

Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in Ireland

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An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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Foreword



The publication of these Criteria and Guidelines for initial professional undergraduate degree programmes for the Early Learning and Care sector is an important milestone which marks the growing professional status of those who support the learning and care of our youngest children. The guidelines have been developed in close consultation with stakeholders, and with the higher education institutions who are producing high quality graduates for the sector.

The guidelines build on the long commitment of my Department to supporting the evolution of the early learning and care sector in Ireland and in particular the professionalisation of the workforce. We have done this over the last two decades, publishing a model framework for the workforce in 2002 and later aligning this work to the National Framework of Qualifications in a workforce development plan in 2010. We have published and are working to implement in collaboration with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and our agencies, the two national practice frameworks for the sector, Síolta and Aistear.

More recently, my inspectorate has rolled out the National Early Years Education Inspections at the behest of my colleague in Government, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. All of these frameworks have been designed to support the workforce in the sector to improve quality and to underpin the very best possible early educational experiences for our youngest citizens.

These guidelines have emerged from a long process of consultation and research. They set out the values, knowledge and practices essential for all professionals working in this field. They will inform the development of undergraduate programmes and will complement the current exciting development of professional awards in the further education and training sector being undertaken by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. For the first time in the history of the ELC sector, the workforce will have access to a suite of professional awards from entry level qualifications at Level 5 to honours degree level, that recognise the value of professionals at all these levels working in ELC settings across the country.

I look forward to working closely with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as we implement the guidelines and review our higher education programmes. The graduates who will emerge from these new professional programmes will form the bedrock for a graduate led profession in the coming years, in line with the ambitions of national and international education policy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe McHugh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Minister for Education and Skills, **Mr Joe McHugh, T.D.**

Foreword



I am delighted to welcome the publication of these Criteria and Guidelines for professional awards at undergraduate level for the Early Learning and Care sector. I recently published the “*First 5 whole of government strategy for babies, young children and their families, 2019-28*”. This for the first time sets out a comprehensive framework for the growth and development of high quality services for our youngest children across the range of Government departments and their agencies who support them during this most important formative period of their lives.

Key to the success of First 5 is a shared vision and commitment by my colleagues in Government to the ambitious agenda set out in the report. One of the major goals in First 5 relates to the availability of positive play-based learning experiences for young children in our ELC settings. While recognising the dedication of our ELC workforce to providing those experiences, I am aware, that like all professions, they need continual support and access to high quality CPD opportunities and initial professional education.

The strong collaborative relationship between my Department and the Department of Education and Skills and their agencies provides opportunities to support the design of a caring educational continuum from birth right through primary school and beyond. The guidelines being published today are just one part of that important agenda being progressed through First 5.

First 5 sets out a highly ambitious vision for a future graduate-led workforce. The environment that ELC professionals work in has changed rapidly over the last decade and will continue to evolve at a fast pace. We need to future-proof and professionalise the qualifications on offer to the current and future workforce so that we can be assured that they are prepared for the responsibility to deliver high quality learning and care experiences for their young charges. These guidelines are one of the important building blocks for the forthcoming comprehensive workforce development process that will be led by my Department in ongoing collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Z. Zappone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, T.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	What is this document?	6
1.1	Introduction and context	7
2.	Purpose of and Rationale for the Criteria and Guidelines	8
3.	Development Process of the Criteria and Guidelines	9
3.1	Structures and Processes	9
3.2	Pillars of Research	10
4.	Professional Award Criteria for Initial Professional Education in ELC	14
4.1	Structure of the Criteria and Guidelines	14
4.2	Programme Content	15
4.3	Programme Delivery	23
	Supervised Practice Placement	25
	Access, Transfer and Progression	26
5.	Other matters for consideration	28
5.1	Upskilling the existing workforce in the early years sector in Ireland.	28
5.2	Access, Transfer and Progression	28
5.3	Induction for Newly Qualified Professionals	28
5.4	Post-qualification Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	29
5.5	Professionalisation and working conditions	29
6.	Summary and Conclusion	29
	References	30
	Appendix 1 – Working Group membership	32
	Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference of the Working Group	33
	Appendix 3: Required competences of an early years professional graduate (Level 8) to work in the early years sector	39
	Appendix 4: Required competences of an early years professional graduate (Level 7) to work in the early years sector	41

1. WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT?

This document presents criteria and guidelines for Initial Professional Education (IPE) (NFQ Level 7 and 8) degree programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care for the ELC (Early Learning and Care) sector in Ireland. The generic title for the professional graduate of these programmes is Early Childhood Educator¹. The structure of the document is as follows:

1. Introduction and context
2. Development process of the criteria and guidelines
 - a. Structures and processes
 - b. Pillars of research
3. Professional Profile of the Graduate Early Childhood Educator
4. Professional Award Criteria for Initial Professional Education in ECEC
 - a. Programme content
 - b. Programme delivery
5. The challenges for graduates
6. Conclusion

¹The use of this term has emerged from extensive consultation with the Early Learning and Care sector and reported on in: Fillis, Suzanne, *Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Ireland; An evaluation of the consultation findings* <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/evaluation-report-consultation-on-draft-criteria-and-guidelines.pdf>

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector has developed exponentially in the past few decades, with a particularly fast pace of development in recent years. This has been driven by both the increased understanding of the value of quality ELC experiences for young children and by the need to provide services for parents to participate in employment outside the home. Accompanying this has been an increased State involvement, regulation and investment in the sector with the advent of a number of universal and targeted initiatives in the provision of ELC. The introduction of the Free Preschool Year (ECCE) scheme in 2010 and its extension to a second year in 2016 and 2018 has introduced increased professional expectations of the ELC workforce. Collectively, these developments have resulted in a much increased workforce and a more complex policy and practice landscape for the sector (Walsh, 2016; Urban, Robson & Saatchi, 2017).

This evolving policy and practice landscape has led to an increase in the level of qualifications achieved by staff in ELC settings. This is both a response to the more complex role undertaken by such staff and the advent of minimum criteria to work in the sector and the eligibility criteria for higher capitation paid by certain State initiatives. For example, higher capitation grants are awarded to ELC settings in the Free Preschool Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme which employ staff with higher qualifications in the role of Pre-school Leader (Level 7 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)², and three years of post-qualification experience). The minimum level of qualification introduced for all staff working with young children is a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent). These, among other developments, have led to the emergence of a wide range of initial professional education offerings for staff in ELC settings and a concomitant rise in the number of graduates at all levels of the NFQ.

The contribution of initial professional education programmes is critical in ensuring that early childhood education and care settings for children in Ireland are of the highest quality thereby increasing the likelihood that children's experiences of these settings will positively contribute to their learning, well-being and development in the present and into their future.

Research clearly indicates that there is variability in the experiences of degree course participants in Ireland at present depending on where they undertake their course (DES, 2016; Urban, Robson & Saatchi, 2017). Given the variability of the experience of degree courses, it follows that the experiences of our youngest citizens in ELC settings will also be variable. It is, therefore, the objective of these criteria and guidelines to ensure that all awards offered in Ireland as IPE for Early Childhood Educators will have the capacity to prepare graduates for the complex and challenging roles they will occupy.

