



Talking About Quality

Report of a Consultation Process on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

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Acronyms

ADM – Area Development Management

AR – Action Research

BA – Bachelor of Arts

B.Ed – Bachelor of Education

BCCN – Border Counties Childcare Network

CECDE - Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

DES – Department of Education and Science

DHC – Department of Health and Children

DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology

DJELR – Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

ECCE – Early Childhood Development and Education

EOCP – Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

IATSE – Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

IFA – Irish Farmers’ Association

IMEB – Irish Montessori Education Board

INTO – Irish National Teachers’ Organisation

IPPA – Irish Preschool and Playgroup Association (The Early Childhood Organisation)

NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children

NAMHI – National Association for the Mentally Handicapped in Ireland

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCCC – National Coordinating Childcare Committee

NCCRI – National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

NCNA – National Children’s Nurseries Association

NDP/CSF – National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework

NFQ – National Framework for Quality

NQAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

OMEP - Organisation Mondiale pour l’Éducation Prescolaire

RAPID – Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development

UCC – University College Cork

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) is delighted to present this report of our consultation process to the ECCE sector. This publication is a collation of the collective views and experiences of the sector as relayed in our series of consultative seminars in October and November 2003. The primary focus of the consultative seminars was to gain the insights and perspectives of all stakeholders in the ECCE sector in relation to quality. Consultation is a core value of the CECDE; as is stated in our Programme of Work, *"Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards."* (CECDE, 2001: 4)

The CECDE held six consultative seminars, located in areas where we could access the maximum number of people interested in participating and also to ensure a balanced geographical spread. Initially seminars were planned for Dublin, Cork and Galway. However, subsequent to the feedback from these events, we held additional seminars in Athlone, Monaghan and Carraroe in the Connemara Gaeltacht. The final seminar was conducted through the medium of Irish while all documentation was

provided in both English and Irish at all seminars.

A facility was established on the Centre's website (www.cecde.ie) to allow stakeholders who were not able to attend the seminars to complete and submit the form on-line. Additionally, information templates were distributed to members of our Consultative Committee¹ to be completed by members of the organisations they represent. Students in the final year of the BA in Early Childhood Care and Education in the Dublin Institute of Technology also participated in the research.

1.1 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)

In 2001 the Minister for Education and Science asked the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra to jointly establish the CECDE. The Centre was launched in October 2002 to develop and co-ordinate ECCE in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper *'Ready to Learn'* (DES, 1999). This remit is comprehensive, focusing on all care and education settings for children birth to 6 years of age, bridging many of the traditional divides

¹ As part of its commitment to consultation, the CECDE formed a Consultative Committee in 2003 to advise and guide it in its work. At present, the committee is comprised of 48 stakeholders in the early childhood care and education sector.

between education and care and between the early years settings and the formal education system.

Within this context, the **objectives** of the Centre (CECDE, 2001) include:

- To develop a quality framework for early childhood education;
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs and
- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper.

Thus, the core objective of the Centre is to produce a **National Framework for Quality (NFQ)**. Within the NFQ, three distinct elements can be identified. First of all, the standards will **define** what we understand by quality for children in the Irish context.

Secondly, a system of inspection or **assessment** will be devised to ensure that quality is achieved and maintained. Last of all, an infrastructure will be devised and implemented to **support** all those working in the ECCE sector to accomplish the quality as prescribed in the standards. The Centre has also completed a number of additional research projects that feed directly into the devising of the NFQ. The consultative seminars represent an important element of the process that is being used to produce the NFQ. *'A Conceptual Framework of how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland'* (CECDE, Forthcoming) is in the final stages of revision. A number of pieces of research focusing on quality in Ireland and in the international context are being conducted and this will distil best policy and practice nationally and internationally in relation to quality.

Figure 1: Elements of Research underpinning the NFQ



This report provides insights into the delegates who attended these seminars, including their demographic profiles, professional backgrounds and role within the ECCE sector. The core focus of the report relates to the three aforementioned elements of the NFQ and the answers provided to the questions posed:

1. What does the term ‘**quality**’ in early childhood care and education mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways of **assessing quality** in early childhood care and education?
3. What **supports** do you need to receive in order to achieve and maintain quality in early childhood care and education?

The CECDE is extremely grateful to all the participants who contributed their time and expertise towards the publication of this report. A special word of thanks is especially due to the facilitators at each seminar whose skills ensured that all delegates were afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions and have their insights shared. It is this sharing of expertise and involvement in discourse regarding quality that will inform the

production of the NFQ.

1.2 Chapter Summaries

This report is divided into a number of sections, which address specific aspects of the consultative process.

Chapter 2 presents a rationale for the consultative seminars. It outlines the value of consultation and discusses the approach taken in this instance.

The Methodology is delineated in **Chapter 3** and this provides a detailed account of the seminars. Data is also included on the methods employed in disseminating information on the seminars and in relation to the selection of geographical locations. The information template design and content is also elaborated upon.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the data. This section extracts the major themes that emerged in the course of the seminars and in addition, demographic feedback and information on the background of the respondents. This information is presented in narrative and graphic form to enhance the illustration of the main findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings for the development of the three core elements of the NFQ i.e. quality

standards, assessment processes and a supportive infrastructure.

Conclusions, recommendations and the path forward are detailed in **Chapter 6**. This draws together the main findings and makes specific recommendations for the development of the NFQ.

A number of **Appendices** are contained at the end of the publication, including the flyers and letters disseminated, the information template utilised, the briefing notes distributed to facilitators, the presentations from the seminars and the evaluation sheet of the seminars completed by participants.

The Report is presented in both English and Irish. The verbatim responses of participants are quoted in the style and language in which they were elicited. We hope that this report will be a valuable and useful resource for the ECCE sector and we welcome any feedback you might have to offer on this publication.