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Insights on Quality

**A National Review of Policy, Practice
and Research Relating to Quality in
Early Childhood Care and Education
in Ireland 1990-2004**

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Foreword



In Ireland, and internationally, the critical importance of children's early years in preparing them to achieve their full potential in their personal, social and working lives has been well documented. In recognition of this, my Department established the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education in 2002. One of the main functions of the centre is to develop a national framework for quality standards that will be applicable to all settings that provide for children from birth to six years of age. The framework will support the development and delivery of high quality early education experiences that will give our children the best possible start in their lifelong journeys of learning and personal fulfilment.

To have relevance for all those committed to the provision of quality in early childhood care and education, it is recognised that the national framework for quality must be built on solid foundations of research and consultation. It must promote coordination and cohesion across the diverse policy and practice domains that characterise existing early childhood care and education provision. It must also be flexible enough to accommodate the richness of experience and expertise that currently underpins the quest for quality in our early years' settings in Ireland.

This publication of this document, *Insights on Quality: A National Review of Policy Practice and Research relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990 - 2004*, is a key step in the development of the quality framework. A holistic vision of early childhood care and education is adopted in the review. Policy, practice and research, emanating from both the formal and informal sectors that provide services for children from birth to six years of age, have been drawn upon to give the most comprehensive picture possible.

The wealth of documentation analysed in the course of this review is testimony to the vibrancy of the early childhood care and education sector and to the excellent work that is currently taking place across the variety of settings that cater for very young children nationwide. The cooperation and generosity of the multiple stakeholders in the sector is particularly noteworthy. Their involvement has been vitally important in ensuring that the research is inclusive and representative. In this regard, I thank everyone who made a contribution to this work.

This review will be a valuable resource for all who are committed to providing quality early experiences for young children. It will ensure that the future development of early childhood care and education will build on the wisdom of our past and current experiences. Its publication is a milestone on the road to the highest possible quality of standards in the care and education of our youngest members of society.

Finally, I congratulate the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education for producing this insightful and wide-ranging report on quality in early childhood care and education in Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Hanafin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Hanafin, TD
Minister for Education and Science

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Acronyms

ADM	Area Development Management	ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
BCCN	Border Counties Childcare Network	INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
BMW	Border, Midland and Western Region	KCCC	Kildare County Childcare Committee
CCC	County Childcare Committee	NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
CEA	Centre of Excellence Award	NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education	NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
CHI	Children in Hospital Ireland	NCCC	National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency	NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association
CPI	Community Playgroup Initiative	NCO	National Children's Office
CSO	Central Statistics Office	N.D.	No Date
DES	Department of Education and Science	NDA	National Disability Authority
DHC	Department of Health and Children	NDP	National Development Plan
DELG	Department of the Environment and Local Government	NDP/CSF	National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework
DELR	Department of Equality and Law Reform	NESC	National Economic and Social Council
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology	NFQ	National Framework for Quality
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	NOW	New Opportunities for Women
DoE	Department of Education	NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
DoH	Department of Health	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
DSCFA	Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	QE	Quality in Education
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs	QIP	Quality Improvement Programme
DSW	Department of Social Welfare	SEP	Self-Evaluation Profile
EACH	European Association of Children in Hospital	SESE	Social, Environmental and Scientific Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education	SNMSI	St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland
ECEA	Early Childhood Education Agency	SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale	SWAHB	South Western Area Health Board
EEL	Effective Early Learning	UK	United Kingdom
EOCP	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme	UN	United Nations
ERC	Educational Research Centre	WHB	Western Health Board
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair	WSE	Whole School Evaluation
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison Scheme		

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The CECDE wishes to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of all those who provided literature for this review. The extent of the bibliography testifies to their efforts in this regard and also evidences the significant endeavours that are being made towards understanding and achieving quality in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland.

Without the cooperation and generosity of those many individuals and organisations at national, regional and local level, we would not have been in a position to produce such a comprehensive overview of policy, practice and research pertaining to quality in ECCE.

We look forward to future dialogue and discussion on this important issue as we proceed towards the development of the National Framework for Quality.