The possible role titles for early childhood educators include setting-based practitioners, managers, teachers, lecturers, inspectors/ evaluators, mentors and many more. This work may involve early childhood educators working directly with children, with parents, with professional colleagues or in the wider community (or indeed with all of the above in the complex daily role). See figure 1 overleaf.

² Please visit <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html> for an overview of the NFQ.



Figure 1: Range of contexts in which early childhood educators work

2. Purpose of and Rationale for the Criteria and Guidelines

While further education award standards were established for ECEC at Levels 4, 5 and 6 on the NFQ in 2011 (<http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/FET-Awards-Standards.aspx>), there has been little national oversight around the structure and content of programmes at bachelor degree level and above. The purpose of these criteria and guidelines is to support the development of professional awards (Level 7 and Level 8³) that will lead to the formation of early childhood educator graduates who are fully prepared to take on the complex challenges of practice in this field.

They may be used in the development or review of programmes by individual institutions, by awarding bodies, by accreditation bodies or by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). They will be of use to employers in terms of clarifying the values, knowledge(s) and practices of a Level 7 or Level 8 ECEC graduate. It is also hoped that they will have a positive effect in the development of a more cohesive professional identity among graduates and ultimately enhance the experiences of young children in ELC settings.

³Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has a statutory remit to develop award standards at Levels 1-10 of the NFQ. QQI was represented on this working group to ensure alignment in the future development of criteria and standards at Levels, 4, 5 and 6 and to ensure coherence across all levels of the NFQ. Current development of content using Professional Award-type Descriptors for major professional ECEC awards at Level 5 and 6 is being closely aligned and mapped across to these Criteria and Guidelines.

The criteria and guidelines specifically focus on the professional dimension of practice in the ELC sector which must be integral to the professional formation of Level 7 and Level 8 graduates. It provides guidance and criteria on the journey from entry for a candidate onto a Level 7 or Level 8 undergraduate course to their exit as an early childhood educator graduate. It is intended that the criteria and guidelines will enable initial professional education course providers to design and deliver a course (including professional practice placement) that develops the necessary values, knowledge(s) and practices in their graduates to enable them to practise as ELC professionals. The criteria are inclusive of both academic and professional indicators expected by early childhood educator graduates. Finally, but perhaps most critically, they aim to improve the experiences and outcomes of our youngest citizens in ELC settings. It is not intended that these criteria and guidelines will standardise and homogenise the delivery and content of all Level 7 and Level 8 courses in Ireland; rather it aims to bring some consistency to the experiences and outcomes for students undertaking such courses.

3. Development Process of the Criteria and Guidelines

3.1 STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

A working group was established in June 2017 by the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEP) to lead the development of professional award criteria and guidelines to inform the development and review of ordinary and honours level degrees (Level 7 and Level 8) programmes for the ELC sector in Ireland. The working group was representative of key constituents of the education sector with a remit to authorise and implement the use of the criteria and guidelines in their various jurisdictions. Included were representatives from the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Technological Higher Education Authority (THEA). Membership of the working group can be found in Appendix 1. The terms of reference of the working group were shared with the wider ELC sector in September 2017 (see Appendix 2). This is in keeping with the long tradition of consultation on policy development in partnership with the sector and consultation on the criteria and guidelines is central to the work of the group. Consultation was facilitated through the Early Years Advisory Group established by the Minister for Education and Skills, the Early Years Forum established by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and through wider public consultation processes. Consultation ensures these criteria and guidelines are balanced, comprehensive and reflective of the diverse needs of the sector. Consultative processes commenced in December 2017 and comprised public seminars and online survey opportunities for all stakeholder organisations. The details of the consultation processes and the findings were published in June 2018⁴.

Subsequent to consultation processes being concluded the Criteria and Guidelines were submitted for review and sign-off by the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

⁴ Fillis, Suzanne, Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Ireland; An evaluation of the consultation findings <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/evaluation-report-consultation-on-draft-criteria-and-guidelines.pdf>

3.2 PILLARS OF RESEARCH

3.2.1 ELC Policy and Research

The criteria and guidelines are informed by research from a number of studies, both national and international, and distil the key elements of what is considered essential for the professional formation of a competent and confident ELC professional. The work of the group was primarily informed by a commissioned review of the occupational role profiles in ELC in Ireland conducted by the University of Roehampton (Urban, Robson & Saatchi, 2017). In turn, this report drew upon previous national and international research including:

- The *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 2002). This set out occupational profiles and core skills for 5 levels of practitioner, from 'Basic' to 'Expert'.
- *A Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2010). This plan recognised the impact that the calibre and capacity of ELC professionals has on the quality of experiences of young children. It made a number of recommendations relating to improving access to appropriate initial and continuing professional education to prepare ELC professionals for the challenging role in the ELC sector.
- The *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe)* report (Urban et al., 2011) was a European research project which explored conceptualisations of competence and professionalism in the ELC sector. This report identified systemic conditions for developing, supporting and maintaining competence at all levels of the ECEC system.
- A survey of ELC practitioners to seek their views on the extent to which current early childhood care and education qualifications provide early years practitioners with the appropriate blend of knowledge and skills to support the educational development of children in early years settings (DES, 2016).

These reports, particularly the Urban, Robson & Saatchi (2017) research, underpin the criteria and guidelines. Collectively they have posited a common core professional profile, which is framed in general terms, and provides detail of the knowledge, practices and values expected in the initial professional education of Level 7 and Level 8 professional education courses.

Recent policy and practice developments are reflected in the criteria and guidelines. For example, the development of national practice frameworks such as *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009) and *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006) are incorporated in the knowledge element of initial professional education courses. While using somewhat varying language, the research outlines a key range of values (principles, dispositions), knowledge(s) and practices (skills, competences) that are central to the professional formation of ELC professionals.

The criteria outline the essential components in the professional formation of ELC professionals while the guidelines surrounding these criteria provide guidance on the inputs and processes that should assist the achievement of desired graduate attributes. It is envisaged that the achievement of a Level 7 or Level 8 degree does not represent the end of the learning processes or indeed complete professional formation but instead marks a milestone of achievement that will be built on by both formal and informal learning throughout the early childhood educator's career. A commitment to such ongoing professional learning is inherent to the attributes and formation of an early childhood educator. It is expected that the criteria and guidelines for ordinary and honours level degrees (Level 7 and Level 8) can be further developed to provide clarity around expectations for Level 9 courses in the future. It is expected that these criteria and guidelines will be updated into the future to reflect ongoing developments within the sector.

3.2.2 Policy and Research relating to Developing Professional Award Criteria and Standards

All providers offering programmes leading to awards on the NFQ form part of the national education and training system. This system is underpinned by quality assurance, which seeks to provide public trust and confidence in the education and training delivered and the resulting qualifications obtained by learners. QQI has published Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for providers of higher, further and English language education and training.⁵ Provider-owned quality assurance refers to the mechanisms and procedures developed and adopted by providers to achieve and maintain a desired level of quality in educational provision, research and related services.

