

National Strategic Plan
2011-2013

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

Mission Statement

The City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and the Voluntary Childcare Organisations (VCOs), led by the Childcare Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and assisted by Pobal, will work collectively and collaboratively during 2011-2013 to deliver early childhood care and education programmes which support children and families.

Principles

The proposal is underpinned by the following guiding principles, which include those of Síolta.

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.
- The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.
- Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.
- Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.
- Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education.
- Care and education are inseparable and interdependent.
- Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated. The importance of the Irish language as the national language is recognised.
- The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her/his well-being, learning and development.
- The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.
- The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental.
- A professional, well trained and competent early childhood workforce is fundamental to the provision of quality and developmental experiences for children.
- The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires co-operation, communication and mutual respect.

- A partnership approach among all stakeholders with an interest in early childhood care, health and education is essential for the implementation of cohesive and effective supports and services for children and families and for the long-term sustainability of the early childhood infrastructure.
- Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.
- Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ECCE PROPOSAL 2011-2013

1. To develop comprehensive childcare supports, infrastructure and services where the holistic well-being of children and families are fundamental.
2. To enhance quality early childhood education and care and school-age provision.
3. To consolidate investment in the sector in order to support the continuing development of a stable, integrated and sustainable infrastructure.
4. Through ongoing professional development, to build on the capacity of the ECCE sector to enhance and develop quality services for children and their families.
5. To ensure effective and transparent collaboration, communication and consultation, and optimum use of resources by all stakeholders in early childhood care and education.

Each objective comprises components, actions and key outcomes, and each component is graded as follows:

Level (A): These are the cornerstones to consolidate the achievements of the sector to date and to continue deliver Government programmes and policy. Can be delivered by the VCOs and the CCCs in conjunction with the Childcare Directorate and Pobal.

Level (B): These are dependent on the involvement of other organisations/agencies/lead departments.

Level (C): These are important to the on-going development of the sector beyond the timeframe of this plan.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE ECCE SUPPORTS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES WHERE THE HOLISTIC WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ARE FUNDAMENTAL

Component	Actions	Key Outcomes
<p>1.1</p> <p>Parents and families are recognised and supported as children’s primary educators and are active participants in decisions that affect their children</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will highlight to parents the importance of their role and the benefits to young children of a quality early childhood experience. This includes materials to demonstrate how early childhood services can promote the needs of children under the age of four. The CCCs and VCOs will work collaboratively using materials which are co-ordinated at national level by the OMCYA. (A)</p> <p>Parents will be involved in children’s learning in early childhood services and actively consulted through existing support structures, for example, local parent networks. (A)</p> <p>Supports and information around language acquisition will be made available to parents. (A)</p> <p>CCCs will roll-out information sessions about ECCE programmes, including the free Pre-School Year, the value of early childhood education, making ECCE choices and National Practice Frameworks. (A)</p>	<p>There will be a co-ordinated approach to the production and use of support materials by the CCCs, VCOs, and OMCYA.</p> <p>Parents will be better informed in relation to the benefits of quality early childhood care and education. CCCs will consult with Parent Networks.</p> <p>Information sessions, parent-friendly publications, website articles, newsletter articles and information leaflets on ECCE programmes and developments will be provided.</p>

