identified in discussions relating to co-ordination where there is seen to be little correspondence between the principal policy actors in the ‘care’ and ‘education’ sectors, despite the clear overlap of care and education in provision on the ground.

The historical context is vital here. School-based early education provision in the form of infant classes has existed for many years and has long established policy development, management and administration structures. Childcare on the other hand has come to the fore only in recent years and is at the stage of developing as a national sector and putting in place national and local structures for the co-ordination and management of policy and delivery of services. It will take time for these two systems to come to an accommodation of each other that serves the integrated needs of children, parents and society more generally. On a positive note, however, a number of moves were identified as addressing this gap on the ground if not in the

policy echelons. These include the emergence of accredited courses that emphasise a combination of childcare and education that will better enable workers to address the care, education and developmental needs of young children.

Quality, Access and Co-ordination

Quality, access and co-ordination are intrinsically linked and, in many cases, it is difficult to clearly separate the issues arising in each area. However, the relationship between these three areas is one of ongoing tensions such as that between accessibility in terms of affordability and quality as defined by the Child Care (Pre-School) Regulations. Predominantly, these issues tend to be discussed from the perspective of parents. However, they should also be considered from the provider's perspective. For parents, the issues of affordability, access and quality are not separate. The relationship between these issues is not a simple linear one where high cost services lead to ready access (defined in either physical or other terms) and high quality. Due to the rapid increases in the demand for services and the time-lag experienced in meeting these demands due to the low base position from which Ireland started in the mid-1990s, the relationship tends to be one of high cost, low accessibility and variable quality.

From the provider's perspective, the relationship between these is equally if not more complex. In attempting to meet Pre-School Services Regulations, many have to update their facilities at a minimum and in some cases undertake renovations and refurbishments. The cost of this alone may be sufficient to result in a price increase to parents. The demands for additional staff required by expansion also impacts on quality and linked to this is a need for innovative approaches to training. In addition, many providers are now concerned with quality beyond the Child Care (Pre-School) Regulation in terms of employing trained staff, maintaining voluntary standards in respect of materials, equipment, etc. Again, adherence to these quality standards may result in price increases that parents may be unwilling or unable to pay. The EOCP is providing valuable support to some providers in this regard through the provision of capital and staffing, as well as support to specific initiatives targeted at improving the quality of provision.

The relationship between access, quality and co-ordination is not a simple one. Wider access to early childhood education and care through the provision of additional places is a key quality concern and also a stated commitment of the current Government. However, given the current situation regarding co-ordination outlined above, it is difficult to determine which Government Department or Departments or agencies should have central responsibility for the co-ordinated creation, regulation and support of such expanded provision.

The Future: Key Challenges

Early childhood education and care has seen substantial development and improvement in recent years that is to be welcomed. Nonetheless, key challenges remain in many areas. The issues of improving and assuring quality services is one in which further policy and support is needed. Forthcoming work in this area has been identified above. This work should draw on the experience of current quality initiatives and measures as well as regulatory mechanisms.

In the area of access, how wider access is provided to disadvantaged or vulnerable children and families is of primary importance and, following this, if and how more widespread or universal access to pre-school education and care can be achieved.

Co-ordination remains one of the key challenges facing policy-makers in particular. The creation of effective and efficient co-ordination mechanisms or structures that address the needs and concerns of the various stakeholders – children, parents, providers, funders - involved in early education and care and that recognises the contribution and expertise of both the ‘education’ and ‘care’ sectors would be a substantial advance in this arena.

In research and evaluation, the substantial body of work already achieved as well as that planned will contribute to our growing knowledge of the needs of young children and how these can be addressed through early education and care. However, gaps remain. In particular, there is a need for additional statistics on early childhood services provided for by the DES and for the further disaggregation of those that are currently collected. For example, disaggregated statistics on participation in infant classes and the funding these attract from core and additional sources would be a useful addition to our knowledge. There is also a need for the regular collection and analysis of data on childcare services that builds on the experience of the National Childcare Census and on national surveys carried out to inform the various policy makers. Regularly collated information on childcare services notified to the various Health Boards would also prove useful, as would further research into the early childhood education and care experiences and needs of particularly vulnerable groups of children.

Ensuring that children are placed and remain at the centre of all policies and services aimed at them is a key challenge in every relevant area of policy and provision. In addressing this and other challenges, one option is to adopt, or adapt, an approach underpinned by the principles that guide existing government policy in the National Children’s Strategy. Central here are the six operational principles on which the implementation of the Strategy is based. These are that all actions will be child-centred, family oriented, equitable, inclusive, action oriented and integrated. Such an approach allows aspiration of meeting the needs of all children and for targeted interventions to address the needs of children at risk of exclusion and disadvantage as a priority.