⁵ QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for providers of higher, further and English language education and training <http://www.qqi-qaguidelines.com/>

Since the establishment of the NFQ (NQAI, 2002)⁶, a range of award standards has been developed to inform the development of programmes across the NFQ. QQI adopted the National Framework of Qualifications' generic award-type descriptors as generic awards standards. These generic awards standards form the basis of all awards standards. In 2014, QQI published professional award-type descriptors for the alignment of professional awards (QQI, 2014). These are also documented in Appendix 2 (Level 8) and Appendix 3 (Level 7) alongside the general indicators. These criteria and guidelines are informed by these standards. Moreover, each individual awarding body has established a set of criteria and guidelines that inform programmes leading to awards within their institutions.

QQI (2014:2) indicate that the purpose of a Level 8 Professional Award is to ensure that:

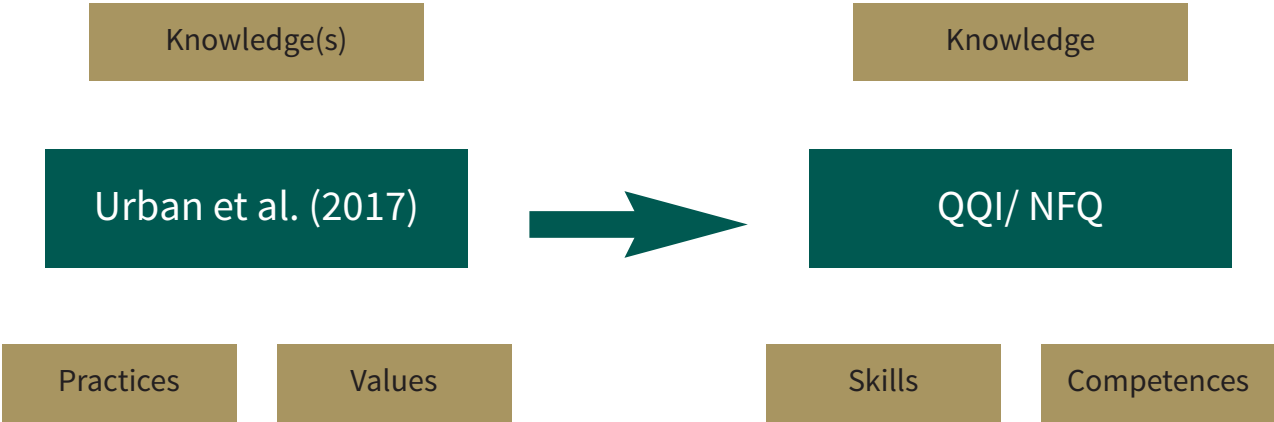
The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are proper to independent professional practice, as well as relevant to personal development, participation in society, employment and study including access to ELC formal education and training.

An ELC professional graduate requires a combination of attributes which are developed through a range of experiences. These include academic attributes (e.g., establishing sound academic principles), professional practice attributes (e.g., planning and developing a curriculum for children) and professional personal attributes (e.g., an ethical practice framework to inform their practice, the capacity for reflection and critical thinking).

In both the NQAI (2002) and the Urban, Robson and Saatchi (2017) reports, there are three core elements. NFQ indicators as outlined by the NQAI (2002) in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4 are used to frame the knowledge, skills and competences required by ELC professional graduates. These align to the values, knowledge(s) and practices as outlined in the Urban, Robson and Saatchi (2017) report. The knowledge(s) align automatically. The practices in the Urban, Robson and Saatchi (2017) report are aligned to the skills and competences in the NFQ documentation. The values in the Urban Robson and Saatchi (2017) report are inherent within the competences in the NFQ indicators with the understanding that they will be expressed more fully within each individual award standard. This alignment is represented visually in Figure 2 overleaf.

⁶ QQI was established in November 2012 by the amalgamation of the functions of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Amongst its functions, QQI is responsible for the maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Figure 2: Alignment between Urban et al. (2017) criteria and QQI (2014)



Professional and personal values are the lens through which professional knowledge is interpreted. They orient our making sense of the world and underpin our practices. The criteria and guidelines are underpinned by and framed within a range of core principles. These principles have been developed through consultation with the sector and are well articulated within a range of policy documents. These include the *Model Framework* (DJELR, 2002), the *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) frameworks, as well as in the more recent national policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) and the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines and Charter* (DCYA, 2016). The publication of *First 5*, a whole of government strategy for babies, young children and their families, 2019-28 further articulates a shared vision for the sector. These principles encapsulate a range of values that can be both inherent and explicit within programmes and should underpin the initial professional education of students pursuing Level 7 and Level 8 degrees. Recent work carried out by the Professionalisation subgroup, comprising of key stakeholders of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Early Years Forum has articulated a Code of Ethics for Early Years Teachers in Ireland, which are also of relevance in this regard.

4. Professional Award Criteria for Initial Professional Education in ECEC

4.1 STRUCTURE OF THE CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

In April 2017, Urban, Robson & Saatchi (2017) developed a common core profile for the early childhood profession in Ireland irrespective of occupational role title. The three inter-related and inseparable dimensions of this professional profile are:

1. Knowledge(s)
2. Practices
3. Values

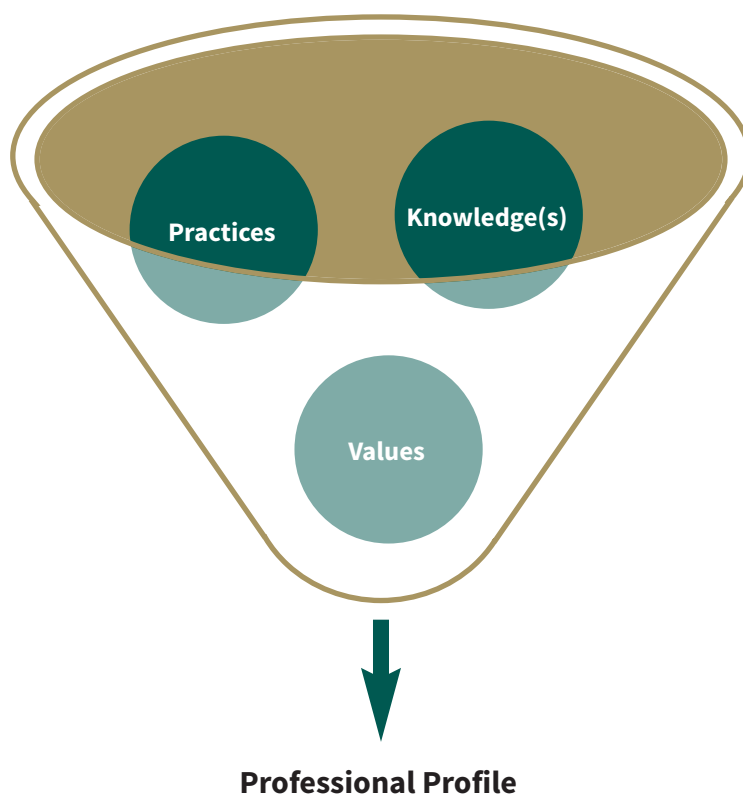


Figure 3: Components of the Professional Profile

These three dimensions are identified as relevant to four broad areas of professional practice. The first three are defined in relational terms:

1. Working with children
2. Working with families and communities
3. Working with other professionals and institutions

The fourth area relates to the wider context of engaging in the development of early childhood education and care provision and practice. Professional activities in this regard include:

- Personal, professional development – including activities such as self-reflection and evaluation, continuous professional development and advocacy.
- Early Childhood Systems development and improvement – including promoting quality in early childhood provision and practice in the wider local, national and international context.