	<p>CCCs will act as a signpost for parents requiring information and assistance around supports for special needs, networking, parenting and training. (A)</p> <p>Resources will be provided in Irish and English (C)</p>	<p>A parents' page/parents' information section will be included on CCC/VCO websites.</p> <p>Parents will be able to access resources in Irish or English.</p>
<p>1.2.</p> <p>Key stakeholders in the early childhood sector work collaboratively to promote best outcomes for children and families</p>	<p>Other key stakeholders in the early childhood sector will be encouraged to draw up their strategic plans in a way which is complementary to the objectives and activities of the CCCs and VCOs in implementing the ECCE programmes of the Childcare Directorate and securing the best outcomes for children and families. (B)</p>	<p>Duplication of supports, services and resources will be minimised through a cohesive and cost-effective approach.</p> <p>Supports, resources and services will be targeted to more effectively meet the specific needs of children and families</p>
<p>1.3.</p> <p>The protection and welfare of children is promoted through the implementation of <i>Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children</i></p>	<p>Child Protection Policy and Procedure documents, compliant with <i>Children First</i> Guidelines, will be required across the sector, including CCCs, VCOs and all early childhood services. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs, VCOs and OMCYA will work with the HSE to ensure that <i>Children First</i> Child Protection Training is made available to all</p>	<p>Greater consistency of understanding and approach to child protection across the early childhood sector.</p> <p>Children First Child Protection Training is provided by the HSE to VCOs and other relevant trainers. Workers in the ECCE sector</p>

	<p>persons working with children, including an expansion of the Train the Trainers Child Protection Training and the development of a Refresher Child Protection Programme. (B)</p> <p>The CCCs will provide locally specific information regarding appropriate points of contact for reporting child protection concerns. (A)</p> <p>The VCOs will work with the Garda Vetting Unit to ensure that all those with unsupervised access to children obtain Garda Vetting within a six-week timeframe. (B)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will work with the HSE and other agencies to ensure greater clarity of responsibility and roles regarding the protection and welfare of children and the availability of family supports. (B)</p>	<p>will have increased access to child protection training and increased skills, knowledge and awareness regarding the protection of children.</p> <p>Availability of a database of Social Worker contact details by geographical area within each county to assist a timely and appropriate response to child protection concerns.</p> <p>A more responsive Garda Vetting System to meet the needs of the early childhood workforce.</p> <p>Increased understanding of roles and responsibilities through a clear set of guidelines and a directory of family supports.</p>
<p>1.4.</p> <p>Quality services for children are accessible and support the holistic well-being, learning and development of the individual child</p>	<p>ECCE services will be encouraged to take additional steps to promote the inclusion of children with additional needs. (A)</p> <p>The VCOs will work to support the inclusion of culture, the Irish language, diversity and</p>	<p>Early Childhood Practitioners will be equipped with suitable information and skills to respond to the unique needs of all children and their families.</p>

	<p>special needs as accessible components of all FETAC-accredited early childhood care and education training programmes. (B)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will ensure the availability of the Síolta and Aistear practice guidelines to Early Childhood Practitioners to inform care and educational opportunities for children with special needs. (B)</p>	
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OBJECTIVE 2: TO ENHANCE QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION AND SCHOOL-AGE PROVISION

Component	Actions	Key Outcomes
<p>2.1</p> <p>The ECCE programmes implemented by the Childcare Directorate are administered effectively at local and national level</p>	<p>The CCCs will continue to act as the local delivery agent of the Childcare Directorate and assist the Directorate (and Pobal on its behalf) in implementing the ECCE programmes and national policy for which it is responsible. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs will continue to carry out the administrative tasks associated with the implementation of the ECCE programmes. These include the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS). (A)</p> <p>The CCCs will support and assist early childhood services in meeting the requirements of the schemes. This will include a developmental role for the CCCs in relation to Síolta. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs will promote the compliance of services participating in the schemes and</p>	<p>The ECCE programmes and national policy implemented by the Childcare Directorate will be effectively delivered at local level by the CCCs and VCOs.</p> <p>The arrangements necessary to implement the ECCE programmes will be carried out in a timely manner.</p> <p>Participating early childhood services will be assisted in meeting the conditions of the programmes.</p> <p>The compliance of participating early childhood services will be effectively monitored.</p>