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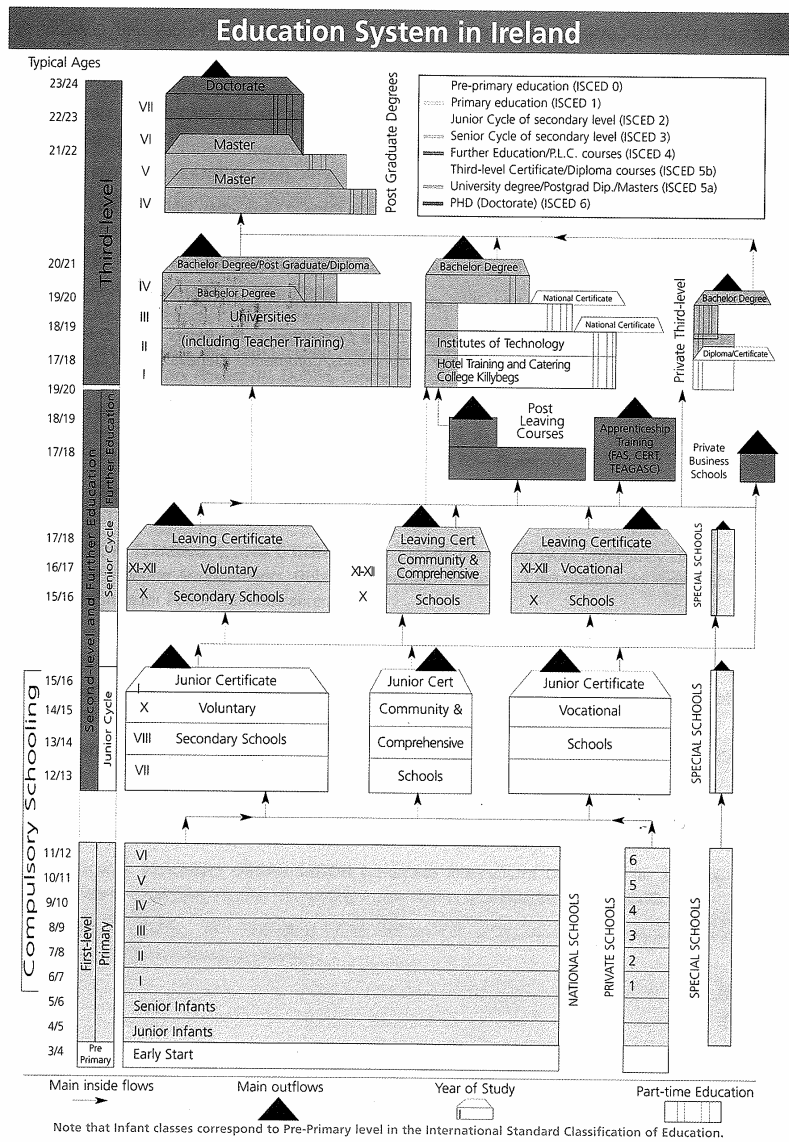
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Annex 1

THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM



ANNEX 2

PRINCIPAL TYPES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROVISION

Type of Care	Typical Age Range Catered For	Typical Duration of Service	Ownership
<i>Pre-schools / Play Schools</i>	3 to 6 years	Sessional – morning or afternoon	Mainly privately owned, with some community-based not-for-profit
<i>Nurseries / Crèches</i>	Birth to 6 years	Full day, although some accept children on a part-time basis. Small number of drop-in facilities	Mainly privately owned, with some community-owned
<i>Montessori Schools</i>	3 to 6 years	Sessional, usually mornings	Privately owned
<i>Naionrai</i>	3 to 6 years	Sessional, usually mornings	Privately owned
<i>Parent and Toddler Groups</i>	Birth to 3 years	Sessional	Attached to both privately owned and community-based not-for-profit services
<i>Early Start</i>	3 to 4 years	Sessional, usually mornings	Supported by the Dept. of Education and Science
<i>Pre-Schools for Traveller Children</i>	3 to 6 years	Sessional, usually mornings	Supported by the Dept. of Education and Science
<i>Infant Classes</i>	4 to 8 years	Shortened school day – mainly mornings	Supported by the Dept. of Education and Science
<i>Childminders</i>	Birth to late childhood	Various – full day and part-time	Private individuals
<i>After-School and Out-of School Care</i>	From 4 years upwards	Various – after-school and school holidays	Privately owned facilities as well as some community-based not-for-profit

ANNEX 3

THE EOCP: SUMMARY TABLES

Summary by Region and County of the Original and Projected number of childcare places (full-time and part-time) and number of paid staff (full-time and part-time) in facilities supported under the EOCP, 2000 – 31 August 2002¹

Border, Midlands, and West Region County	Childcare Places Full Time		Childcare Places Part Time		Paid Staff Full Time		Paid Staff Part Time	
	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support ²	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support
Cavan	43	97	316	800	17	44	27	63
Donegal	50	319	521	964	11	78	60	123
Galway County	87	290	575	1282	35	104	54	86
Galway City	70	147	420	639	23	56	32	35
Longford	37	219	142	357	4	48	12	33
Louth	86	418	340	730	27	112	13	48
Leitrim	15	92	307	567	9	33	27	50
Laois	62	252	278	606	13	52	22	67
Monaghan	41	180	397	639	7	47	24	38
Mayo	45	172	457	889	13	40	39	72
Offaly	10	53	287	621	4	23	20	42
Roscommon	44	149	217	356	10	42	25	39
Sligo	6	85	118	190	2	12	13	41
Westmeath	130	282	655	862	34	64	36	70
TOTAL BMW	726	2755	5030	9502	209	755	404	807

1. In these two tables it is essential here to note that these figures relate only to facilities funded under the EOCP and are not an exhaustive or representative account of the number of childcare services, places or staff at county, regional or national level.