Professional awards in Early Childhood Education and Care for the ELC sector must, therefore, build the capacity of the learner to engage in all of these domains. This requires that programme design is constructed to ensure that programme content, structure and delivery are carefully balanced to allow for key concepts and areas of professional practice to be explored, reflected upon and revisited as the process of professional formation unfolds. It should also prepare graduate for a profession which requires a strong commitment to lifelong learning and continuous professional development to meet the dynamic and evolving nature of the context and demands of professional practice in early childhood education and care.

4.2 PROGRAMME CONTENT

The details of programme content in the tables below have taken the foundational concepts drawn from the individual competences for the early childhood professional contained in the CoRe report and have further incorporated the findings from consultation with the Early Years sector in Ireland. Whilst there was strong endorsement for the CoRe report competences, there were a significant number of recommendations for the addition of specific attributes that would be relevant to professional practice in the early years sector in Ireland. Whilst these criteria and guidelines do not seek to create absolute homogeneity across higher education professional awards in ECEC, it was evident from the consultation processes that there are essential core, knowledge, practices and values that must be fully integrated into any programme design.

TABLE 1: ESSENTIAL PROGRAMME CONTENT FOR PROFESSIONAL AWARDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE.

Knowledge	Practices	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of various developmental aspects of children from a holistic perspective (cognitive, social, emotional, creative...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Building strong pedagogical relationships with children, based on sensitive responsiveness ■ Observing and assessing children in order to identify their developmental needs ■ Planning and implementing a wide range of learning experiences that respond to children's needs supporting their holistic development ■ Documenting children's progress systematically in order to constantly redefine educational practices ■ Identifying children with ELC needs and elaborating strategies for their inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Taking into account children's needs in order to promote their full potential and their participation in the life of ELC institutions ■ Adopting a holistic vision of education that encompasses learning, care and upbringing ■ Committing to inclusive educational approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of children's different strategies of learning (play-based, social learning, early literacy and numeracy, language acquisition and multilingualism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creating and organising effective learning environments ■ Providing and presenting learning opportunities that foster children's creativity, aesthetic awareness, meaning making and imagination. 	

Knowledge	Practices	Values
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arranging small-group learning opportunities based on children's interests (inquiry-based learning) ■ Encouraging children's personal initiatives ■ Supporting children's symbolic play through appropriate provision of structured and unstructured materials ■ Generating an appropriate curriculum that stimulates and promotes positive learning dispositions, emergent literacy, maths and science skills ■ Promoting language acquisition from a multilingual perspective (recognising children's home language and supporting second language acquisition) ■ Offering more personalised and individual learning support to children with special educational needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a child-centred approach that views children as competent, active agents and as protagonists of their own learning ■ Understanding learning as a co-constructed and open-ended process that ensures children's successful social engagement and encourages further learning ■ Adopting a cross-disciplinary approach to learning ■ Adopting a multilingual approach that encourages learning in contexts of diversity

Knowledge	Practices	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge in relation to the health, care and wellbeing of young children ■ Knowledge in relation to ensuring the well-being and safety of children and adults in an ELC environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implementing appropriate practices in relation to children's safety, hygiene and nutrition ■ Ensuring that all measures in relation to child protection are in place and operational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Commitment to welfare and well-being for all adults and children in ELC settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of communication with children and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Valuing and encouraging children's expression through different languages (painting, dancing, story-telling...) ■ Making accessible to children the cultural heritage of local communities as well as the cultural heritage of humankind (arts, drama, music, dance, sports...) ■ Encouraging children to engage in cultural production as a way to express themselves ■ Involving children in community-based projects (festivals, cultural events,...) and valuing their contributions (through exhibitions, documentaries...) ■ Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge together with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a rights-based approach to ELC in which children's right to citizenship encompasses their full participation in the social and cultural life of their community ■ Promoting democracy, solidarity, active citizenship, creativity and personal fulfilment

Knowledge	Practices	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of working with parents and local communities (knowledge about families, poverty and diversity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analysing the needs of local communities to work effectively with parents and disadvantaged groups ■ Establishing partnership relationships with parents based on mutual understanding, trust and cooperation ■ Enabling open communication and reciprocal dialogue with parents ■ Creating systematic opportunities fostering dialogue and exchanges (e.g. documentation, but also welcoming practices...) ■ Involving parents in the decision-making processes (collegial bodies, parents-teachers committees,...) and taking their perspectives into account ■ Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge together with parents and supporting their parental role ■ Organising initiatives involving parents as well as members of local communities (e.g. workshops, debates and open conferences,...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a democratic and inclusive approach to the education and care of young children and families in order to sustain social cohesion ■ Recognising the educational role of parents as the primary educators of their children during the early years

Knowledge	Practices	Values
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Building up support for ELC services within local communities ■ Establishing collaborative relationships with other professionals (e.g. health and social services) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of team working (interpersonal communication and group-work dynamics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continuously reviewing practices individually and collectively ■ Sharing and exchanging expertise with colleagues in team meetings ■ Engaging in discussion and learning from disagreement ■ Developing educational practices together with colleagues through joint work ■ Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge through documentation and collective evaluation of educational practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a democratic and critically reflective approach to the education of young children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of working in contexts of diversity (anti-biased approaches, intercultural dialogue, identity...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developing inclusive practices that facilitate the socialisation of children and families within a plurality of value systems and proactively address discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a democratic and inclusive approach that values diversity

Knowledge	Practices	Values
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Facilitating intercultural dialogue within ELC services and in the wider community through parents' involvement ■ Dealing with unpredictability and uncertainty ■ Elaborating a pedagogical framework that sustains inclusive practices within ELC services ■ Engagement with other professionals and professional organisations in support of children's learning, well-being and development 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of the historical and current situation of ELC in the broader local, national and international context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provision of ELC that is respectful of the historical, philosophical and cultural context in which it is located ■ Actively engaging with local communities in promoting children's and families' rights and participation ■ Networking with other professionals (e.g. professional associations, trade unions) and engaging in local political consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rights-based approach to ELC that promotes children's and families' active citizenship, solidarity and lifelong learning

