

**CENTRE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
AND EDUCATION**

PROGRAMME OF WORK

**APPENDIX TO THE
MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT**

OCTOBER 2001

Introduction

This appendix to the Memorandum of Agreement, between the Department of Education and Science, St. Patrick's College and the Dublin Institute of Technology contains details of a programme of work for the new Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education¹.

The programme was designed on the basis that the Centre is being established to “develop and co-ordinate early childhood education in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper Ready to Learn and to advise the Department of Education and Science (the Department) on policy issues in this area” (Memorandum of Agreement, Item 1). The design of the programme also takes account of the requirement that the Centre will “prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper” (Memorandum of Agreement, Item 2).

The programme is described in terms of a series of actions under six headings. The first four headings correspond to the four functions set out in Item 2 of the Memorandum of Agreement. The fifth relates to the Centre's responsibility to advise the Department on policy issues in the area of early childhood education. Under the final heading, some important actions that do not fit readily under the other five headings are identified.

Some actions are common to the four specified functions and to the Centre's role in relation to advice on policy. Thus, consultation and/or networking are seen as a prominent part of almost all of the Centre's work. Similarly, documentary/desk research will be necessary to conceptualise key issues in relation to most aspects of the work programme. There will be an international dimension to much of the work of the Centre and North-South cooperation will be promoted.

The Centre will operate in a flexible manner within changing policy priorities in relevant areas, and will forge close links with other agencies (e.g. NCCA, the National Children's Office).

¹ This Work Programme is presented as a framework for the operation of the Centre for Early Childhood **Development and Education** by a management team of Dublin Institute of Technology and St Patrick's College in partnership, as per the Memorandum of Agreement, with the Department of Education and Science.

Concern with issues of equality and inequality will be a feature of the work of the Centre. This concern will be particularly evident in relation to the function dealing with provision for disadvantaged children and children with special needs. However, the promotion of equality will be an aim of the Centre's work in relation to all of its functions. For example, the fact that disadvantaged children and children with special needs have diverse needs will be recognised in the development of quality standards (Function 1) and issues of disadvantage and special needs will feature prominently in the Centre's Research programme (Function 3). The work of the Centre will also focus on factors that give rise to inequality, as well as disadvantage and special needs, that give rise to inequality (e.g. gender, ethnicity, etc.).

An attempt has been made to reflect the emphasis in the White Paper on the empowerment of parents as educators of their own children; as partners in the governance and management of institutions where early education and care are provided and as stakeholders in relation to policy in this area. Thus, actions relating to parents are included, where appropriate, in the work programme.

A series of tables is used to summarise the programme of work and provide a time frame for that programme.

Development of Quality Standards

As the White Paper acknowledges, there are several conceptual and definitional problems associated with the development of quality standards. However, recent work in this area is beginning to reveal a growing consensus on what constitutes quality. This consensus will form part of the starting point for the work of the Centre in relation to its first function. As noted earlier, the diverse needs of disadvantaged children and children with special needs will form part of the starting point.

Actions

It is envisaged that the first action relating to the development of quality standards will involve setting out a conceptual framework describing how children (from 0 to 6 years) develop and learn. It is envisaged that appropriate learning goals and objectives can be identified within this framework. The framework will be used as the basis for developing guidelines and standards in the areas identified in the White

Paper (curriculum and methodology, equipment and materials, staff and qualifications) and in relation to parental involvement.

Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards. Such consultation will commence shortly after the establishment of the Centre and will be repeated at regular intervals, especially as draft documents (e.g., guidelines) are produced.

Outputs

As implied above, the work of the Centre on quality standards will need to be translated into guidelines. These guidelines will have to be adaptable for use in a wide range and variety of settings in which integrated care and education is provided to children from birth to six. These settings include relatively informal childminding arrangements, preschools, playgroups, crèches and nurseries all of which can be organised as private enterprises or as community-based initiatives and which may or may not be in receipt of State funding. They also include the infant classes of primary schools where the guidelines will be relevant to initiatives such as Whole School Evaluation and School Development Planning.

These guidelines can also be used in working with parents and guardians. For example, they might respond to the need, identified in the White Paper, for ways of enhancing the role of parents and guardians in their daily interactions with children. A multi-media approach to the production of guidelines, in this context, will be necessary and, in particular, use will be made of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Among a number of suggestions in the White Paper are courses/resources for parents delivered through distance education and information packs for parents.