2. In all cases 'Projected with EOCP Support' are impact figures. These refer to the total number of childcare places or staff the facilities are anticipated to have following receipt and use of funding. This includes the original number of places and staff facilities had at the time of their first successful application to the EOCP.

Source: ADM Monitoring Statistics for the EOCP Programme

Summary by Region and County of the Original and Projected number of childcare places (full-time and part-time) and number of paid staff (full-time and part-time) in facilities supported under the EOCP, 2000 – 31 August 2002

Southern and Eastern Region	Childcare Places Full Time		Childcare Places Part Time		Paid Staff Full Time		Paid Staff Part Time	
	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support	At Time of First Successful Application	Projected with EOCP Support
County								
Cork County	126	659	1027	1633	51	191	86	129
Cork City	152	353	885	1175	37	110	58	84
Clare	91	284	259	709	24	87	21	40
Carlow	34	122	122	246	11	25	12	17
Dublin County Borough	547	1494	2049	3216	133	366	114	210
Fingal	175	522	187	590	45	132	19	44
DunLaoghaire Rathdown	291	749	398	744	90	193	46	70
South County Dublin	212	587	496	917	67	140	45	105
Kildare	108	244	147	527	27	68	19	57
Kilkenny	52	197	361	649	14	60	30	39
Kerry	104	367	607	1473	25	121	54	117
Limerick County	38	149	193	356	13	44	18	24
Limerick City	108	214	525	663	29	50	30	67
Meath	77	191	377	652	34	59	36	68
Tipperary North	27	195	156	330	9	44	13	33
Tipperary South	7	150	381	541	5	36	25	40
Waterford County	38	81	101	195	6	13	7	13
Waterford City	128	263	275	267	22	49	36	45
Wicklow	44	110	424	706	12	39	25	41
Wexford	141	429	484	710	27	89	39	65
TOTAL SAE	2,500	7,360	9,454	16,299	681	1,916	733	1,308
CUMULATIVE TOTAL	3,226	10,115	14,484	25,801	890	2,671	1,137	2,115

Source: ADM Monitoring Statistics for the EOCP Programme

Grants Approved Under the EOCP by Grant Type, Region and County – 2000 to 31 August 2002

County	Staffing Grants		Capital Grants – Community-Based Facilities		Capital Grants – Self-Employed		Sub-measure 3 – Quality Improvement		Total Approved	
	No.	€	No.	€	No.	€	No.	€	No.	€
Cavan	19	1,384,313	9	772,721	9	225,153	3	338,726	40	2,720,913
Donegal	28	1,926,276	19	1,874,662	12	469,526	7	694,441	66	4,964,905
Galway County	29	1,868,289	7	203,161	31	855,585	3	123,262	70	3,050,297
Galway City	17	1,748,446	11	1,083,154	8	290,841	2	451,158	38	3,573,599
Longford	11	1,138,245	7	616,724	11	457,036	2	169,100	31	2,381,105
Louth	12	2,537,976	6	328,829	24	742,176	5	421,931	47	4,030,912
Leitrim	19	1,743,708	12	950,611	4	79,290	3	323,873	38	3,097,482
Laois	12	989,388	5	1,752,065	14	324,733	3	216,975	34	3,283,161
Monaghan	16	1,430,709	15	1,643,766	1	57,816	3	831,844	35	3,964,135
Mayo	29	2,743,800	9	676,646	10	311,740	3	321,589	51	4,053,775
Offaly	9	1,047,889	2	77,981	9	130,950	3	314,368	23	1,571,188
Roscommon	13	985,029	8	371,477	5	162,501	2	186,907	28	1,705,914
Sligo	10	1,036,753	5	431,347	2	37,777	2	261,777	19	1,767,654
Westmeath	15	1,396,656	9	913,210	15	488,771	3	540,325	42	3,338,962
TOTAL BMW	239	21,977,477	124	11,696,354	155	4,633,895	44	5,196,276	562	43,504,002
County										
Cork County	35	3,161,577	23	1,615,746	35	1,113,032	6	248,449	99	6,138,804
Cork City	33	4,754,203	21	159,249	8	3,312,201	3	567,931	65	8,793,584
Clare	11	1,690,580	7	1,584,835	11	466,524	5	476,287	34	4,218,226
Carlow	7	1,086,408	8	878,518	4	41,995	3	212,296	22	2,219,217
Dublin County Borough	94	12,963,773	51	11,472,459	22	824,917	18	6,266,147	185	31,527,296
Fingal	9	1,300,559	9	766,395	25	906,754	4	171,700	47	3,145,408
DunLaoghaire Rathdown	10	1,068,442	7	1,224,251	25	683,333	4	505,986	46	3,482,012
South County Dublin	27	3,621,984	15	3,417,661	17	642,136	6	3,818,297	65	11,500,078
Kildare	4	457,433	4	126,730	32	775,914	3	330,595	43	1,690,672
Kilkenny	14	1,797,694	6	639,265	9	288,670	4	305,561	33	3,031,190
Kerry	38	5,200,095	16	3,037,660	19	569,292	7	436,081	80	9,243,128
Limerick County	6	648,430	3	303,320	10	283,778	4	403,432	23	1,638,960
Limerick City	13	2,990,949	2	454,193	5	160,807	1	167,418	21	3,773,367
Meath	5	541,312	1	4,444	18	668,395	4	219,248	28	1,433,399
Tipperary North	7	1,654,465	2	1,054,472	9	224,537	5	536,324	23	3,469,798
Tipperary South	16	1,011,516	9	937,687	3	13,374	2	268,492	30	2,231,069
Waterford County	1	82,450	3	195,907	8	211,684	2	236,267	14	726,308
Waterford City	7	1,132,814	5	894,573	3	90,191	2	178,571	17	2,296,149
Wicklow	9	1,015,781	8	190,338	13	378,916	5	1,623,311	35	3,208,346
Wexford	19	2,185,329	15	2,198,787	22	837,903	5	431,521	61	5,653,540
TOTAL SAE	365	48,365,794	215	31,156,490	298	12,494,353	93	17,403,914	971	109,420,551
CUMULATIVE TOTAL	604	70,343,271	339	42,852,844	453	17,128,248	137	22,600,190	1533	152,924,553