Knowledge	Practices	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of being a professional Early Childhood Educator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Self- reflection and self-evaluation ■ Practicing within an agreed ethical framework ■ Translating theoretical knowledge into practice ■ Modelling democratic leadership ■ Advocacy for quality in all domains of early childhood education and care provision and practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopting a democratic and critically reflective approach to personal professional development ■ Commitment to continuing professional development as a core attribute of the professional Early Childhood Educator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of leadership and management in Early Childhood Education and Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pedagogical leadership in support of the learning, well-being and development of all children ■ Co-ordination of the effective operation of a sustainable, ethical and legislatively compliant ELC setting ■ Implementation of effective and democratic organisational structures and processes ■ Implementation of innovative, evidence informed policies provision and practice. ■ Effective communication with all stakeholders and partners in the learning well-being and development of children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ethical, democratic leadership that promotes sustainable development

Knowledge	Practices	Values
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support and supervision of all staff and students in support of their personal and professional development ■ Respectful engagement with evaluation, monitoring and accountability processes 	

4.3 PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Level 7 and Level 8 undergraduate degree programmes in ECEC should provide rich and diverse learning experiences for students to develop their values, knowledge(s) and practices as they develop as early childhood educators. These experiences must include personal and professional development experiences that enable them to become reflective practitioners and prepare them for professional practice in the ELC profession. Working with children, families and diverse communities not only requires a body of knowledge but the ability to translate that knowledge into action. It was clearly indicated throughout the responses to the consultation on the draft criteria and guidelines that the duration of a professional award must be sufficient to accommodate the evolving professional formation of the participant.⁷

In the Irish context it was argued that a graduate from a four-year Level 8 degree programme would attain 240 ECTS credits (a minimum of 6,000 hours of work), while a graduate from a three-year Level 7/8 degree programme would attain 180 credits (4,500 hours of work).

Given the complex and challenging nature of the role of the Early Childhood Educator it is required that a Level 8 professional award in ECEC will facilitate the achievement of 240 ECTS and a level 7 professional award will facilitate the achievement of 180 ECTS. Other comparable professions where undergraduate courses are designed to achieve 240 ECTS credits are, e.g., primary school teaching, nursing and social studies. Typically, these professional awards are four years in duration for ab-initio full-time programmes and postgraduate qualifications are two years in duration. (e.g., primary and post-primary teaching).

⁷ The comments of the European Commission (2015) in relation to the application of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) were cited:

“ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent” and that “one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work”. (page 10)

While respecting the autonomy of education providers to have flexibility in relation to the design, development and delivery of degree programmes, courses must adhere to the following guidelines. These draw on the QQI list of core validation criteria (QQI, 2016) and incorporate feedback from the consultation processes on the draft criteria and guidelines. They provide specific guidance in relation to aspects of ECEC courses, including professional practice placement.

- **Programme objectives and outcomes** should be clear and consistent with the award sought.
- Each module objective and learning outcomes should be clear and communicated to the students.
- **Access, transfer and progression arrangements** are in place and are transparent and fair.
- The mode, method and location of programme delivery must not compromise or dilute the overall integrity of the professional award.
- Programme Staff are **qualified and capable** with expertise and experience in ELC. Normally staff should be qualified to one level above that which the participant on the programme is expected to attain. Allied professionals may also engage with students for discrete aspects of the course (e.g., psychologists, nutritionists, etc.).
- Programme staff should be research active and take lead roles in relation to conducting, supervising and publishing research.
- **Face-to-face and online learning and teaching** contact hours provide opportunities for individual, group and experiential learning.
- **Significant opportunities are in place for personal and professional development to support the development of** reflective practice, problem solving, intentionality and critical thinking and the capacity to become practitioner researchers with a disposition for lifelong learning.
- **Structured supervised assessed professional practice placement** for a minimum of 35%⁸ of the overall duration of the course in appropriate settings is a core feature of the programme.

⁸ This time allocation is common across other professional disciplines (e.g., teaching, social care).

- A **range of assessment methods are used** that capture the incremental acquisition of values, knowledge(s) and practices of students. These assessment methods are fair, transparent and consistent. A combination of formative and summative assessments are included. There is a clear relationship between learning outcomes, learning experiences and the assessment criteria.
- The programme's **written curriculum is** well-structured and fit-for-purpose.
- **Sufficient physical resources** are available to implement the programme as planned.
- The **learning environment** is consistent with the needs of programme learners.
- Learners enrolled on the programme are **well informed, guided and cared for** (including students with ELC learning needs).
- The programme is **well managed** and **meets highest governance standards**.

SUPERVISED PRACTICE PLACEMENT

As the matter of supervised practice placement is so critical in the professional formation of graduate Early Childhood Educators, further specific guidelines are necessary to ensure the relevance and quality of this aspect of the professional award.

Professional practice placement experience should be incremental/ spiral in nature and be integral to each phase of the programme. Professional practice placement experience should provide students with an opportunity to:

- Observe experienced professionals and be supported to reflect on these observations in a variety of early years settings
- Integrate theory and practice
- Apply knowledge in practice.
- Develop and demonstrate the required values, knowledge(s) and practices to work with young children in the context of their setting, family and community under the supervision of more experienced professionals
- Critically engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation of their own practice and engage in professional conversations with more experienced professionals (setting-based practitioners and supervisors) around their practice.

Professional practice placement should be undertaken in a range of various settings spanning the early childhood age range (birth to six years) and catering for a diverse range of children, including children with ELC needs. Placements in non-practice settings such as policy development agencies, research centres, City and County Childcare Committees and regulatory agencies should also be considered. However, latter placements should not be more than one of a range of settings for professional practice settings for a student.

Placement settings should be TUSLA-registered and criteria for the selection of settings should be developed.

There should be support by both course-based staff and ELC staff based in the setting.

Visiting tutors or supervisors should have suitable qualifications for and experience of the early years sector and work alongside co-operating educators within professional practice placement settings to support and assess students

There should be structures in place to build active partnership and relationships between course providers and professional practice placement settings. For example, this could be achieved through the development of a Memorandum of Understanding or an agreement that provides comprehensive information about respective roles and responsibilities.

There should be a requirement that students must pass the professional practice placement element of the programme independent of all other elements in order to progress to the next year of the programme or to graduate. Students who fail professional practice placement should be offered mentoring and support if they are afforded the opportunity to repeat the professional practice placement. Continuing professional development opportunities should be available to visiting tutors to ensure coherence and consistency of the institutional assessment processes and procedures

ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

It is essential that initial professional education course providers for Level 7 and Level 8 degrees ensure that participants on their programme have the necessary academic ability and are personally suitable to meet the demands of the programme. Providers must adopt, where appropriate, policies and procedures relating to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) in the assessment of candidates⁹. These should involve an analysis of the content of prior courses undertaken and of prior experience to ensure all students, especially those on advanced entry, have the necessary knowledge, skills and values to undertake the course.¹⁰ Due to the complex legacy of the unregulated professional status of the workforce in the ELC sector in Ireland, criteria for ATP processes must include a standardised approach to the recognition and accreditation of prior awards achieved by potential entrants to Professional Awards for Early Childhood Educators (HE).

⁹ QQI Policy Restatement of Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training [NQAI 2003, Restated 2015]

¹⁰ QQI is currently undertaking a review of the Common Award Standards in Early Childhood Care and Education at Levels, 4, 5 and 6. This has the potential to make a very positive contribution to the promotion of coherence and cohesion across all levels of pre and in-service education for early childhood educators.