	<p>assist Pobal and the Directorate in monitoring and addressing compliance issues. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs will report to Pobal and / or the Childcare Directorate as required, in accordance with the National Strategy 2011-2013, their annual implementation plans and their general role as the local delivery agent of the Childcare Directorate. (A)</p> <p>The VCOs will continue to support the ECCE programmes of the Childcare Directorate and will liaise with Pobal in this regard. (A)</p> <p>In particular, and in accordance with their annual action plans, the VCOs will assist the EYEPU of the OMCYA to ensure that services participating in the free Pre-School Year in ECCE scheme are supported to meet their contractual obligations regarding Síolta (A)</p>	<p>Annual implementation plans will be agreed with the Childcare Directorate and implemented by the CCCs and the VCOs. Adequate reporting arrangements between the Childcare Directorate, Pobal, the CCCs and VCOs will be in place.</p> <p>Services participating in the free Pre-School Year in ECCE will be assisted in implementing Síolta.</p>
<p>2.2</p> <p>National Practice Frameworks, Síolta & Aistear are established in the ECCE sector</p>	<p>The VCOs and the CCCs will work with the EYEPU on the dissemination and implementation of Síolta and other early education initiatives.</p> <p>Specific roles for the VCO and CCCs will</p>	<p>Each CCC will have a comprehensive plan to co-ordinate supports to early childhood services to engage with Síolta and Aistear. Collaboration and clarity of the VCO and CCC roles to ensure effective use of resources and a strategic approach to supporting the</p>

	<p>include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of resources and information on Síolta and other early education initiatives. (A) • Participation in a national evaluation of the Síolta Quality Assurance Programme. (A) • Implementation of any recommendations arising from the national evaluation • Participation in research and development activities associated with Síolta and other early education initiatives 	<p>implementation of Síolta and other early education initiatives.</p>
<p>2.3</p> <p>A transition programme from pre-school to primary school, in line with Aistear and Síolta will be piloted</p>	<p>The CCCs and the NVCOs will build on existing research to identify how pre-school services can build closer links between the pre-school and primary school sector. The CCCs and NVCOs will facilitate this work.</p>	<p>Children’s early learning experiences will be enhanced and the benefits accruing from participation in high quality pre-school will be retained and built upon in primary school.</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will support the</p>	<p>The SAC sector will be appropriately</p>

<p>School Age Childcare (SAC) services operate within appropriate new regulatory requirements</p>	<p>implementation of new regulatory requirements adopted by the OMCYA for the SAC sector.(B)</p> <p>The FETAC Major Award in School Age Childcare will be offered widely by the VCOs. (B)</p>	<p>regulated. Parents will be in a position to access SAC services that are inspected and whose compliance with regulations is apparent.</p> <p>Staff working in SAC services will be appropriately trained.</p>
<p>2.5</p> <p>Childminding services are supported to ensure high quality standards</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will work to ensure that FETAC modules appropriate for Childminders are offered widely by training providers. (B)</p> <p>Support and mentoring, through existing CCC and VCO structures, will be available for services. (A)</p>	<p>People providing childminding services will have access to appropriate training. Parents will be in a position to access Childminding services which meet quality standards.</p>
<p>2.6</p> <p>Support on all aspects of practice is available for ECCE providers</p>	<p>There will be continued investment in support to enable providers to enhance their practice. (A)</p> <p>THE CCCs and VCOs will support providers to improve the quality of their practice and to work towards meeting their regulatory and governance requirements. (A)</p>	<p>Services will have access to advice and support.</p>
<p>2.7</p>	<p>The OMCYA will work with DES to explore</p>	<p>A shared understanding of good quality ECCE</p>

<p>An integrated approach to child welfare and protection and early educational requirements, will be explored</p>	<p>how an integrated inspection protocol might be developed. (B)</p> <p>Consideration will be given to the development of a joint training regime and the creation of a joint reporting mechanism. (B)</p>	<p>and a shared agreement on good outcomes for children.</p> <p>ECCE providers will be clear as to their regulatory responsibilities.</p>
<p>2.8</p> <p>Support services for pre-school children with special needs will be reviewed in the context of the ECCE scheme</p>	<p>The OMCYA will work with the Office of Disability and Mental Health and the HSE to improve the delivery and co-ordination of resources and additional supports for pre-school children with additional needs. (B)</p>	<p>There will be a more coherent approach to support services for pre-school children with special needs. Children with special needs will be accommodated to the greatest extent possible in mainstream services.</p>

