

## EDITORIAL

BY HEINO SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR, CECDE

Welcome to the spring issue of Alana, the newsletter of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)!

I am writing this on my return from Montreal where I had the great privilege to present on behalf of the CECDE at the World Forum on Early Care and Education. The Forum is the largest gathering of early childhood professionals in the world with over 700 delegates from all over the globe and our presentation on the Irish quality process, led by the CECDE, was received with great interest. Since we began our work in 2002, the CECDE has presented at many international conferences and the resulting feedback and opportunities for networking have greatly enhanced our work.

At home, we have continued our work on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education. Since the publication of the set of Principles in the previous issue we are now introducing sixteen Standards (p 3/5). These Standards have undergone a very thorough and fruitful period of consultation through our Consultative Committee and will be followed soon by a set of Components and Signposts for Reflection which will expand the Framework to the point of delivery.

Over the past few months the CECDE has also been involved in intense policy development at various levels. The High Level Working Group, chaired by the National Children's Office and representing a number of key Departments submitted an interim report and will conclude its deliberation in July of this year with a final report to Government. The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) project team, chaired by Professor John Coolahan, is also finalising its report on early childhood care and education in Ireland and will report in June 2005. The early childhood community and indeed the public at large look again with renewed hope for strong commitment in the Government's response...

Finally, I am very pleased to congratulate Maresa Duignan on her appointment as Assistant Director of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. Maresa has previously worked as a Development Officer on the CECDE team. Her appointment, therefore, reflects

both change and continuity in our work. I look very much forward to working with Maresa in her new role.

**Heino Schonfeld**  
Director

### CONTENTS

---

Introducing the NQF/ECCE Standards 2-4

---

CECDE OMEP Presentations 2005 4

---

CECDE Projects: Progress Report 5

---

Consulting with Parents 7

---

**Editor**

Heino Schonfeld

**Printers**

Profile Lithoprint (01) 8316894

If you have comments or suggestions for this newsletter, please contact the Information Officer at 01 8842113 or by email at [peadar.cassidy@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:peadar.cassidy@spd.dcu.ie)

Special thanks to DCULS for their work on the Irish translation of the Alana Newsletter.

# INTRODUCING THE NQF/ECCE STANDARDS

BY THOMAS WALSH, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CECDE

In the last edition of *Alana*, the Principles of the National Quality Framework in Early Childhood Care and Education (NQF/ECCE) were presented. Collectively, these form an agreed vision for quality ECCE in Ireland. The next step in the process of developing the NQF/ECCE relates to the provision of Standards, which translate the vision of the Principles into the reality of practice. These Standards were developed in Spring 2005 and relate to the four settings to which the NQF/ECCE will apply, namely:

- Full day care
- Infant classes of primary schools
- Sessional services
- Family day care (Childminding)

A process of consultation was undertaken in March and April 2005 with the fifty stakeholder organisations that comprise the CECDE Consultative Committee. This consultative process has proved invaluable in the revising and enhancing of the Draft Standards. The sixteen Standards below incorporate and reflect the feedback and contributions of the Consultative Committee and represent an agreed framework for quality practice within settings. As is evident, these are broad-based and comprehensive in nature and relate to all aspects of practice. As with the Principles, these Standards are interrelated and interdependent and cannot be viewed in isolation. Only together do they form a cohesive and comprehensive framework for ensuring quality practice for our youngest children.

Already the third, and final, element in the development of the core NQF/ECCE is underway. These are called the Components of Quality, which unpack further the Standards and provide guidelines for all personnel in settings. These are accompanied by 'Signposts for Reflection,' which support the reflective practitioner to consider his/her practice within the broad area of the sixteen standards. These Draft Components and Signposts for Reflection are currently the subject of a process of consultation within the member organisations of the Consultative Committee and feedback on this process will be provided in the next edition of *Alana*. The final prototype of the NQF/ECCE will be published in October 2005, followed by a nationwide pilot process of implementation.

## The NQF/ECCE Standards

### **Organisation**

Organising and managing resources effectively requires an agreed written philosophy, supported by clearly communicated policies and procedures to guide and determine practice.

### **Professional Practice**

Practising in a professional manner requires that individuals have skills, knowledge, values and attitudes appropriate to their role and responsibility within the setting. In addition, it requires regular reflection upon practice and engagement in supported ongoing professional development.

### **The Rights of the Child**

Ensuring that each child's rights are met requires that he/she is enabled to exercise choice and to use initiative as an active participant and partner in his/her own development and learning.

### **Parents and Families**

Valuing and involving parents and families requires a proactive partnership approach evidenced by a range of clearly stated, accessible and implemented processes, policies and procedures.

### **Environments**

Enriching environments, both indoor and outdoor (including materials and equipment) are well-maintained, safe, available, accessible, adaptable, developmentally appropriate, and offer a variety of challenging and stimulating experiences.

### **Curriculum**

Encouraging each child's holistic development and learning requires the implementation of a verifiable, broad-based, documented and flexible curriculum or programme.

### **Consultation**

Ensuring inclusive decision-making requires consultation that promotes participation, and seeks out, listens to and acts upon the views and opinions of children, parents and staff, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

### **Identity and Belonging**

Promoting positive identities and a strong sense of belonging requires clearly defined policies, procedures and practice that empower every child and adult to develop a confident self- and group-identity, and have a positive understanding and regard for the identity and rights of others.

### **Planning and Evaluation**

Enriching and informing all aspects of practice within the setting requires cycles of observation, planning, action and evaluation undertaken on a regular basis.

### **Interactions**

Fostering constructive interactions (child/child, child/adult and adult/adult) requires explicit policies, procedures and practice that emphasise the value of process and are based on mutual respect, equal partnership and sensitivity.

## Play

Promoting play requires that each child has ample time to engage in freely available and accessible, developmentally appropriate and well-resourced opportunities for exploration, creativity and meaning making in the company of other children, with participating and supportive adults and alone, where appropriate.

## Communication

Communicating effectively in the best interests of the child requires policies, procedures and actions that promote the proactive sharing of knowledge and information among appropriate stakeholders, with respect and confidentiality.

## Health and Welfare

Promoting the health and welfare of the child requires protection from harm, provision of nutritious food, appropriate opportunities for rest, and secure relationships characterised by trust and respect.

## Community Involvement

Promoting community involvement requires the establishment of networks and connections evidenced by policies, procedures and actions which extend and support all adults' and children's engagement with the wider community.

## Transitions

Ensuring continuity of experiences for each child requires policies, procedures and practice that promote sensitive management of transitions, consistency in key relationships, liaison within and between settings, the keeping and transfer of relevant information (with parental consent), and the close involvement of parents and, where appropriate, relevant professionals.

## Legislation & Regulation

Being compliant requires that all relevant regulations and legislative requirements are met or exceeded

## CECDE OMEP PRESENTATIONS 2005

"Making Connections" - A Review of International Policies, Practices and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

*by Heino Schonfeld, Director, CECDE*

A Vision for the Future – Principles of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland

*by Maresa Duignan, Assistant Director, CECDE*

Informing the NFQ/ECCE; A thematic perspective on child learning and development

*by Jacqueline Fallon, Development Officer, CECDE*

"Insights on Quality"

*by Thomas Walsh, Development Officer, CECDE*

All presentations can be found on our website at [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie).

# A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CECDE TARGETED AND COMMISSIONED PROJECTS

BY ANNETTE McDONNELL, PROJECT COORDINATOR, CECDE

One of the main objectives of the CECDE is "to develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs".

While the projects arising from this objective primarily focus on children who experience disadvantage or who have special needs, it is important to point out that each project will generate universally applicable knowledge. All projects will be completed by Sept 30th, 2005 and results will be published before the end of the year. The evidence and learning gained from the projects will inform the subsequent work of the CECDE and benefit the development of quality early childhood care and education for all children in Ireland.

## **Project 1: In Search of Quality: Multiple Perspectives**

Inspired by international findings that quality is dynamic and context dependent, this project aims to conduct a comprehensive nationwide study on quality in the Irish context. To date the project team, headed by Dr. Nóirín Hayes of the Centre for Social and Educational Research, have compiled an extensive literature review on quality in ECCE settings and have established a methodology to foreground the study.

Over 20 settings have been selected to take part in the study, each nominating one staff member and two families. Currently the researchers are measuring observable quality in each setting. This will be followed up by interviews and consultation with the participants, including the children.

Views will also be elicited from other stakeholders in ECCE, such as Department of Education and Science, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of Health and Children, the County Childcare Committees, Pre-School Inspectors and the National Voluntary Child Care Organisations.

This research will produce and validate instruments to measure different aspects of quality in Irish settings.

## **Project 2: Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs in Diverse Settings**

International literature clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of intensive early intervention for children with disabilities. This project, carried out by the Mid Western Health Board takes a deeper look into early intervention to identify specific programme features, which provide optimum outcomes for children and their families.

This project team has established baseline information for 18 children in three different education/care settings. They are currently designing and implementing individual intervention plans for each child, which will be assessed on an on-going basis. Parents and ECCE workers will be interviewed to elicit their views on quality.

The outcomes will identify aspects of best practice of each setting relating to capacity, pedagogy used and support of transitions.

## **Project 3: An In-Career Development Programme for Teachers and Management in Pre-School for Travellers**

The National Evaluation Report on Pre-schools for Travellers (DES, 2003) found a significant need for in-service training among both the teachers and members of the management committees of Traveller pre-schools. In response a training programme has been developed and delivered by a Barnardos/INTO partnership.

32 pre-school staff took part in an extensive training needs analysis to determine the topics of the course modules. The areas identified were curriculum development and lesson planning, involving parents in their children's education, the importance of play in learning, diversity, behaviour management and special needs. These modules were designed and delivered from January to May 2005.

A particular focus has been placed on mentoring, networking and peer learning. This has included the development of a website and bulletin board for the pre-school staff which can be accessed at [www.tptp.ie](http://www.tptp.ie). The research team will also consult with traveller parents and children on their attitudes to the pre-school and learning.

*In addition to these 4 projects, the CECDE has also commissioned research on the provision of services in Ireland for children with Special Needs and those who suffer from educational disadvantage.*

#### **Commissioned Project 1: Early years provision for children with special needs in Ireland**

**This project will provide a much-needed overview and analysis of the current provision in Ireland for children with special needs in Ireland.**

The research is focused on two distinct geographical areas, one urban and one rural. Questionnaires sent to the early years service providers in these regions elicited information on the numbers of children with special needs in the region as well as the nature of services available for their families.

The project team is currently examining the relationship between types of intervention and factors for early intervention. The outcomes will produce recommendations in relation to practice and to future policy and research.

#### **Commissioned Project 2: Early assessment and intervention in educational Disadvantage**

Both national and international research has revealed that the early identification and assessment of children at risk of educational disadvantage is necessary to implement effective interventions. This is particularly challenging in dispersed rural areas.

This project, carried out by the Centre for Social and Educational Research, DIT seeks to develop a framework to assess dispersed educational disadvantage among children of 0-3 years. 10 dispersed rural areas have been selected and will be surveyed through interview and focus groups with parents and existing agencies.

The research will also develop guidelines for using the framework and recommendations relating to the design of best practice interventions for families and children of 0-3 years in rural Ireland.

## THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP INITIATIVE (2001-2004)

Copies of the Final Evaluation Report of the Community Playgroup Initiative (2001-2004) are now available. The community playgroup initiative (cpi) was a project set up in 2001 by the Katharine Howard Foundation in partnership with the Health Service Executive South Eastern Area (formerly known as the South Eastern Health Board) with financial assistance from the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. This 3 year project was developed to assist community playgroups to enhance the quality of their service through funding and support. The final evaluation report points to many enhancements in the quality of provision as a result of cpi and also highlights the benefits for children, families and communities that community playgroups provide.

For further information or for copies of the report please contact the KHF at 01-4531831 or email to [info@khf.ie](mailto:info@khf.ie)