- Processes developed for the recognition and/or accreditation of prior learning must be documented and implemented by individuals who have the necessary qualifications, experience and expertise to ensure consistent outcomes for all applicants.
- An NFQ Level 6 further education award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent) can be deemed to have a maximum credit value of 60 ECTS for the purposes of advanced entry into a degree programme.¹¹
- An NFQ Level 5 further education award can be deemed sufficient to gain initial entry to an undergraduate programme but cannot be used for the purposes of advanced entry into a degree programme.

¹¹ NFQ Level 6 further education awards comprise of 120 credits. These further education credits are not ECTS equivalent, and normally represent a volume of 10 hours of learning. ECTS represent 25 to 30 hours of learning.

NQAI (2006) published 'Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training'. (Note; this document is also referred to in the ATP restatement document mentioned in 3. above)

5. OTHER MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

As the CoRe report (Urban et al., 2011) identified, a wide range of factors impact on the competence of an ELC system. The professional competence of the workforce is a key dimension. However, the effectiveness of the system within which graduate professionals work is dependent on a myriad of factors at a macro and micro level. The competent system is defined across four levels – the individual, the team/institution, the inter-institutional level and the governance level. While there has been much activity in the development of the ELC sector in recent years, a number of fundamental issues exist that, while outside the scope of these criteria and guidelines, should be considered by providers of professional awards for early childhood educators. These are signposted briefly below.

5.1 UPSKILLING THE EXISTING WORKFORCE IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR IN IRELAND.

As previously observed, the workforce in the Early Years sector in Ireland was entirely unregulated in terms of qualification to practice until 2016. This has resulted in the existence of a diverse qualification profile across all types of Early Years settings. In recent years several initiatives have been established to ‘upskill’ the early years workforce to meet regulatory and contractual compliance obligations. The ‘Learner Fund’ model and the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) models of support have been very positive in their impact on the qualification profile of the workforce. It is now necessary to consider how such experience can be used to develop a similar upskilling model to enable the ELC workforce to achieve this Professional Early Childhood Educator award (either Level 7 or Level 8).

5.2 ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

In addition to the specific criteria associated with the delivery of Early Childhood Educator professional awards, it is worth considering how this award relates to other professional awards held by professionals who also work directly with children in the 0-6 age range. What are the possibilities for these professional awards to afford access, transfer and progression across these separate but related domains of practice?

5.3 INDUCTION FOR NEWLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS

There is increasing awareness of the value and importance of a structured induction process for entry to a profession. At other levels of the education and care systems (e.g., primary and post-primary teaching), structured induction programmes have been developed and are being introduced to support the transition for student teachers in the first year of teaching. A model of induction for graduates of ECEC courses could be beneficial to graduate Early Childhood Educators to support their entry to the profession. This has been shown in other professions to not only benefit the new graduate but also has a positive professional development component for more experienced professionals. A registration system and body for ELC professionals should also be considered to set professional standards for the sector and to promote the work of professionals in the ELC sector.

5.4 POST-QUALIFICATION CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Early childhood Educators will graduate from Level 7 and Level 8 professional award programmes with the values, knowledge(s) and practices to enable them to work within the ELC sector. Given the evolving nature of fundamental understandings informed by research, policy and practice within the field, it will be necessary for graduates to regularly review and update their own professional ‘qualification to practice’. This may be achieved through participation in a range of formal and informal CPD activities throughout their careers. Professional award programmes at Level 7 and Level 8 should offer clear pathways for transfer and progression to further qualifications nationally and internationally.

5.5 PROFESSIONALISATION AND WORKING CONDITIONS

While the ELC workforce has become increasingly professionalised in terms of qualifications and the expectations placed on the sector, there have been limited steps taken to recognise or reward this professionalisation. It should be noted that the state operates within significant constraints in this respect, given the commercial nature of the sector where the majority of ELC settings are private employers. If professional Early Childhood Educators are to be recruited and retained in practice in ELC settings progress must be made in relation to the following; support for professionals to advance their qualifications, the remuneration of ELC professionals, the improvement of general terms and conditions of employment and opportunities for professional career progression. Until these issues are addressed, graduates will enter a sector where their work feels undervalued and under rewarded which will impact on their capacity to practise and develop professionally. The establishment of an accreditation body or professional body with a register of professionals (such as CORU for social care professionals or the Teaching Council for Teachers) within the sector may be considered into the future as part of the journey to professionalisation.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

These criteria and guidelines are an important element of a framework for the development and review of Level 7 and Level 8 ECEC courses in Ireland. The challenge for the sector is to review, interrogate and engage with any such review processes with the ultimate goal of strengthening the quality of both professional higher education awards in the ELC sector and the calibre of provision and practice supported by graduates.

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APPENDIX 1 – WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Dr Maresa Duignan, Assistant Chief Inspector, DES (Chair)

Ms Antoinette Gibbs, Early Years Specialist and Inspector, DES (Secretariat)

Dr Geraldine French, DCU (Irish Universities Association)

Ms Roisín McGlone, IT Sligo (Technological Higher Education Authority)

Ms Róisín Sweeney, Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Ms Valerie Harvey, Higher Education Authority

Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University, was the Technical Expert to the Working Group.

INTRODUCTION

This short paper sets the context and rationale for the establishment of a working group to develop draft criteria and guidelines to inform the development of professional education awards at ordinary and honours bachelor degree level in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. The group is being established by the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) of the Department of Education and Skills which has had a long standing remit to provide advice to a range of government agencies and policymakers on workforce development issues in the early year's sector. This paper also sets out the draft terms of reference, membership and timelines for the working group.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In 2010, the Department of Education and Skills published a Workforce Development Plan¹² for the ELC sector in Ireland, which built on the Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development that had been published in 2002¹³. The report acknowledged the strong evidence base that early childhood experiences have a critical impact on the well-being, learning and development of children and that the calibre and capacity of adults delivering those early years services was a determining factor in the quality of those experiences. A number of recommended actions were included in the report highlighting the importance of improving access to appropriate initial and continuing professional education and training programmes designed to prepare staff for the range of roles and practice in early years settings.

In 2015, the Department of Education and Skills began an initial consultative review relating to the quality of education and training provision for professionals working in the early year's sector. As part of the review, two surveys were completed by early year's practitioners and employers respectively and a third survey was an open-to-all consultation. The early years professionals' survey responses and the report was published in 2016¹⁴. The findings reveal that there is overall satisfaction with the quality of education and training currently provided. However, significant gaps were identified in certain areas. These include lack of preparedness to cater for the educational needs of children with ELC needs, including those with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English; lack of preparedness to implement the two national practice frameworks, Síolta and Aistear; and concerns around the quality of the supervised professional practice element of their studies. The gaps identified partly reflect the changing environment in which early years professionals must now work. This changed environment has been brought about by the introduction of a universal pre-school scheme, offering free pre-school places to all children and by an increased diversity in Irish society.