It is envisaged that draft guidelines will be produced towards the middle / end of the Centre's second year. These draft guidelines would then be pilot tested over the following 15 to 18 months.

Ultimately, it is planned that the guidelines produced by the Centre will contain the criteria for the award of the Quality in Education (QE) Mark. The QE Mark itself will,

of course, be one of the most significant outputs from this aspect of the work of the Centre.

Encouraging Compliance with Quality Standards

It is accepted that it will not be possible, within a period of about three years, to put in place a fully developed system for inspection and evaluation as outlined in Chapter 10 of the White Paper. However, it will be possible, within the time frame, to design such a system and begin to pilot some aspects of the system.

Actions

The Centre will seek to make significant progress towards the development of an infrastructure for the monitoring of quality standards. Research and consultation (including consultation with practitioners, policy makers and researchers in other countries) will be used to ensure that the proposed system of monitoring is based on good practice that has emerged in other systems. For example, the procedures developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education could serve as a possible model.

The Centre will also, in the second year of its operation, begin to exercise the role of support provider in relation to compliance with quality standards, as outlined on page 123 of the White Paper. It will do so in the first instance, by designing and costing some of the specific supportive initiatives (e.g., a help line) mentioned in the White Paper. It will then begin to implement at least some of these initiatives on an experimental basis.

Outputs

As well as the experimental initiatives (support services) referred to in the previous paragraph, the Centre will produce a number of elements of a monitoring infrastructure. A "quality target handbook" will be prepared, in which monitoring instruments will be presented. At least some aspects of the monitoring system will be maintained by the Centre on a centralised database, enabling the periodic production of reports on compliance with quality standards. Liaison mechanisms will be established with the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science in

relation to four to six year olds in primary schools and with the Department of Health and Children in relation to the Child-Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations of 1996, as these apply to younger children.

Co-ordinating and Enhancing Provision for Disadvantaged Children and Children with Special Needs

In discharging this function, the Centre will pay particular attention to the following:

- All children have needs, but some children have additional needs, requiring targeted measures.
- There is a need to develop procedures for the early identification of children with particular developmental needs.
- Appropriate forms of early intervention are needed to respond to the particular needs of disadvantaged children and children with special needs.
- Special needs and disadvantage are distinct and the provision appropriate to the two areas differ considerably.
- The contribution of Non-Governmental Organisations and Voluntary and Community Groups, working with disadvantaged children and children with special needs, will be recognised and further developed as appropriate.
- The active involvement of parents in early childhood education settings will be a priority.

Actions

The Centre will commence its work in this area by carrying out an audit of existing provision relating to disadvantage and special needs. An interim report of the audit will be produced after about nine months and a final report after 18 months. In conjunction with this audit, proposals will be made for (a) enhancing and, where appropriate, extending existing provision and (b) innovative initiatives for groups

whose needs are currently not being met. In relation to the former (enhancing existing provision), the Centre will, in the course of its proposals, try to respond to the need, identified in the White Paper, for an agency that is “responsible for all aspects of early childhood education for Traveller children” (p.106). In relation to the latter set of proposals (identifying unmet needs), the Centre will give priority to groups mentioned in the White Paper (e.g., children whose language, cognitive or sensory development has been impaired; disadvantaged children living in rural areas; children whose first language is not English). Reaching out to support the involvement of parents and guardians in families experiencing the most extreme forms of disadvantage will also be a priority in the proposals developed by the Centre.

It is envisaged that the Centre will not confine itself to simply making proposals about innovative initiatives but will actually implement some of these initiatives in the form of targeted programmes, perhaps on an experimental basis and/or support and strengthen existing initiatives. Funding for the delivery of such programmes may be made available to the Centre, independently of its annual grant, in accordance with Item 10 in the Memorandum of Agreement.

The fact that the audit will be reported in two stages means that some targeted programmes can commence as early as the start of the Centre’s second year. Where a clear need is identified, some programmes can be developed in the first year of the project.

Some of the arrangements for consultation and networking in relation to this function will be made by the Centre itself. However, other opportunities for consultation and networking will arise and will be availed of. For example, the twice-yearly meetings of the Forum to Address Educational Disadvantage, announced by the Minister for Education and Science in February 2001, will bring together a wide range of individuals and groups concerned with all aspects of disadvantage, including the role of early childhood education. Staff from the Centre will play an active part in this forum and other similar events.

In addition to its work on equality issues relating specifically to disadvantage and special needs, the Centre will develop procedures for equality proofing (including

gender proofing) all aspects of its own work and early childhood care and education more generally.