OBJECTIVE 3: TO CONSOLIDATE INVESTMENT IN THE SECTOR IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF A STABLE, INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Component	Actions	Key Outcomes
<p>3.1</p> <p>Capital investment is targeted to need</p>	<p>An integrated national audit of ECCE provision will be completed by type – full day, sessional, drop in, childminders and school age – and by methodology, building on all existing resources, databases and data-hubs, to be coordinated by Pobal. (A)</p>	<p>There will be a national database of provision by type and methodology linked to a range of indicators by area, population, income demographics and projected birth rates, which will identify both gaps and over supply.</p>
<p>3.2</p> <p>Service providers are supported to develop and sustain their services</p>	<p>Broad governance training in preparing business plans, administration, financial and programme management, HR and reporting on funding, and, where relevant, in roles and responsibilities, will be organised by CCCs and VCOs for all ECCE providers. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs will encourage local organisations with relevant business development expertise to provide assistance to ECCE services as appropriate. (B)</p> <p>Alternative models of voluntary management</p>	<p>Providers’ business abilities, from business planning to financial recording and employment knowledge, will be enhanced, so that sustainability and viability are increased.</p> <p>The sustainability of community services will</p>

	<p>committees will be reviewed and the information made available to all voluntary committees in the interests of greater efficiency and sustainability. (B)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will assist the ECCE sector to support any Workforce Activation Initiatives. (B)</p>	<p>be increased through the sharing of management and committee expertise over groups of facilities.</p>
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OBJECTIVE 4: THROUGH ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TO BUILD ON THE CAPACITY OF THE ECCE SECTOR TO ENHANCE AND DEVELOP QUALITY ECCE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Component	Actions	Key Outcomes
<p>4.1</p> <p>Work with the Early Years Education Policy Unit on the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will support the qualifications framework to assist the coherence and rationalisation of qualifications in the workforce. (B)</p> <p>Awareness of career options and continuous professional development pathways within the sector will be raised. (A & B)</p>	<p>The sector/organisations will be equipped with information and training to implement the key elements of the WDP. The sector/organisations will work more collaboratively to ensure that the child is at the centre of all services.</p>
<p>4.2</p> <p>Services are managed by early childhood practitioners trained in ECCE and service management in accordance with the Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector</p>	<p>The CCCs/VCOs will support any national initiatives developed to support this process. Note actions associated with Objectives 2 and 3 above. (A & B)</p>	<p>Current achievements/training levels will be mapped.</p>

<p>4.3</p> <p>ECCE-related training resources are pooled, standardised and applied to a national ECCE training strategy</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will support a qualitative and quantitative audit of training currently delivered by training organisations across the sector measuring completion, progression and retention rates. (A and B)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will promote ECCE as a valued profession/vocation. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will actively support accessible pathways for the professional development of the sector which value and recognise the prior learning/experience of the sector. (A)</p> <p>Training resources will be published in Irish and English. (A)</p>	<p>There will be clear data on current training delivery. Training resources are allocated and applied effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Practitioners can access training resources in Irish and English.</p>
<p>4.4</p> <p>Utilising the “Train the Trainer” model ensures training is effectively applied back into services</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will explore innovative ways of training. (A)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will work with the OMCYA to achieve high standards in training trainers across the sector. (A)</p>	<p>There will be support for trainers and access to on-going professional development.</p>

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OBJECTIVE 5: TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE AND TRANSPARENT COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION AND OPTIMUM USE OF RESOURCES BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Component	Actions	Key Outcomes
<p>5.1</p> <p>The activities of the CCCs and VCOs are planned and co-ordinated on a national and local basis, ensuring optimal use of resources</p>	<p>The CCCs and VCOs will work from a single national plan under the auspices of the Childcare Directorate. (A & B)</p> <p>The implementation planning process will support consistency in approach, promote specialisation and eliminate duplication. (A & B)</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs implementation plans approved by the Childcare Directorate, will include collaboration and integration of services and initiatives relating to the ECCE programmes. (B)</p> <p>Pobal will play a key role in co-ordinating and monitoring CCC/VCO performance and delivery on behalf of the Childcare Directorate. (A & B)</p> <p>The Childcare Directorate and Pobal will work with the organisations on an individual and</p>	<p>Funding and resource allocations will reflect policy priorities.</p> <p>The ECCE programmes of the Childcare Directorate will be coherently and efficiently managed and implemented.</p> <p>Governance and accountability will be strong. Particular emphasis will be placed on collaboration and integration of services and initiatives supporting informed policy and service planning within and beyond ECCE.</p> <p>Versatile management and implementation structures will be able to adapt to changing</p>

	<p>collective basis in support of their continued work towards continually responding effectively to changing demands and needs. (B)</p> <p>Progress will be reported and analysis shared in a timely manner to inform implementation planning. (A & B)</p>	<p>conditions and demands.</p>
<p>5.2</p> <p>Local ECCE-related services are organised and co-ordinated through an accessible hub</p>	<p>CCCs' actions will include local administration, co-ordination, promotion and access to ECCE programmes implemented by the Childcare Directorate. (A)</p> <p>VCOs' actions will include services to their members / customers and service quality development and their commitment to assist the Childcare Directorate and EYEPU in implementing Síolta in services participating in the free Pre-School Year. (A)</p>	<p>ECCE programmes implemented by the Childcare Directorate, and related frameworks, will be efficiently managed and delivered locally.</p> <p>Any new initiatives and schemes implemented by the Childcare Directorate will be efficiently implemented at local level.</p> <p>Early childhood services will be supported in providing the ECCE programmes to children, their families and communities.</p> <p>The investment under the EOCP and NCIP will be secured.</p> <p>Efficiencies will be secured from optimum application of available resources to a more extensive and complex range of</p>

		<p>responsibilities along with more integrated work planning and collaboration.</p> <p>The CCCs and VCOs will be a local hub and resource with expertise which can work collaboratively within the ECCE sector on local service planning, resource management and sustainability.</p> <p>The CCCs will continue to co-ordinate and promote needs analysis, service planning and training initiatives on a county basis.</p>
<p>5.3</p> <p>Management and support structures for the ECCE sector are streamlined and effective</p>	<p>Key business processes used in the implementation of the Childcare Directorate's ECCE programmes will be kept under review to ensure on-going efficiency and coherence of activities by the CCCs and VCOs. (B)</p> <p>The infrastructure associated with the Childcare Directorate's ECCE programmes will be reviewed to ensure that it continues to be appropriate to the sector and Government</p>	<p>Governance, collaboration and co-ordination across the CCCs and VCOs will be coherent and complementary.</p> <p>The investment to date and delivery of current initiatives will be consolidated and protected. The 2011–2013 Strategy will position the CCCs and VCOs to engage with, support and inform any post-2013 strategy.</p> <p>Where appropriate, the processes for the ECCE free Pre-school Year, CCS and CETS will be adjusted to improve coherence and efficiency.</p>

	policy. (B)	
<p>5.4</p> <p>Information management and communication strategies will ensure unity of purpose and efficiency of effort</p>	<p>The Childcare Directorate, Pobal, CCCs and VCOs will build up shared protocols and platforms for information management and communication. (A & B)</p> <p>Shared protocols and platforms will be promoted and applied to other key relationships. (B)</p>	<p>Potential to align current information management systems.</p> <p>Potential to standardise IT functionality to improve communications and information sharing and minimise paper-based administration.</p> <p>Childcare Directorate and Pobal's arrangements for communication and consultation are proactive and coherent in support of the sector.</p>