Since 2010, the policy and practice landscape of the early year's sector in Ireland has changed dramatically. This change has resulted in higher professional expectations for staff in early years settings and of particular relevance for this initiative, there has been a steady growth in the number of higher education and training programmes in this field. There has been a concomitant increase in the number of graduates of these programmes working in practice in early years settings. All these factors point towards an urgent need to

¹² https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye_workforce_dev_plan.pdf

¹³ <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/Model-Framework-for-Education-Training-and-Professional-Development-in-the-Early-Childhood-Care-and-Education-Sector.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/Early-Years-Practitioner-Survey-Findings-2016.pdf>

review the initial education programmes in ECEC. In advance of such work, which could take place in 2018, it is imperative that a set of criteria and guidelines be developed which will reflect the scope and nature of professional practice in the early years sector as informed by national and international research.

REVIEW OF OCCUPATIONAL ROLE PROFILES

In mid-2016, building on work to date, as well as the first phase of information gathering outlined above, the Department of Education and Skills commissioned a literature and policy review and a review of the occupational role profiles for professionals in the early year's sector. Professor Mathias Urban and his team in the Early Childhood Research Centre in the University of Roehampton carried out the commissioned research and presented initial findings to the Department of Education and Skills in December 2016. A consultation event to discuss these findings with the wider early year's sector, was led by Professor Urban in Dublin Castle in late 2016 and a final report informed by the views of the stakeholders at that consultation was submitted to DES in April 2017.

The report¹⁵ puts forward a core common role profile for the early childhood profession in Ireland. Professor Urban concludes that the aim of national workforce development policy in the early years sector should be to develop a competent system that supports professional practice through the implementation of a coherent set of criteria and guidelines at all domains of potential influence (i.e. from national policy and governance to the local workplace and personal). Professor Urban states that a central requirement for achieving this goal is shared professional values and practices for all professionals working with children from birth to eight years, regardless of occupational status, job title and level of formal qualification. These shared professional values and practices should also feature in all professional occupations and institutions that constitute the ELC system. The report sets out the knowledge, practices and values that should form the core requirement for an ELC professional.

REVIEW OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN ELC

It is now proposed to use the *Review of Occupational Role Profiles in Ireland in Early Childhood Education and Care* by Urban, M. Robson, S. and Scacchi, V. (2017) as the starting point to establish criteria and guidelines for ordinary and honours degree programmes in ELC¹⁶. It is also proposed to establish a small working group which will draft professional award criteria and guidelines for ordinary and honours undergraduate degree programmes in ELC.

The working group is chaired by the Assistant Chief Inspector of the Early Years Education Inspection Unit in the Department of Education and Skills, Dr Maresa Duignan, and comprises of representatives, nominated by the Irish Universities Association and the Technological Higher Education Association, from the university and institute of technology sector with current expertise in the development of ELC higher education programmes as well as representatives from the HEA and QQI. The technical drafting of the new award criteria and guidelines is carried out by an academic with established expertise in the field.

¹⁵ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Final-Review-of-Occupational-Role-Profiles-in-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care.pdf>

¹⁶ Please note, for the purposes of the Working Group, the age range of birth to six years is considered to reflect the Irish context. In Ireland it is a legal requirement that children begin primary education at six years of age. Furthermore, this is the age range that is referenced in our current national frameworks, Aistear and Síolta.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Dr Maresa Duignan, Assistant Chief Inspector, DES (Chair)

Ms Antoinette Gibbs, Early Years Specialist and Inspector, DES (Secretariat)

Dr Geraldine French, DCU (Irish Universities Association)

Ms Róisín McGlone, IT Sligo (Technological Higher Education Authority)

Ms Róisín Sweeney, Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Ms Valerie Harvey, Higher Education Authority

Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University, is the Technical Expert to the Working Group.

If a member cannot attend a meeting, an alternative is not required. However, all members must commit to assessing and commenting on drafts as they emerge.

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION ADVISORY GROUP (EYAG)

The Early Years Advisory Group (EYAG) was established in 2014 by the Minister for Education and Skills to provide guidance and expert advice on educational policy in the ELC sector and which is chaired by the Department of Education and Skills. In this context, the Group has provided valuable input into the process undertaken by the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the review of the quality of education and training programmes which commenced with an extensive consultation survey of employers and practitioners in 2015.

Membership of the EYAG is drawn from a wide range of education and sectoral professional representative groups. The full membership of the Early Years Education Advisory Group is: NCCA, SOLAS, Irish Universities Association, Institutes of Technology Ireland, County Childcare Committees, Better Start, the National Early Years Quality Support Service, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, Parents representatives, Barnardos, Early Childhood Ireland, Association of Childcare Professionals, INTO, IMPACT, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, EYEP, NEPS, NCSE, ETB, IPPN and QQI.

The EYAG, in terms of its broader contribution and expertise, will provide the forum with guidance and advice on the emerging draft criteria and guidelines and due consideration will be given to this guidance and advice by the working group. Finalisation of the criteria and guidelines following the input of EYAG and wider consultation in the sector will rest with the Department of Education and Skills.

The final criteria and guidelines will be shared with partners in the Higher Education sector (THEA, IOTI and QQI) to inform the development and oversight of the quality of education programmes and training for early year's professionals. It will also inform the advice provided to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs whose remit it is to fund and regulate the provision and practice of ELC services for children and families.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The establishment of the working group forms part of the Review of Education and Training in Early Years Qualifications that was launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in February 2015, commencing with a consultation on the quality of education and training in the field. In May 2016, DES published a *Survey of Early Years Practitioners* following this consultation (DES, 2016). This report highlighted a number of gaps in the existing initial professional education programmes for the ELC sector, including a lack of preparedness to use the national curriculum framework (*Aistear*) and the national quality framework (*Síolta*) and a diversity of practices in relation to the practicum element of courses. This latter issue has also been further explored by the Pedagogy, Learning and Education (PLÉ) Association of Ireland¹⁷.

In April 2017, the University of Roehampton completed a commissioned piece of research for DES in which it put forward a core common role profile for an early year's professional in Ireland within the context of an overall competent system (Urban, Robson and Scacchi, 2017). This research report was based on a review of national and international policy and theoretical literature and conversations/consultation with key stakeholders in Ireland. The resulting core common role profile outlined in the report delineates the knowledge, practices and values that should form the core requirement for an early years professional.

The working group will draft criteria and guidelines to inform the development of ordinary and honours undergraduate degree programmes in ELC. The work of the group is primarily informed by research conducted by University of Roehampton. In turn, this report (Urban, M. Robson, S. and Scacchi, V. (2017), drew upon previous national research including:

- *The Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 2002) set out occupational profiles and core skills for 5 levels of practitioner, from 'Basic' to 'Expert'.
- *A Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2010). This plan recognised the impact that the calibre and capacity of early year's professionals has on the quality of experiences of young children. It made a number of recommendations relating to improving access to appropriate initial and continuing professional education to prepare early years professionals for the challenging role in the ELC sector.