Outputs

The Centre will be working towards a coordinated strategy for provision for disadvantaged children and children with special needs which has links between the early years sector and schools and between providers, communities and specialist units within government departments and other state agencies. On the way to putting this strategy in place, the Centre will have a number of more specific outputs. These include:

- an audit of existing provision (reports after 9 and 18 months)
- proposals regarding the enhancement and extension of existing provision
- proposals regarding initiatives to meet needs currently not being met
- a series of targeted programmes being implemented on an experimental basis
- procedures for equality proofing early childhood education and care.

Research and Development

In line with the priorities in the White Paper, the Centre will devote time and other resources to research and development designed to identify and disseminate best practice in curriculum, teaching methodology and parent involvement. As can be seen from the discussion of other functions, much of the research of the Centre is transversal in the sense that it relates to all areas of work of the Centre.

Actions

During its first year of operation, the Centre will carry out a comprehensive review of national and international research in the area of early childhood education and care. A goal of this review will be to identify gaps in existing research. The Centre will then prepare a programme of research designed to fill these gaps. Policy makers,

practitioners and parents will be consulted during the preparation of the research programme.

A variety of methods will be used to ensure that the programme of research is implemented. First, the Centre will seek to encourage other research agencies to undertake research identified in the programme and provide support to these agencies, where possible. Secondly, as indicated earlier, some important research will be done in the Centre itself. In this regard the introduction of doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships, described below, will be significant. Thirdly, the Centre will have responsibility for a dedicated fund to enable it to commission research.

Outputs

The review of research, with which the Centre will commence its work in relation to this function, will represent a valuable resource in the area. It will hopefully lead to the emergence of a coherent programme of research, in which synergy is created between the Centre's own work and that of other researchers.

Policy Advice

As envisaged in the Memorandum of Agreement, the Centre will provide advice to the Department of Education and Science on policy issues related to early childhood education and development. Most of the issues, about which advice is provided, will be ones for which the Department of Education and Science has direct responsibility. However, the Centre will also identify policy measures which the Department of Education and Science could propose to other Departments and to Government. These measures might relate to the kinds of issues raised on page 115 of the White Paper in the context of a discussion of factors that impact on parental choice regarding time spent with their children (income support, flexible working arrangements, etc.).

Actions

It will be a particular responsibility of the Director of the Centre to monitor policy developments in early childhood education and care in a national and international context. This will be done by organising conferences and other events to address policy issues and by establishing and maintaining links with key agencies.

Transnational study visits and North-South cooperation will be important aspects of this work.

Outputs

The Centre will produce annual reports on general policy developments and will respond to requests from the Department of Education and Science for advice on specific policy issues.

Other Actions

Some important aspects of the work of the Centre do not readily fit under any of the five headings used above. Four types of action are described here.

First, the Centre will try to respond to the need, recognised in the White Paper, for the development of mechanisms for the formal representation of parents of children not attending school (i.e., a large majority of children under six years of age). Initially this will involve consultation with existing groups but will move on to the facilitation of discussion and negotiation designed to lead to the establishment of a formal representative structure.

Secondly, the Centre will engage in capacity building within the area of early childhood care and education by working to increase the availability of people with specialist expertise in the area. One aspect of capacity building will be the operation, by the Centre, in conjunction with Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College, of a series of fellowships. It is envisaged that the Institute and the College will advertise a doctoral and a post-doctoral fellowship early on in the life of the Centre. The four successful candidates will pursue their studies in the Centre under the auspices of the Institute or the College but their work will be required to be relevant to the programme of work of the Centre.

It is also planned that a system of secondments from the College and the Institute will be introduced. Secondees will contribute to the work of the Centre in line with their expertise and the needs of the Centre. This system will be part of the Centre's capacity building activities, but will also help to build on the mutually beneficial interaction between the Centre, the Institute and the College that will occur at a number of levels.

Thirdly, the Centre will introduce procedures for the internal monitoring and evaluation of its own work. These procedures will be additional to the external review provided for in Item 1 of the Memorandum of Agreement.

Fourthly, the Centre will need to devote attention to preparing the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper and provided for in the Memorandum of Agreement. Some of the groundwork will emerge automatically from the work of the Centre. For example, procedures for consultation and for dissemination, used by the Centre, can be developed into strategic consultation and dissemination plans that can then be taken on board by the Agency. In addition, the Centre's work on its second function (encouraging compliance with quality standards) will have designed and piloted aspects of a monitoring infrastructure that can be developed and implemented by the Agency.

Function 1: To develop quality standards in relation to all aspects of early childhood education including equipment and material, staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, teaching methodologies, curriculum and related areas.

Notes:

1. As part of the developmental work, transnational study visits will be scheduled.
2. The anticipated outputs of these actions are a series of guidelines and, ultimately, a QE Mark for providers in the sector.
3. Four sets of quality standards (QS1 to QS4) will be developed.
4. Draft guidelines will be produced over the course of year 2 (Quarter 5-8) of the work programme and issued for piloting prior to the production of the Final Guidelines in Year 3.

Quarters

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Conceptual framework (incorporating learning objectives)	*	*	*									
QS1: curriculum & methodology												
QS1: documentary/desk research			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
QS1: consultation with stakeholders		*				*						
QS1: networking					*						*	

Function 1 - contd

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
QS2: Materials and Equipment												
Documentary research			*	*	*	*	*	*				
Consultation			*					*				
Networking					*			*				
QS3: Staff qualifications and training												
Documentary research			*	*	*	*	*	*	*			
Consultation				*					*			
Networking					*				*			
QS4: Parental involvement												
Documentary research			*	*	*	*	*	*				
Consultation			*			*			*			
Networking				*		*		*				

Function 1 – contd.

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Production of Draft Guidelines												
Draft Guidelines QS1							*					
Final Guidelines QS1												*
Draft Guidelines QS2						*						
Final guidelines QS2									*			
Draft guidelines QS3						*						
Final guidelines QS3											*	
Draft guidelines QS4					*							
Final Guidelines QS4									*			

Function 2:To develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards by early education providers

Note:

The monitoring infrastructure referred to in the first action below will include a “quality target handbook”.

Quarters

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Development of quality standards monitoring infrastructure			*	*					*	*	*	*
Consultation re existing arrangements				*						*		
Consultation re proposed arrangements							*	*			*	*
Networking									*			
Documentary/research re best practice in supporting compliance						*	*	*				
Experimental action (e.g. Costing & design of helpline)					*							
Possible implementation of identified approved initiatives								*	*	*	*	*

Function 3: To coordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and special needs group

Notes:

1. The first implementation action below will aim to identify gaps in provision for special needs and disadvantaged groups; it will seek to highlight initiatives whose impact suggests that they can be implemented on a wider basis. This research will form the backcloth to a series of targeted interventions with the two aggregate groups. It will result in an interim and final report.
2. Networking here refers to setting up a mechanism to coordinate the many initiatives – this ‘coordination’ will primarily aim to bring key actors together with a view to the identification of duplication and successful modes of intervention. This will link in with the research function.

Quarters

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Research (documentary & empirical) /audit of existing provision*	*	*	*	*	*	*						
Consultation			*				*		*			
Networking	*			*			*		*		*	
Design of innovative interventions for targeted groups				*	*	*						
Pilot phase for the innovative interventions (evaluation of these actions)					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pilot targeted interventions to promote parental involvement among the disadvantaged groups						*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Function 4: To carry out and commission a programme of research and development through which best practice in curriculum, teaching methodology and parent involvement may be implemented and evaluated

Notes:

1. Three core research programmes, are envisaged. Each of these independent programmes will link with the implementation of the Centre's other functions.
2. The Centre will liaise closely with existing research agencies, seeking to provide encouragement and support in relation to priorities identified in the Centre's research programme.

Quarters

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Review of existing research in relation to curriculum, teaching methodology and parental involvement	*	*	*									
Design research programme		*	*									
Consultation		*						*				
Networking		*					*				*	
Implement research programme (both Centre, including doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships, and commissioned research)				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Global Activities: Policy Advice and Other Actions

Notes:

1. The advice provided by the Centre will relate mainly but not exclusively to education policy.
2. As well as monitoring policy developments, the Centre will respond to requests for advice on policy.
3. During the first nine months of its operation, the Centre will develop a strategy that will guide all subsequent dissemination work.

Quarters

Implementation Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Provision of advice and information to policy-makers and other key stakeholders	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Development and sustaining links with key agencies outside Ireland, for example with Northern Ireland, regarding policy matters			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Facilitating the establishment of a new representative structure for parents		*	*	*	*							
Fellowship programmes [capacity building]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Development and implementation of evaluation systems (internal)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Annual Report					*				*			*
Development of dissemination strategy	*	*	*	*								