Source: ADM EOCP Monitoring Statistics for the EOCP Programme

ANNEX 4

PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRAMMES TO COMBAT EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Breaking the Cycle

Breaking the Cycle was introduced as a five-year pilot programme in 1996 in schools designated as disadvantaged. Based on research conducted by the Combat Poverty Agency and the ERC on selection criteria, schools were designated as disadvantaged according to a number of social and economic characteristics. These included the proportion of pupils from homes in which the main breadwinner was unemployed for more than one year, the proportion of pupils living in lone parent households and the proportion of pupils whose father and/or mother had, at most, basic educational qualifications. The scheme provided for extra staffing, funding, in-career development and a pupil teacher ratio of 15:1. The purpose of these additional resources was to support each participating school to develop improvement strategies, which are designed to break the cycle of intergenerational educational disadvantage. The pilot phase ended in June 2001 and the future of the scheme will be considered in light of an evaluation report being prepared by the ERC. Thirty-two urban schools accounting for 5,652 pupils and 120 rural schools with 6,052 pupils were catered for under this programme.

Giving Children an Even Break

This initiative was launched by the DES in 2001 following a survey of primary schools by the ERC. This survey provided an objective basis for the identification of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving and is the most comprehensive survey of the incidence of educational disadvantage in primary schools in Ireland. Based on the concentration of disadvantaged pupils, schools were ranked on the basis of economic and social criteria associated with educational disadvantage. Additional resources were then made available to schools according to the degree of disadvantage as illustrated by their rank position. In urban areas, where the larger concentrations of disadvantaged pupils were located, these resources resulted in a pupil teacher ratio of no more than 20 to one in the infant classes and the following two classes, as well as funding towards additional in-school and out-of-school activities. In rural areas, a teacher / coordinator was appointed to work with clusters of 4 to five schools with high levels of at risk pupils. These coordinators will support schools and teachers in developing ways of meeting the needs of pupils experiencing disadvantage. Individual schools that could not be clustered received additional funding for in-school and out-of-school activities.

Teachers and schools are supported in adapting their teaching styles and strategies to derive maximum benefit from significantly reduced pupil/teacher ratios. Schools and their staff, including new local coordinators, will be supported in the effective use of the new teaching supports and financial allocations in providing enhanced services that meet the needs of at risk young people in school and out-of-school.

A key condition of participation in this programme is that the school subscribes to a holistic interpretation of the child's development. Other conditions of participation include the development of a specific school retention policy, the preparation of a three-year developmental plan for policy and practice in the school, collaborative

planning with the representatives of local statutory and voluntary agencies for the integrated delivery of in-school and out-of-school supports for the targeted pupils and their families, targeting of new in and out-of-school supports at the pupils whose enrolment qualified the school for the additional supports through the survey, the identification of the needs of the individual targeted pupils – curricular and learning needs and social and personal needs – and the development of strategies that best meet those needs, and the development of strategies that encourage and enable parents to become involved in their children’s education.

The DES has given a commitment to external formative and summative evaluation of this programme. In this, a sample of schools given assistance will be selected for intensive examination of a number of issues including matters related to the concentration and dispersal of disadvantage, possible anomalies highlighted in the survey analyses and an evaluation of criteria and methods used for pupil identification and school selection in the current and in possible future processes. This work will provide an estimate of the accuracy of the information supplied in the original survey undertaken by the ERC and will inform future exercises of this kind.

The full implementation of this new programme has yet to be achieved. Costing €33 million, it will benefit 2,144 primary schools around the country, with initiatives targeted at over 80,000 pupils considered to be risk of educational disadvantage. In total it is expected that 204 extra teachers will be employed over a three-year period, 150 of which will be in urban areas and 54 of which will be in rural areas. Training will be provided for teachers to help them gain an understanding of educational disadvantage and to help them in the delivery of targeted supports.

Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage (Primary)

Until recently, the primary mechanism for addressing the effects of socio-economic deprivation in primary schools was the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. Under this DES funded scheme, special teaching assistance and extra funding was provided to schools in areas designated as disadvantaged. Schools seeking disadvantaged status were assessed and prioritised on the basis of socio-economic and educational indicators such as unemployment levels, housing, medical card holders, information on basic literacy and numeracy and pupil teacher ratios. In the school year 2001/2002, 314 primary schools serving 68,565 pupils received support under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. There are 293 additional over-quota teaching posts in 250 of these schools.

For the 2001/2002 school year, a capitation supplement of €38.09 is paid per pupil to schools designated under this scheme. This is to cover general running costs, classroom materials and equipment and home / school liaison activities. In addition to these supports, schools also received a refund of their television licence fee, a 95% Building Grant for approved building projects, and financial assistance to alleviate serious current financial difficulty.

Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

The HSCL is a key aspect of the DES’s strategy to address educational disadvantage at both primary and second level. Under the HSCL, a co-ordinator (teacher) is assigned to a school or group of schools and works with school staff, parents and community agencies to address the educational needs of children at risk of or

experiencing educational disadvantage. In September 1999, all primary and second level schools with disadvantaged status that were not already part of the HSCL scheme were invited to join and most have taken up this invitation. There are currently 176 whole time equivalent posts at primary level. A National Co-ordinator oversees the day-to-day operation of the Scheme. In 2000, almost €9 million was spent on this scheme which serves over 70,000 pupils at primary level.

Traveller Children

Support is provided for an estimated 5,000 Traveller children at primary level, approximately 4,600 of which attend ordinary primary schools. These are supported by 465 resource teachers for Travellers. The remaining children are attending one of the 4 special schools dedicated to Traveller children. These special schools for Travellers operate at a pupil teacher ratio of 14:1. A special capitation rate of €249.50 is paid in respect of Traveller children under 12 years, irrespective of where they are attending school.

Children with Special Needs

Education policy in respect of children with special needs seeks to secure the maximum possible level of integration of these children into the mainstream school system. Where this is not possible due to the level of disability, dedicated specialist facilities continue to be made available in a special dedicated class attached to an ordinary school or in a special dedicated school.

Under the Education Act 1998, all children with disabilities within the primary system have an automatic entitlement to a response to their needs, irrespective of their level of need or location. This has resulted in the number of resource teachers supporting children with general learning disabilities in integrated settings in the primary system increasing from 104 in October 1998 to approximately 2,000 in 2002. In addition, the number of special needs assistants supporting children with learning disabilities in the primary system has grown from less than 300 to 3,000 over the same period. Approximately 13,000 children with special needs attend ordinary primary schools on a fully integrated basis.

Where a child has a learning disability that prevents them from attending integrated primary school classes they may attend special classes attached to ordinary primary schools or special schools. There are 465 special classes catering for approximately 3,700 children. There are 108 special schools dedicated to children with special needs, serving the needs of some 6,600 children. These special schools employ 1,089 teachers and 940 full-time equivalent special needs assistants.

All special classes and schools operate significantly reduced pupil teacher ratios with, for instance, an eight to one ratio applying in special classes and special schools catering for children with moderate learning disabilities. Special rates of capitation apply to all children attending special classes and special schools. In addition, all children attending such classes or schools are entitled to avail of the Special School Transport Service where an escort accompanies them on bus services.

Special provision is made for addressing the educational needs of children with autism. Autistic children are now provided for in dedicated special classes with a

maximum of 6 children. Each class has the support of a teacher and two special needs assistants. The DES has sanctioned the establishment of approximately 90 such classes and the number of classes is increasing on an ongoing basis in response to assessed needs. The DES has also allocated funding to the extension of education programmes through the month of July for pupils attending dedicated units for children with autism. This is in addition to funding a number of special pilot projects delivering a dedicated Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) model of response to children with autism. Finally, a special Task Force on Autism was established in November 2000 to review current approaches and make recommendations for the future development of education services for children on the autistic spectrum. The Task Force has presented its report to the Minister and its recommendations are currently being considered within the DES.

Learning Support/Remedial Teachers

The Learning Support Scheme provides assistance for primary school children experiencing learning difficulties, particularly in the core areas of literacy and numeracy. Although the development of this service was closely linked to the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme outlined above, all schools in need of this service now have access to it. Just short of 1,500 teacher posts are currently funded by the DES.

Education of Non-English Speaking Pupils

Ireland has seen an increasing number of non-English speaking immigrants in recent years. In order to cater for the children of such emigrants the DES has put in place supports for the teaching of English in primary schools. Schools with an enrolment of fourteen or more non-nationals with English language deficits are entitled to an additional temporary teacher, appointed on a year by year basis, to provide language support for such pupils. In the case of a school having twenty-eight or more non-English speaking non-nationals, the school is entitled to a second additional teacher. Where the number of eligible pupils is less than fourteen, grants are paid to enable the school authorities acquire the services of a suitable qualified person to teach these pupils English. Such grants are available to any school with between two and 13 relevant pupils. In the school year 2001/2002, approximately 144 posts were sanctioned at primary level and grant assistance in excess of €1.3 million was paid.

School Development Planning

Introduced in the school year 1999/2000, the School Development Planning Initiative aims to facilitate schools in devising and implementing strategies to achieve maximum school effectiveness. It is targeted specifically at schools with designated disadvantage status, including those participating in the Breaking the Cycle initiative. At the core of this initiative is the belief that combating educational disadvantage involves a 'whole school' philosophy that encompasses the home-school-community approach. A National Co-ordinator, 4 Regional Co-ordinators and 40 facilitators assist schools in implementing this initiative.

The first phase of the School Development Planning Initiative involved 1,775 schools, of which 442 were designated as disadvantaged. The budget for 1999/2000 was €616,775 which was increased to €1.3 million in 2001. From September 2001 this initiative was further extended to all schools within the education system. Schools catering for disadvantaged communities will continue to receive special assistance.

Guidelines for Primary Schools on Developing a School Plan have been developed and circulated by the DES.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Agency was established in September 1999 as an executive Agency of the DES. This has the delegated authority to develop and provide an educational psychological service to all students in primary and post-primary schools and in certain other centres supported by the DES, with particular attention paid to those with special educational needs. Currently, some 86 psychologists are employed in the NEPS. Following a recruitment drive in 2001, just over 60 additional psychologists have been placed on a panel and will join the NEPS by the end of 2002. In addition, pending the expansion of NEPS to all schools, the Minister for Education and Science approved the commissioning of psychological assessments from private practitioners. All of these psychologists work with individual pupils with specific problems, identify learning difficulties, and work with teachers on how to address these. In short, they aim to co-ordinate the efforts of teachers, parents and school management in meeting the needs of the pupils.

The NEPS service is now available to approximately 1,950 primary schools serving over 200,000 pupils. NEPS psychologists are located throughout the country in 10 regions corresponding to the Health Board regions in order to facilitate co-operation with the psychological services provided by the Health Boards and Voluntary Bodies. It is intended that there will be offices in approximately 20 locations around the country so that each team of psychologists will be located near the schools it serves. In 2002, €11.26m has been committed to the provision of the NEPS. '

School Completion Programme

Incorporating the elements of best practice from previous pilot schemes (specifically the 8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) and the Stay-in-School Retention Initiative at Second Level (SSRI)), the School Completion Programme focuses on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years who are educationally disadvantaged and at risk of leaving school early. The Programme is designed to address the issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage. This Programme is now considered a key component of the DES strategy to address early school leaving. The Programme is operating in 273 primary schools and the second-level schools to which pupils progress.

ANNEX 5

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECEC

Department	Principal Responsibility	ECEC Sections / Structures	Principal ECEC Programmes
Dept. of Education and Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Funding, managing and inspection of pre-school education measures for children at risk of educational disadvantage ➤ Funding, managing and inspection of infant classes in primary schools. ➤ Funding, managing and inspection of specific measures to address educational disadvantage in primary schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Primary Section(s) ➤ Inspectorate ➤ Social Inclusion Unit ➤ Educational Disadvantaged Committee ➤ Educational Disadvantaged Forum ➤ Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rutland Street Project ➤ Early Start ➤ Pre-Schools for Traveller Children ➤ Provision in Training / Further Education Centres ➤ Primary School Infant Classes, including Special Classes for Children with Learning Disabilities ➤ Special Schools for Children with Learning Disabilities ➤ Giving Children and Even Break ➤ Designated Disadvantaged Areas Scheme ➤ Support Teacher Scheme ➤ Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme ➤ Learning Support / Resource Teachers ➤ English language provision for Non-Nationals ➤ School Development Planning ➤ National Educational Psychology Scheme
Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Chair and Co-ordinate the National Childcare Strategy ➤ Management and Administration of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Equality Division ➤ Childcare Directorate ➤ Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Synergies Group ➤ National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee ➤ Certifying Bodies Sub-Group ➤ Advisory Sub-Group ➤ Working Group on School Age Children ➤ County Childcare Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

Department	Principal Responsibility	ECEC Sections / Structures	Principal ECEC Programmes
Dept. of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regulation of pre-school facilities ➤ Provision of childcare places for children from families under stress ➤ Delivery of the National Children's Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Child Care Policy Unit ➤ Child Care Legislation Unit ➤ National Children's Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No specific programmes
Dept. of Social and Family Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Payment of child-related income support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Child Benefit ➤ Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Scheme
Dept. of the Environment and Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regulation of the planning and building of childcare facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Programme of building new public and social housing ➤ Programme of renovation of existing public and social housing
Dept. of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provision of childcare support to those on labour market programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community Employment Programme
Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provision of support under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Local Development Social Inclusion Programme ➤ RAPID ➤ CLAR

ANNEX 6

QNHS MODULE ON CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Childcare Module¹⁷

Introduction

A Childcare module for inclusion on the QNHS in Q4 2002 has been designed by the Central Statistics Office, at the behest of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in association with a Liaison Group of interested parties drawn from the public and private sectors (See LG members below). The module is designed to supply data on the use, cost and availability of childcare throughout the State.

<i>Members of Liaison Group</i>
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
Area Development Management Ltd.
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Department of Health and Children
Central Statistics Office

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment also provided some comment on an early draft of the questionnaire.

Technical Notes

For the purposes of this survey *Childcare* is to be distinguished from babysitting, and arrangements made during holiday periods and days off unless referred to explicitly by the questions. It refers to arrangements that are usually made by parents/guardians on a regular weekly basis during the working day (e.g. Mon-Fri 7am – 7pm... or whatever constitutes same) for the care of their children.

NOTE: The usual care of children by their parents in the early morning or early evening should not be coded as ‘Children minded at home by me / partner’. This response option is aimed at capturing parents who mind their children for a period during what might be considered typical working hours. For example, a parent collecting a child at noon or mid-afternoon from a childcare facility and looking after him/her for the rest of the day would be considered to be minding him/her at home for the purposes of this survey, whereas someone collecting a child after work at 6pm would not.

A distinction is made in this questionnaire between children attending primary school and younger children who are not attending primary school.

SHOW CARD: The list of childcare options will not apply in all cases, but the list is the same for all questions to facilitate responses.

¹⁷ Please note that all coding references have been removed here for ease of presentation.

[Q1.]

Will someone answer the childcare questions now?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Note: The Childcare module is only to be asked in households where there are children currently attending primary school or younger non-school going children

[Q2.]

[List of persons in household]

Please enter the line number of the person who is answering the Childcare module.

Note: The person who answers this module must be 15 or over and a guardian of the child in question

Interviewer Note: This refers to any child(ren) within the household for whom the responding adult has direct responsibility

How many children currently attending primary school do you have? _____

[Q3.]

How many younger non-school going children do you have? _____

[Q4.]

*[Q1.] Can I ask you which of the following types of childcare you usually avail of on a weekly basis for your school-going child(ren), outside of holiday periods and weekends?
[SHOW CARD]*

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Allow multiple responses

Interviewer Note:

- 1. Childcare for school-going children is the care they receive on weekdays outside of school hours in the morning and/or afternoon.**
- 2. Parents caring for children directly before they go to school should not be recorded here, but if the child is cared for by someone else before they go to school then this should be recorded here.**
- 3. Relatives/friends are considered to be paid if this is a regular arrangement, and not an ad hoc or occasional payment.**

[Q1.]

You have just mentioned some different types of childcare that you use. Can you say which is the main type of childcare that you use for your school-going child(ren)? [SHOW CARD]

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Multiple responses not allowed

Interviewer Note: Use time spent in care and then if necessary cost of care to determine primary source of care.

Do you use the same types of childcare arrangements during the holidays for you school-going children?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not applicable (Child just started school)

[Q2.]

Interviewer Note: The holiday period refers to primary school holidays and runs from July to August only.

What type of childcare arrangements did you make during the school holiday period? [SHOW CARD]

[Q3.]

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Allow multiple responses

[Q4.]

Can I ask you which of the following childcare arrangements you usually avail of on a weekly basis for your non school-going child(ren), outside of holiday periods and weekends (or days off)? [SHOW CARD]

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Allow multiple responses

Interviewer Note:

- 1. Childcare for non school-going children is the care they receive on weekdays during the working day. For example, if a child is in childcare and returns to the care of their parents at the end of the working day, this is considered to be the termination of childcare for that day.**
- 2. Parents caring for children directly before they go to childcare should not be recorded here, but if the child is cared for by someone else before they go to the childcare facility then this should be recorded here.**
- 3. Relatives/friends are considered to be paid if this is a regular arrangement, and not an ad hoc or occasional payment.**

[Q5.]

You have just mentioned some different types of childcare that you use. Can you say which is the main type of childcare that you use for your non school-going child(ren)? [SHOW CARD]

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Multiple responses not allowed

Interviewer Note: Use time spent in care and then cost of care to determine primary source of care.

[Q6.]

Can I ask you how many hours per week your school-going child(ren) spend(s) in your main form of childcare? _____

Note: If more than one child enter the total number of hours spent by all children in childcare

Example: If two school-going children spend 40 hours each per week in a *Crèche* then record 80 hours for HOURPRIM.

[Q7.]

You previously indicated that your childcare arrangements differ during the school holidays. Can I ask you how many hours childcare per week for your school-going child(ren) did you avail of during the school holiday period? _____

Note: If more than one child enter the total number of hours spent by all children in childcare

Example: If two school-going children spend 30 hours each per week in a *Activity Camp* then record 60 hours for HOLHOURS.

[Q8.]

Can I ask you how many hours per week your non school-going child(ren) spend(s) in your main form of childcare? _____

Note: If more than one child enter the total number of hours spent by all children in childcare

Example: If three non school-going children spend 20 hours each per week with a *paid childminder* then record 60 hours for HOURPREP.

[Q9.]

What is your main reason for using childcare on a weekly basis?

1. To enable me to work
2. To enable me to avail of education/training
3. To provide a social/educational outlet for the child
4. Other

Multiple responses not allowed

[Q10.]

*You have indicated that you avail of childcare outside of your home. Is **this** childcare within walking distance of your home?*

1. Yes
2. No, I have to travel with my child(ren)
3. No, but child is collected from my home by someone else.
4. Yes and No (some care within walking distance and some care not within walking distance)

[Q11.]

How far from your home is this childcare facility? (miles) _____

Note: If more than one childcare facility, record total distance travelled to reach last childcare facility.

Note: Record distance from home only

[Q12.]

How long does it usually take to get there?

_____ (mins)

Note: If more than one childcare facility, record total time travelled to reach last childcare facility.

Note: Record time taken to drop children off (e.g. in the morning) not collect them

[Q13.]

How do you usually take your child(ren) to your childcare facility?

1. Car
2. Bus
3. Train
4. Minibus
5. Taxi
6. Car Pool

Multiple responses not allowed

Interviewer Notes for Travel questions:

1. **The travel questions refer to the entire journey from someone's home to their childcare facility, for both their schoolgoing and non-schoolgoing children.**
2. **If someone has a number of stops at different childcare facilities, for children of different ages then record the total distance travelled up to the last facility.**
3. **Distance and time questions generally refer to the one-way journey from home to childcare in the morning.**
4. **Enter distances less than 1 mile as '1' and all other distances to the nearest mile**
5. **In a situation where the child is collected by someone else and taken out of the home to childcare enter 3 for TRAVCARE**

Can I ask you, how much in total does your [MAIN TYPE OF CARE FOR SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN] typically cost you per week for your school going children?

EUR ___ [Q14.]

INTERVIEWER NOTES:

- 1. The cost of childcare is for the main source of childcare identified in MAINCAR1.**
- 2. The cost of care is the total cost for all children in this type of care per week.
E.g Two children in a crèche @ €150 each = €300 per week for COSTPRIM**
- 3. Cost should be recorded against all care types where money is paid on a regular basis, regardless of whether this is a formal or informal arrangement**

Can I ask you, how much in total does your [MAIN TYPE OF CARE FOR NON-SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN] typically cost you per week for your non-school going children?

EUR ___ [Q15.]

INTERVIEWER NOTES:

- 1. The cost of childcare is for the main source of childcare identified in MAINCAR2.**
- 2. The cost of care is the total cost for all children in this type of care per week.
E.g Two children in a crèche @ €150 each = €300 per week for COSTPREP**
- 3. Cost should be recorded against all care types where money is paid on a regular basis, regardless of whether this is a formal or informal arrangement**

[Q16.]

Is there any type of childcare arrangement that you would like to use for your school-going children but which you are not using at the moment?

1. Yes
2. No

Note:

If respondent has previously indicated multiple options that are used for the care of the school-going child and now indicates that they would prefer to adopt one of the same options exclusively then accept this as a response to NEEDTYP1

For example : The respondent might mind the children themselves at home and also use a crèche, but that as an 'alternative' arrangement they would prefer to look after their children at home full-time themselves. In this case accept 'Children minded at home by me' as a response to NEEDTYP1, even though this is not strictly speaking an 'alternative' form of childcare.

[Q17.]

What type of alternative arrangement would you like to use for your school-going children?
[SHOW CARD]

1. Children minded at home by me

2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

*Multiple responses **not** allowed*

[Q18.]

Why are you not using this type of care arrangement for your school-going children at the moment?

1. Cost \ Financial reasons
2. Waiting List
3. Transport difficulties
4. Service not available
5. Lack of age appropriate services
6. Lack of suitable hours or flexible hours
7. Lack of culturally appropriate services
8. Lack of quality programme/service
9. Lack of informal care by someone known and trusted
10. Other

Multiple responses allowed

[Q19.]

Is there any type of childcare arrangement that you would like to use for your non school-going children but which you are not using at the moment?

1. Yes
2. No

Note:

If respondent has previously indicated multiple options that are used for the care of the non school-going child and now indicates that they would prefer to adopt one of the same options *exclusively* then accept this as a response to NEEDTYP2

For example : The respondent might mind the children themselves at home and also use a crèche, but that as an 'alternative' arrangement they would prefer to look after their children at home full-time themselves. In this case accept 'Children minded at home by me' as a response to NEEDTYP2, even though this is not strictly speaking an 'alternative' form of childcare.

[Q20.]

[Q21.]

What are the main reasons for not using this type of care arrangement for your non school-going children at the moment?

1. Cost \ Financial reasons
2. Waiting List
3. Transport difficulties
4. Service not available
5. Lack of age appropriate services
6. Lack of suitable hours or flexible hours
7. Lack of culturally appropriate services
8. Lack of quality programme/service
9. Lack of informal care by someone known and trusted
10. Other

Multiple responses allowed

Ask of all respondents to this module

[Q22.]

In the last 12 months has a lack of childcare arrangements for your child(ren) ever....[SHOW CARD]

1. ...prevented you looking for a job?
2. ...made you turn down a job?
3. ...made you quit a job?
4. ...stopped you changing the hours you regularly work?
5. ...stopped you from taking a study or training course
6. ...made you quit a study or training course
7. ...restricted the number of hours you regularly study
8. ...made you change the hours you regularly work
9. ...made you change the hours you regularly do study or training
10. None of the above

Multiple responses allowed

Interviewer Note: 'Educational Arrangements' do not include primary education

What type of alternative arrangement would you like to use for your non school-going children? [SHOW CARD]

1. Children minded at home by me
2. Children minded at home by partner
3. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in your own home
4. Unpaid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
5. Paid relative (or family friend) in your own home
6. Paid relative (or family friend) in his/her own home
7. Paid childminder in your own home
8. Paid childminder in his/her own home
9. Au Pair / Nanny
10. Work-based crèche
11. Naíonra
12. Crèche / Nursery
13. Montessori school
14. Playgroup / pre-school / sessional childcare
15. Homework club
16. After-school activity-based facility
17. Special needs facility
18. Activity Camps (Sports, recreation, arts & crafts etc.)
19. Other

Multiple responses not allowed