The draft criteria and guidelines should take into account the following content from these foundation documents:

- Conceptual Framework (Urban Report);
- Proposed general Occupation Role Profile (Knowledge, Practices and Values);
- Advanced and Expert Occupational Role Profiles (Model Framework);
- Mapping of role profiles to award criteria and guidelines (Workforce Development Plan).

¹⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318085356_Project_update_Phase_2_of_PLE_research_An_exploration_of_the_Professional_Practice_Placement_Component_of_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_Degree_Programmes_in_Ireland (Moloney 2017)

This content will inform the development of the award criteria and guidelines to include

- Programme aims and design;
- Areas of study;
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies;
- Professional placement and formation;
- Programme outcomes.

The working group should also give consideration to wider issues that may include:

- The duration and nature of undergraduate programmes
- Entry and advanced entry (to be aligned with current CAS)
- Staffing
- Facilities
- Student supports and guidance systems

The draft will be submitted to the EYAG appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for its consideration and input before being submitted for wider consultation.

TIMEFRAME

The first meeting of the Working Group is to take place on Wednesday 28th June 2017.

It is envisaged that a further 3 meetings of the Working Group is required in the period from September to early November 2017. Meetings will be hosted in the Department of Education and Skills.

MEETING SCHEDULE

Date	Time
28/06/17	10:30- 13.00
18/08/17	11:00- 13.00
22/09/17	10.30-13.00
20/10/2017	14.30-16.30
17/11/2017	14.30-16.30

SETTING THE AGENDA

The agenda will be set by the Chair, having regard to the objectives of the Working Group, and incorporating, as appropriate, items suggested by the members. An 'Any Other Business' item will facilitate the inclusion of unscheduled agenda items at each meeting but these will be kept to a minimum.

SUPPORT TO THE MEETINGS OF THE WORKING GROUP

The EYEP unit and the Chair will coordinate arrangements for the servicing of the Working Group. The Chair will organise the hosting and servicing of the meetings. The agenda and documents will be circulated by soft copy to all members of the Working Group, where possible in advance of the meeting. Secretariat is provided by the EYEPU and a record of all meetings will be kept and circulated.

APPENDIX 3 – REQUIRED COMPETENCES OF AN EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE (LEVEL 8) TO WORK IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR

Area	Knowledge breadth and kind	Know-how and skill: range and selectivity	Competence-context	Competence-role	Competence-learning to learn	Competence-insight
Level 8 indicators (NQAI, 2002)	<p>An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning</p> <p>Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)</p>	<p>Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity</p> <p>Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing</p>	<p>Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision-making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts</p>	<p>Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups</p>	<p>Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically</p>	<p>Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others</p>

Area	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate:
QQI Level 8 Professional Award Type Descriptors (QQI, 2014)	<p>Knowledge - Scope and Coherence:</p> <p>Broad and up-to-date general knowledge and specialised knowledge of a variety of areas comprising a professional discipline and of the connections between these areas and with related disciplines; to include knowledge about recent developments and trends in the professional discipline or its practice</p> <p>Knowledge-Structure</p> <p>Critical understanding of facts, concepts, rules, models, schools of thought, methods, technology; their development and limitations; and how they arise and are applied in current professional practice</p> <p>Knowledge of Issues</p> <p>Knowledge of the context for professional practice (including regulatory, economic, scientific, technological, social and cultural aspects) and of significant issues at the interfaces with related disciplines and professions</p>	<p>Use cognitive and practical skills (analytical and synthetic) to solve problems</p> <p>Select, modify and apply advanced skills to critically analyse, research (under close guidance) and formulate responses to unpredictable, complex and ill-defined problems arising in the profession and its reflective professional practice</p> <p>Draw insightful conclusions</p> <p>Prepare and analyse evidence-based conclusions that take due account of social, disciplinary and ethical insights</p> <p>Communicate and influence</p> <p>Communicate advanced information, transfer one's knowledge and skills, and justify decisions, to specialists and non-specialists, including clients</p>	<p>Exercising autonomy and judgement</p> <p>Exercise autonomy and judgement in applying knowledge and skills in a wide variety of complex contexts including professional practice and study</p> <p>Exercising responsibility</p> <p>Manage complex and innovative technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making and decisions in unpredictable and unfamiliar work or study contexts, balancing responsibilities towards service-users and employer</p> <p>Working with others</p> <p>Act effectively in team roles and take responsibility for managing individuals and lead complex and heterogeneous groups</p> <p>Learning and teaching</p> <p>Manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically; seek necessary guidance when working independently and provide guidance to peers</p> <p>Attitudes</p> <p>Express a comprehensive internalised, personal and professional world-view, manifesting solidarity with others at all levels including the personal, professional, societal and environmental</p>			

APPENDIX 4 – REQUIRED COMPETENCES OF AN EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE (LEVEL 7) TO WORK IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR

Area	Knowledge breadth and kind	Know-how and skill: range and selectivity	Competence-context	Competence-role	Competence-learning to learn	Competence-insight
Level 7 indicators (NQAI, 2002)	Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas. Recognition of limitations of current knowledge and familiarity with sources of new knowledge; integration of concepts across a variety of areas.	Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study. Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes.	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts.	Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes; take significant or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work.	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group	Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others.

Area	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate:
QQI Level 7 Professional Award Type Descriptors (QQI, 2014)	<p>Knowledge - Scope and Coherence:</p> <p>Broad and up-to-date general knowledge and specialised knowledge of a variety of areas comprising a professional discipline and of the connections between these areas and with related disciplines</p>	<p>Use cognitive and practical skills (analytical and synthetic) to solve problems</p> <p>Select and apply advanced skills to analyse and respond to unpredictable and complex problems arising in the profession and its reflective practice.</p>	<p>Exercising autonomy and judgement</p> <p>Exercise autonomy and judgement in applying knowledge and skills in a wide variety of contexts including professional practice and study</p> <p>Exercising responsibility</p> <p>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making and decisions in unpredictable work or study contexts</p>			

Area	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate ability to:	Demonstrate:
QQI Level 7 Professional Award Type Descriptors (QQI, 2014)	<p>Knowledge-Structure</p> <p>Understanding of facts, concepts, rules, models, schools of thought, methods, technology; their development and limitations; and how they arise and are applied in current professional practice</p> <p>Knowledge of Issues</p> <p>Knowledge of the context for professional practice (including regulatory, economic, scientific, technological, social and cultural aspects) and awareness of other disciplines likely to be encountered as a practitioner and member of the profession</p>	<p>Draw insightful conclusions</p> <p>Prepare evidence-based conclusions that take due account of social, disciplinary and ethical insights</p> <p>Communicate and influence</p> <p>Communicate information effectively, transfer one's knowledge and skills, and justify decisions, to specialists and non-specialists, including clients</p>	<p>Working with others</p> <p>Act effectively in team roles and take responsibility for managing individuals and groups</p> <p>Learning and teaching</p> <p>Take initiative to identify and address learning needs; seek necessary guidance when working independently</p> <p>Attitudes</p> <p>Express an internalised personal world-view (see Notes below) manifesting solidarity with others at all levels including the personal, professional, societal, and environmental</p>			

Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in Ireland

April 2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills