For Love or Money

Exploring the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland today

By: Ruth Madden

Supervisor: Dr. Mary Moloney

Postgraduate Masters in Research

Submitted to the Department of Early Childhood Studies, Mary Immaculate College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Research Postgraduate.

July 2012

Abstract

This, study: *For love or Money: Exploring the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland today* examines a broad range of ECCE policies and initiatives throughout the last twenty years that have influenced professionalism within the ECCE sector. Such policies include; the Childcare Act, 1991 (Department of Health and Children (DHC)), the Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations (DHC, 1996, 2006), *Síolta*: the National Quality Framework (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), 2006) and the Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2010). These various policies and initiatives highlight not only the importance of quality ECCE but the complexity of working with young children. However, notwithstanding recognition for training and development within national policy documents, it is as yet, a relatively new concept in Ireland (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012). Using qualitative methodology, i.e., interviews and focus group discussions, this study explores the views of twenty four research participants; ECCE practitioners, City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) and National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC)) representatives as well as B.A ECCE graduates and 3rd level training and education providers in relation to their perceptions of the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland today. The overarching finding indicates that while ECCE policy has positively influenced societal perceptions and attitudes towards ECCE there is still a long way to go before the sector in Ireland is recognised and valued as a profession. Ultimately, ECCE and those working within the sector remain undervalued and underappreciated.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people for their valued help and support in the successful completion of this research study.

My sincerest gratitude goes firstly, to Dr. Mary Moloney, my supervisor. Thank you for your time, effort, enthusiasm and patience in getting me to the finish line. Your immense support, guidance, knowledge and expertise made this process all the more worthwhile.

To the participants who contributed so honestly to this study, without their time and professional insight the completion of this study would not have been possible.

To my friends, thank you for your on-going support, treat nights and gym sessions, without which this process would have been a lot harder.

To James, thank you for always being there for me, your love, support, patience and encouragement are truly valued.

To my family, thank you for your tireless support, encouragement, enthusiasm, effort and patience. They have been much appreciated.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this project represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit/grade. I agree that this project may be made available by the College to future students.

Signed_____

 Dated_____

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Letter: Practitioners

Appendix 2: Information Letter: Lecturers

Appendix 3: Information Letter: National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative Representatives

Appendix 4: Information Letter: City and County Childcare Committee representatives

Appendix 5: Information Letter: BA ECCE Graduates

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Form (interview format)

Appendix 7: Informed Consent Form (focus group discussion format)

Appendix 8: Questions for Practitioners

Appendix 9: Questions for Lecturers at both HETAC and FETAC levels

Appendix 10: Questions for NVCC Representatives

Appendix 11: Questions for CCC Representatives

Appendix 12: Questions for BA ECCE Graduates

Appendix 13: Principles and Standards of Siolta: The National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006)

Appendix 14: Síolta's 16 Standards Quality (CECDE, 2006)

Appendix 15: Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009)

Appendix 16: Aistear's themes

Appendix 17: Model Framework for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (DJELR, 2002)

Appendix 18: National Framework of Qualifications (National Qualification Authority Ireland, 2003)

List of Abbreviations

Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education (B.A. ECCE)

Bachelor of Education (B.Ed)

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)

City\County Childcare Committee (CCC)

City\County Childcare Committee Focus Group 3 (CC3.FG)

City\County Childcare Committee representative 1 (CC1)

City\County Childcare Committee representative 2 (CC2)

Common Awards System (CAS)

Community Practitioner (PC)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Cost Quality and Child Outcomes in childcare centres (CQCO)

Department for Education (DFE)

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)

Department of Education and Science (DES)

Department of Education and Skills (DES)

Department of Health and Children (DHC)

Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR)

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Early Childhood Ireland (ECI)

Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP)

Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

Further Education and Training awards Council Lecturer (FL)

Graduates of a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education focus group 1 (BA1.FG)

Graduates of a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education focus group 2 (BA2.FG)

Graduates of a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education focus group 3 (BA3.FG)

Health Service Executive (HSE)

Higher Education and Train Awards Council (HETAC)

Higher Education and Train Awards Council Lecturer (HL)

Irish Preschool Play group Association (IPPA)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

National Framework of Qualifications Ireland (NFQI)

National Professional Development Centre on Inclusion (NPDCI)

National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC)

National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative representative 1 (NVCC-1)

National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative representative 2 (NVCC-2)

Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)

Private Practitioner (PP)

Rural Practitioner (PR)

Urban Practitioner (PU)

Work Force Development Plan (WDP)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate Ireland's journey in the search for a professional identity for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. The Department of Health and Children (DHC) defines the ECCE sector as those services, including pre-schools, playgroups, crèches, day nurseries, Montessori pre-schools, naíonraí, notifiable childminders and similar services that care for and educate children under six years of age (2006:32). This study is therefore concerned with attempts to professionalise the ECCE sector over the past ten years in particular. It explores the factors that impact upon the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland such as qualifications, professional development, remuneration and shared values and belief systems (Mahony and Hayes, 2006, Moloney, 2011, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2006). In this context, the study further examines the extent to which those working in the sector feel that they have a professional identity.

Although Miller and Cable (2010:2) claim that the "professionalization of those who work, lead and manage in early years settings has been on an upward trajectory for at least the last decade", Woodrow (2007) suggests that who and what constitutes an early childhood professional has been contested ground internationally. Moreover, he claims that ambiguity about the professional identity of the ECCE sector has been shaped by an eclectic mix of policy and practice informed by a diverse knowledge base. In addition, training structures, poor working conditions and low salaries also make the professional identity of the sector problematic (OECD, 2006, Moloney, 2010a, Woodrow, 2007).

Drawing upon Woodrow's (2007) observation regarding the mix of policy, practice and a diverse knowledge base within the ECCE sector, this study examines a range of policy developments in the Irish context intended to enhance the quality of ECCE provision and consequently to impact upon the professionalism of the sector. In order to determine how current practice within the sector evolved, it is concerned with a number of significant developments and initiatives including:

- Child Care Act, (Department of Health and Children (DHC), 1991)
- Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations (DHC, 1996)
- White paper on Early Childhood Education: *Ready to learn* (Department of Education and Science (DES),1999a)
- National Children's Strategy: Our Children-Their lives, (DHC, 2000)
- *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education* Sector (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), 2002)
- National Quality Framework: *Síolta* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), 2006)
- Revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (DHC, 2006)
- Early Childhood Curriculum Framework- *Aistear* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009)
- *Free preschool year in ECCE* scheme, (Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), 2010)

These ongoing developments highlight not only the importance of quality Early Childhood Care and Education but the complexity of working with young children and therefore underpin the need for a highly trained and skilled workforce. Indeed the task of ensuring that high-quality education and care services are made available to young children depends, in a crucial way, on the quality and training of the personnel involved in the service (OECD, 2006). Although Moloney (2010a) perceives such a trained and skilled workforce as central to professional identity, and notwithstanding recognition for training and development within

national policy documents as outlined, it is as yet, a relatively new concept in Ireland (Moloney, 2010a, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012).

Research establishes a clear link between strong training and support of staff, including, appropriate pay and conditions and the quality of ECCE services (Bowman, Donovan and Burns 2000, Cost Quality and Child Outcomes in childcare centres (CQCO) study team, 1995; EC childcare network, 1996; OECD, 2006). Furthermore, in an Irish context Moloney (2011) and Moloney and Pope (2012) create a link between these factors (training, remuneration, conditions of employment) and professional identity. Yet broadly speaking, "the field does not seem to have a consensus that early childhood teachers need specialised early childhood training and general education foundations in the curriculum areas taught in early childhood programmes" (Lutton, 2008:33). As a result, many researchers (OECD, 2006, Mahony and Hayes, 2006, Moloney 2010a, Moloney and Pope, 2012) suggest that in spite of significant progress throughout the past decade, the sector continues to be characterised by semi-skilled, unskilled and poorly paid women. Moreover, poor qualification levels coupled with low salaries (OECD, 2006) and ineffective policy undermines and obscures the professional identity of the ECCE sector (Moloney, 2010b).

1.2 Aims and objectives

Taking all of these factors into account, the researcher felt it necessary to further explore the area of professionalism and professional identity formation within the ECCE sector. Consequently this study; *For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland today*, is concerned with 'who and what constitutes and early childhood professional within the ECCE sector in Ireland today'.

It is underpinned by a series of aims and objectives. Ultimately, it seeks to:

- Verify what it means to be a professional broadly speaking in today's world

- Determine what it means to be a professional in the ECCE sector

- Identify the aspects of professional identity within the ECCE sector

- Discover the extent to which practitioners currently working in the ECCE sector in Ireland view themselves as professionals

- Examine the views of those involved in training ECCE practitioners in relation to the importance of education and training

- Determine the value placed on a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in ECCE in an Irish context

- Examine the extent to which B.A. ECCE graduates in Ireland perceive their professional identity

1.3 Research layout:

This research study is presented through five overlapping chapters.

Chapter 1, introduces the study and presents the research topic *For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland today.* It provides the rationale for exploring the concept of professional identity within the ECCE sector in Ireland today.

Chapter 2, Literature review explores Ireland's journey in the search for a professional identity for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland. This chapter is divided into two distinct sections. Section one focuses specifically upon the elements that shape a profession and in turn, professionalism. Section one thus highlights certain qualities required to be deemed a professional in today's society. For example, professions are associated with a high level of education and lengthy training (Black and Gruen, 2005, Hanlon, 1998, Larson,

1977), certified by examination (Millerson, 1964). In addition to holding a body of specialized knowledge, those working within a profession regardless of the discipline involved, generally enjoy a great deal of autonomy and responsibility (Hakel Keonig and Elliot, 2008, Hoyle and John, 1995). Professionals and professions therefore generally involve a voluntary commitment to a set of guiding principles that govern day-to-day professional activity (Hoyle and John, 1995). These processes in turn shape a person's professional identity which ''is related to finding self-meaning connected with ones work'' (Oleson, 2000 in Ulhmann, Schuette and Yashar 2010:463).

Section 2 of chapter 2 uses this previous discussion as a back drop against which it looks specifically at the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. It therefore explores a range of macro level ECCE policies and initiatives ranging from the introduction of the Childcare Act (1991), which marked the beginning of the journey towards professionalism to the publication of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) which stressed the need for those working with young children within ECCE to up-skill in order to realise the ambitious targets within the strategy. It investigates how these various policies have influenced the discourse around professionalism and professional identity formation within the ECCE sector over the past decade.

Chapter 3, Research Methods and Study Design presents the methods used for data collection and justifies the use of a qualitative methodology. It describes the research design, participant selection and research reliability. It further discusses the issue of ethics in research as well as the limitations associated with qualitative research. Many researchers (e.g., McLeod, 2011, Neegaard and Ulhoi, 2007 and Merriam, 2007) assert that the primary aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the social world is constructed. Consequently, given the personal yet embryonic nature of this study '*For Love or Money:*

Exploring the Professional Identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland today' a qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate. A series of semi-structured interviews (Pole and Lampard, 2002, Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) and focus group discussions (Krueger 1998, Bryman, 2008) were undertaken in order to understand who and what constitutes an early childhood professional in ECCE in Ireland today. The study focuses on the views of twenty four research participants including ECCE practitioners (i.e., those working directly with children in ECCE settings), representatives of the City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) and the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC)) along with B.A. ECCE graduates and 3rd level training and education providers in relation to their perceptions of the professional identity of the ECCE sector. Chapter 3 explains how the research data was analysed using Grounded Theory, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Thus, using an iterative process of reading and rereading the data, patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities were identified before theorising the data (Delamont 1992).

Chapter 4, Findings, Analysis and Discussion presents the research findings which are presented as a series of themes that are located within and discussed against the backdrop of the literature review in chapter two. The overarching finding of this study is that there is still a long way to go before the ECCE sector is recognised as a profession in Ireland. While a myriad of ECCE policies introduced over the past decade has begun to positively influence societal perceptions and attitudes towards ECCE, ultimately the ECCE sector and those working within it remains undervalued and underappreciated in today's society. As such, the societal context in which attitudes and perspectives towards ECCE are shaped hugely impacts the sector's professional growth and development and thus its professional identity (Moloney, 2011).

Chapter 5, Conclusions and Recommendations provides a summary of the research findings, identifies avenues for future research and makes a number of recommendations arising from the study. The recommendations are intended to develop the ECCE workforce, to increase practical professionalism and to impact upon the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. The recommendations are action based and deal with the areas of training and qualifications, professional identity formation and the societal context in which attitudes towards the professional identity of the ECCE sector are based (Moloney, 2011). They therefore present a vision for the sector that will impact upon societal perceptions and influence the discourse around the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

<div align="center">**Chapter Two**</div>

<div align="center">**Literature review**</div>

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Ireland's journey in the search for a professional identity for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. It explores:

A) A range of macro level ECCE policies and initiatives ranging from the introduction of the Childcare Act (1991) to the publication of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011)

B) How these various policies have influenced the discourse around professionalism and professional identity within the ECCE sector at micro level among practitioners, support organisations and ECCE lecturers

Against this policy back drop, this chapter further presents an overview of pertinent literature relating to the professional identity of those working within the sector. It discusses the elements that shape a profession and in turn, professionalism. It investigates what it means to be a professional, broadly speaking in today's world. This includes professional development, remuneration and shared values and belief systems (Mahony and Hayes, 2006, Moloney, 2011, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2006). This discussion is located within the professional culture attributed to the ECCE sector in Ireland over the past two decades.

2.2 What is a profession?

Irrespective of the discipline, the concept of profession is highly contested (Becker, 1962, Black and Gruen, 2005, Ho Choi-Wa Dora, 2006, Whitty, 2000). For example, Ho Choi-Wa Dora (2006) suggests that the word 'profession' alone has multiple meanings, and is related to ideas about professionals, professionalism, and professionalization attached to an

occupational group. In the context of ECCE, while these various terms have different meanings and connotations, they are often used interchangeably.

Within the medical field, the terms 'profession' and 'professionalization' have been differentiated. On the one hand, profession is defined as an ''occupation based upon specific knowledge and training and regulated standards of performance'' (Black and Gruen, 2005:53), while professionalization is perceived as a process where an occupation 'achieves the more independent status of a profession (ibid: 53).

Becker (1962) associates the term 'profession' with work (incorporating knowledge and techniques) without which society would be weakened in some way. Thus, certain ''learned professions…doctors, academics, teachers, accountants, lawyers, engineers, civil servants'' (Hanlon, 1998:45) are seen as crucial to the functioning of society (Hanlon, 1998, Larson, 1977). Moreover, these professions typically require a high level of education and lengthy training (Black and Gruen, 2005, Hanlon, 1998, Larson, 1977).

Commonly the learned professions enjoy independence, self-governance and protection by state policy and professional bodies (Whitty, 2000). Such concepts of professionalism function as a form of social control that confers occupational social status, economic rewards, and greater political powers upon certain professions, particularly those perceived as essential to the functioning of society; medicine and academia (Ho Choi-Wa Dora, 2006). Although these explanations provide a useful starting point from which to consider the meaning of the term profession, they do little to delineate the constituents or characteristics of a profession.

2.3 Characteristics of a profession

In the 1950s and 1960s sociologists compiled various lists of characteristics considered critical to the term 'profession' (Figure 1).

Education and training in those skills certified by examination

Use of skills based upon theoretical knowledge

Code of professional conduct oriented toward 'public good' and a powerful professional organisation

Characteristics associated with the term profession

Source: Millerson, 1964 (in Whitty, 2006:281)
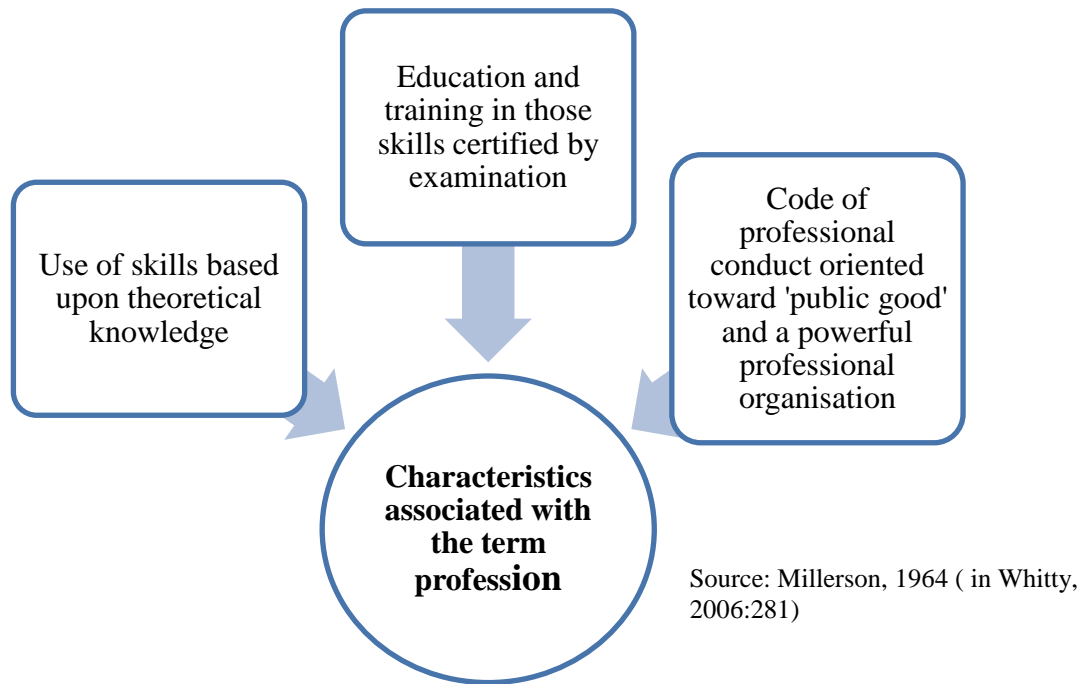
Figure 1: Typology of characteristics associated with the term profession

Likewise, Black and Gruen (2005) identified a series of core elements that underpin a profession (Figure 2).
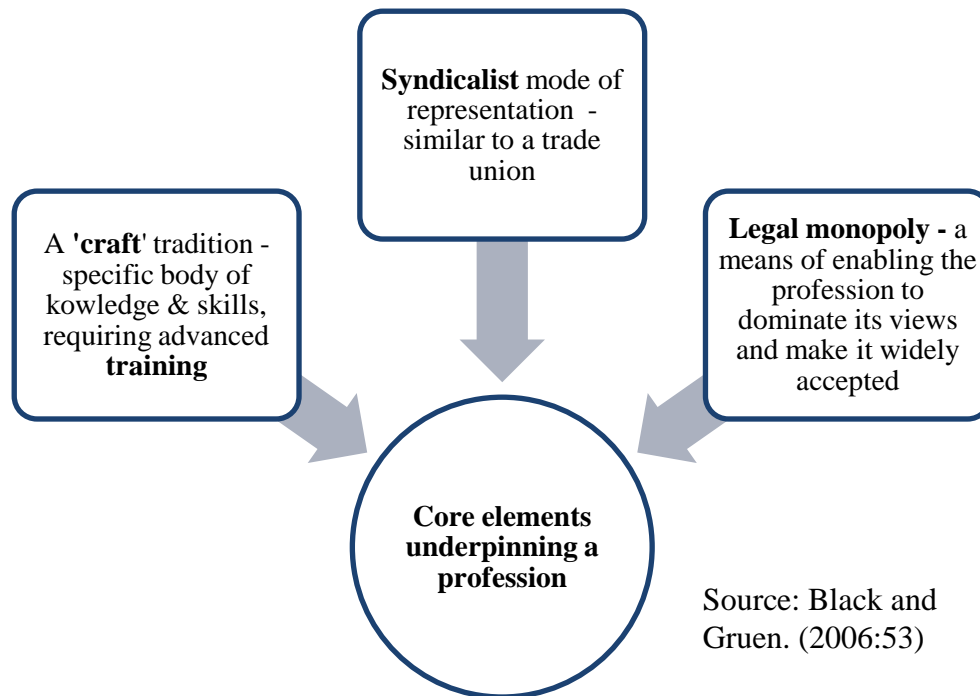
Figure 2: Overview of core elements underpinning a profession

Ultimately, these characteristics represent the values, attitudes and beliefs underlying a profession's way of achieving and maintaining privileged status (Black and Gruen, 2005). Ideology is used to justify and legitimise professional status giving its members a sense of importance and cohesiveness. Black and Gruen (2005:53) therefore claim that professional ideology has evolved over time during which the views held by the profession have become shared and internalised by the public.

Similarly, Hakel Keonig and Elliot specify a range of characteristics associated with professionals; primarily that they have ''command of a body of technical expertise that is not shared by those outside the profession'' (2008:44) and has been provided over a long period

of training by experts in the field. Furthermore, professionals develop ''skills and judgement that allow them to draw on and apply their theoretical knowledge in response to circumstances, to evaluate and make decisions about problems and to develop strategies for addressing them'' (ibid: 44). Hence, 'professionals' have a body of knowledge, skills and expertise, acquired through lengthy training and education that is generally unknown to the lay public.

2.4 Professional knowledge and licensure

As highlighted, knowledge, skills and expertise are usually acquired through a rigorous process of higher education and training. Becoming a doctor for example, requires students to give ten to fifteen years of their life to training alone (Blundell, Harrison and Turney, 2011). Likewise, becoming a lawyer requires a four year university degree followed by three years of law school (Adamson and Morrison, 2011). These rigorous processes protect these occupations against outsiders and create and sustain the social status of that profession (Goode, 1969). In other words, unlike ECCE where it is considered that anybody can mind a child (Moloney, 2010a, 2011) not everybody can practice medicine or law.

The acquisition of a body of expert knowledge is generally accompanied by some form of licensure or certification that signifies the ''adequacy and validity of the training'' (Hakel *et al.*, 2008:44). Licensure/certification is defined as the 'mark of a professional' (Uhlmann *et al.,* 2010:468). It...

> ...sets a professional standard and provides at least a baseline expectation for the quality of
> services rendered. Licensure serves to protect not only the professionals who hold the license,
> but also members of the public who interact with the licensed individual. Licensure serves as
> one means as promoting public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring a standard of practice,
> education and qualification (ibid).

Accordingly, licensure/certification demonstrates a commitment to high standards of professionalism while also creating clear education, certification and continuing education standards for a field; enabling consumers to better identify who is adequately trained (Uhlmann *et al.,* 2010). It is considered the ''golden standard'' (ibid: 467) that impacts upon the public's awareness of a profession while also denoting that the professional has graduated from an accredited graduate program that ensures credibility and expertise (Nutbrown, 2012).

2.5 Autonomy and responsibility

The concept of profession is also associated with autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, in addition to holding a body of specialized knowledge, those working within a profession generally enjoy a great deal of autonomy and responsibility (Hakel *et al,* 2008, Hoyle and John, 1995). Consequently, the profession should involve a voluntary commitment to a set of guiding principles that govern day-to-day professional activity (Hoyle and John, 1995). Similarly, Rodd (2006) emphasises, that professional practice in ECCE needs to be guided and informed by core values and principles, which can be expressed as a code of ethics. According to the CECDE (2006) and Dally (2007), a code of ethics ensures that practice is grounded in evidence and assists practitioners in setting boundaries about what is acceptable professional behaviour. Thus, the values embodied within a code of ethics provide an essential foundation for standards as they establish the common benchmarks for all practice in the sector (DJELR, 2002:12).

Although, there is no code of ethics per se for the ECCE sector in Ireland, many policy documents and initiatives such as *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999a), *Síolta*: The National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) provide insight into the values considered important for the sector. Generally these values are portrayed as a series of guiding principles which when adhered to; provide

information about how performance is defined, how it will be measured and what will be rewarded (Greene, 2010). Conversely, Greene (2010) argues that if a profession lacks guiding principles, it can develop strategies that are not integrated with the organisation or with each other, leading to inconsistencies and conflicting interests. Ultimately, such an organisation cannot be termed a 'profession'.

2.6 Professionalism:

The study of professions and professionalism has evolved over the years, shifting from examination of the constituents of a profession and, by extension of professionalism, to other issues within the field (Evans, 2008). Consequently, issues of trust, values, ethics and control, including specifically, changes to the nature of professionalism are central to discourse around professionalism (Ibid). Interestingly, Evans declares that the very substance of professionalism; – what precisely it is and how it is constituted – remains under-examined in the broad sociological field, and particularly in the context of education.

Broadly speaking, professionalism is concerned with the need for practitioners to act and behave in certain ways. It consists of the "attitudes and behaviour one possesses towards one's profession, it is an attitudinal and behavioural orientation that individuals possess towards their occupation'' (Boyt, Lusch and Naylor, 2001:322). It is therefore seen as the ''identification and expression of what is required and expected of members of a profession'' (Evans, 2008:25). Echoing this viewpoint, Day (1999:13) interprets it as a ''consensus of the norms which may apply to being and behaving as a professional within personal, organisational and broader political conditions''. As noted by Hanlon (1998) professionalism is a "shifting, rather than a concrete phenomenon" (in Whitty 2000:282). Members of a profession must remain abreast of current and new information, practices and knowledge in order to maintain professionalism.

2.7 Professionalism, quality and status

Evans broadens this perspective by establishing a relationship between professionalism, quality and status, claiming that it is the "quality of practice and the public status of the job'' (2008:23). Consistent with these views Maister (1999:17) believes that "real professionalism has little, if anything to do with, which business you are in, what role within that business you perform, or how many degrees you have". Rather, it is concerned with the pursuit of excellence; "a pride in work, a commitment to quality, a dedication to the interests of the client, and a sincere desire to help'' (ibid: 17). Real professionalism is about attitudes and perhaps even about character; while skills can be taught, attitudes and character are inherent and, although their development can be suppressed or encouraged, they must be there to begin with (ibid).

Having established what professionalism means and requires; it is essential that it does not become a hypothetical or idealised concept (Evans, 2008). Thus, professionalism must be perceived as a real entity which it can only be, if it is operational (ibid: 27). She claims that if professionalism is not enacted, it is reduced to being meaningless, an unfulfilled vision, an ideal that fails to be realised.

In order for an idea to become an active practice, Joyce and Calhoun (2010) claim that a number of organisational processes must be addressed and considered, such as regular communication, evaluation, improvement and commitment. Even the smallest ideas and plans take a surprising amount of decision making that involve both the 'what' and the 'who' of the situation (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010:13). This can become a challenge when the concern is professionalism, thus a whole group/organisation effort and commitment is required. Evans further argues that in order to be real; professionalism has to be something that people-professionals actually 'do', not simply something that a government or agency

wants them to do, or mistakenly imagines they are doing (2008:27). For example, in the realm of ECCE, although the government requires the sector to adhere to the Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006, Moloney (2011) argues that in spite of their professional orientation, these regulations, through the manner of their implementation and their failure to specify any minimum level of training for working in ECCE may in fact undermine and negate professionalism within the sector.

Accordingly, in common with Evans (2008), Joyce and Calhoun (2010) state that implementation of policy and practices are critical factors in determining professionalism. Implementation involves putting a plan into action and activating the necessary resources to bridge the planning and budgeting process to create the envisioned actions (Ibid). Additionally, professionalism is enhanced when professionals improve their personal growth through participation in professional development opportunities for example (Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, 1989, Drago-Severson, 1994, Guskey, 2000, National Professional Development Centre on Inclusion (NPDCI), 2008). As stated, professionalism is a shifting phenomenon (Hanlon, 1998) that is clearly evident in the realm of education (Guskey, 2000). Thus continual professional development opportunities; attendance at conferences, observation of practice in other ECCE settings and formal in-service courses (CECDE, 2006); enhance the professionalism of the organisation as new skills, information and knowledge are attained and implemented (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010).

2.8 Professionalization

It is apparent that professionalization is a process whereby an occupation ''achieves the more independent status of a profession'' (Black and Gruen, 2005:53). Broadly speaking, it comprises 4 key factors (Figure 3).

Desire to utilse the best practice and ideas available	Process of continual self-improvement and change towards a better way of doing things
Factors associated with professionalization	
Willingness to change and modernise reasons underpinning that willingness	Explicitly or implicitly bringing about a better, more efficient and reflective organisation of resources and skills to acheive desired objectives

Source: Negrine, 2007

Figure 3: Factors associated with professionalization

In defining an official discourse of professionalization, the UK government (2008), described the concept in terms of ''maintaining high standards of service and performance and strengthening user choices and voice to create world class performance'' (Cabinet Office: 33). These factors are dependent upon the process of change that occurs before members of an occupation become professional and take a degree of control over the technical aspects of their work (Simpson, 2010). Interestingly, Ho Choi-Wa Dora (2006) sees professionalization as embracing two processes; practical and political (Figure 4)

Practical

Practitioner ability to effectively
demonstrate that they can intergrate
specialised professional
knowledge/skills into practice
(Hoyle, 1980, CECDE, 2006, Evans,
2008)

Appeals to mobilise a
profession's members to
gain the social standing
that recognised
professions make
(Kultegen, 1998, Ho Choi-
Wa Dora, 2006)
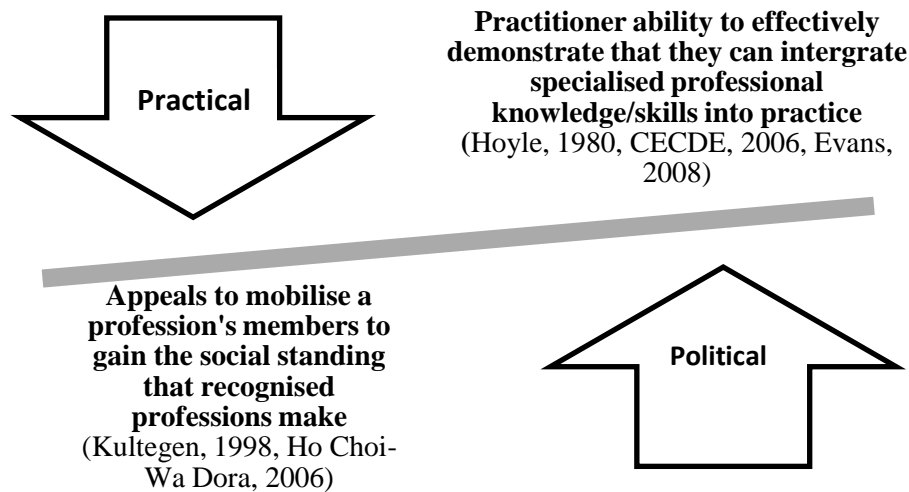
Political

Figure 4: Convergence of practical and political processes

Professionalization goes hand in hand with rising educational levels, high levels of specialisation, the possibility of comparing practices and skills across frontiers, and generally, a greater desire to improve practices so that professionals can attain what is deemed to be the best at any moment of time (Negrine, 2007:13).

2.9 Professionalization and professional development

There is little doubt that professionalization occurs through a process of professional development defined as...

> ''facilitated teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions as well as the application of this knowledge in practice'' (NPDCI, 2008:3).

Moreover the NPDCI identify the core elements of professional development as the:

- Characteristics and contexts of the learners (i.e. the ''who'' of professional development)

- Content (i.e. the ''what'' of professional development; what professionals should know and be able to do), generally defined by professional competencies, standards, and credentials)

- Organisation and facilitation of learning experiences; the organisation of professional development, the approaches, models and methods used to support self-directed, experientially orientated learning that is highly relevant to practice (2008:3)

Therefore, the ''*who*, the *what*, and the *how* can be viewed as the core of a professional development system aimed at promoting highly effective teaching and intervening'' (Hollingsworth and Buysse, 2009:120). In the absence of these factors, Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) claim that it is as if teaching and intervening are totally out of context.

Guskey (2000) suggests that 'professional development' is underpinned by three defining characteristics:

1. It is a process that is intentional, on-going and systemic

2. It is not a set of random, unrelated activities that have no clear direction or intent rather,

3. It is a deliberate process, guided by a clear vision of purposes and planned goals designed to bring about positive change and improvement (Guskey, 2000:17)

Various models of professional development are associated with the teaching profession; training, involvement in development/improvement processes, inquiry research, individually guided activities and mentoring (Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, 1989 and Drago-Severson,

1994 cited in Guskey, 2000:22). In addition to the aspects outlined earlier (attendance at conferences, observation of practice, and formal in-service courses), Sweeney (2003) advocates the use of modelling and study groups while Easton (2004) promotes the use of action research, critical friend groups and peer coaching. More recently, Joyce and Calhoun (2010) suggested the need for designated professional day workshops and courses, direct personal services involving a 'buddy' system where more experienced members of a profession are designated to help others as well as instructional initiatives and distance learning. As noted by Mcintyre and Bryd (2000), the most effective method for facilitating change is based on long term and sustained experiences that empower members to practice and apply new skills.

Many authors (OECD, 2001, Guskey, 2000, CECDE, 2006, Carl, 2009, Hayes, 2007, Lisle, 2010, Meece and Eccles 2010, Moloney, 2010, Mullins, 2007) highlight the importance and value of training as an effective form of professional development. Indeed, Guskey (2000) cites training as the most efficient and cost-effective professional development model for sharing ideas and information with large groups of educators, providing all participants with a shared knowledge base and a common vocabulary. Fundamentally, training improves attitudes, boosts morale, motivates and gives increased incentives, especially, if it can be transferred to other situations and become part of self development (Thomas, Costine and Heraty 1995).

In the field of education, professional development can have negative connotations being associated with deficiencies in the knowledge and skills of educators (Guskey, 2000). However, the current emphasis on professional development comes not from acknowledgment of deficiencies, but instead from growing recognition of education as a dynamic, professional field (Guskey, 2000:16). Thus, any association between professional

development and professional deficiency must be quashed before practitioners refuse to participate and re-educate themselves through professional development opportunities (ibid).

2.10 Professional identity

A person's professional identity ''is related to finding self-meaning connected with ones work'' (Olesen, 2000 in Ulhmann *et al.,* 2010:463). Conversely, poor or weak professional identity is strongly related to a lack of self-worth or a perception that your work is undervalued and underestimated by the government and society (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012). Similarly, Forde, McPhee, McMahon and Patrick (2006:5) believe that ''those who feel their professional expertise is under attack may become disengaged from their work creating malaise within the profession'', thus, adding to the problem of professionalism and professional identity.

Professional identity formation is a personal journey that evolves over time and involves a number of factors. It is "a historical process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, three movements at the heart of any identity dynamics'' (Barnett and Di Napoli, 2008:6). Thus, professional identity formation is a complex multi-faceted process shaped by a wide array of social, personal and environmental factors (Ibid: 152). Researchers (Tucker, 2004, Moloney, 2011), claim that identity is about how we recognise ourselves and are recognised by others. Moreover, Ibarra (1999) states that professional identity is one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences.

In terms of professional identity construction, self-views are shaped in three primary ways:

1. They result from the socialisation process and rhetoric where one is provided with information regarding the meanings associated with a profession (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987)

2. Individuals adjust and adapt their professional identity during periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984)

3. Life as well as work experiences influence professional identity by clarifying one's priorities and self-understanding (Schein, 1978)

Specifically in the context of teacher professional identity, Kelchtermans (1993), states that the professional self, like the personal self, evolves over time and consists of five interrelated elements (Figure 5).
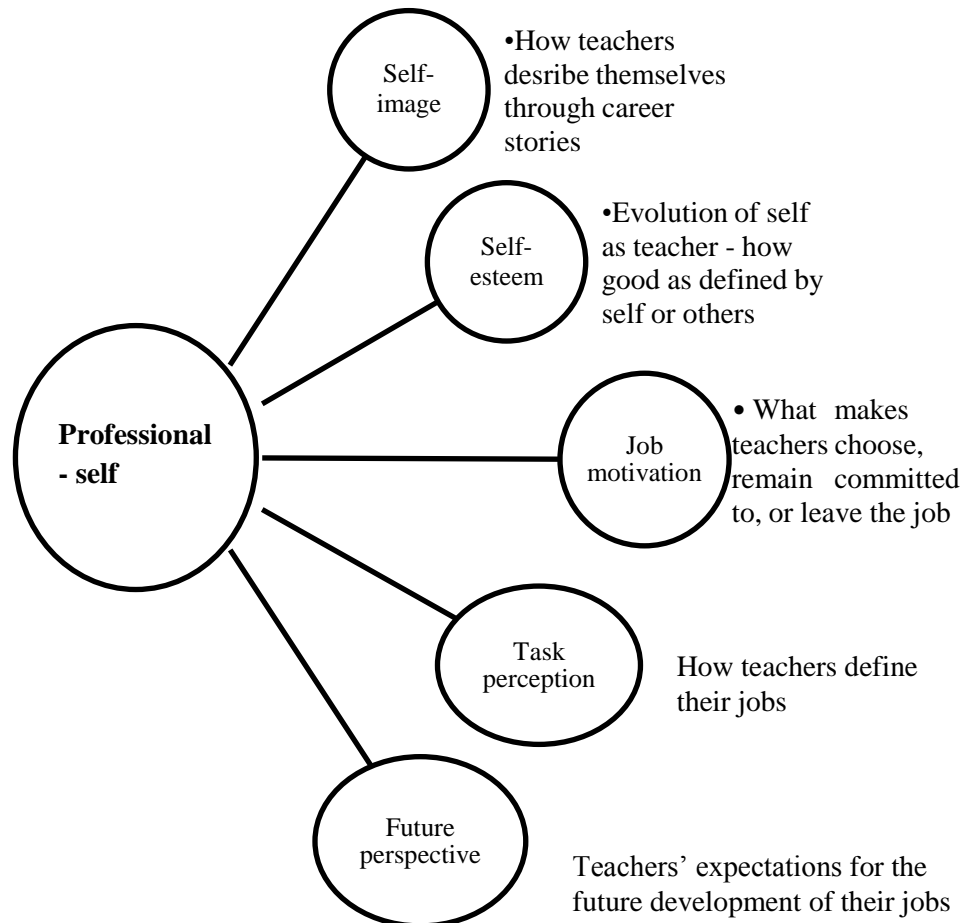
Figure 5: Elements associated with professional-self

Clearly, teachers' identities are closely bound with their professional and personal values and aspirations (Kelchtermans, 1993:449–450); aspects that can in effect be related to all professions and occupations.

Essentially, professional identity:

1. Evolves over time and is strongly influenced by other's perceptions of people's roles and/or occupations
2. Is a complex process comprising multiple interconnected elements
3. Is a process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction shaped and affected by a wide array of social and environmental factors in line with personal experiences and contexts (Barnett and De Napoli, 2008)

Thus far, this chapter has explored various perspectives, definitions and ideas on what it means to be a professional. The following section explores a range of ECCE policies, strategies, initiatives and frameworks that shape the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland, ranging from the Childcare Act, 1991, to the introduction of the *Free preschool year in ECCE* scheme, (OMCYA, 2010). These various developments spanning a thirteen year period, illustrate the conditions within which concepts and constructs of professionalism have evolved (Duignan, 2007) and highlight the need for a highly trained and skilled workforce; a core aspect of professional identity (Moloney, 2010a).

2.11 Irish policy context

Traditionally, childcare was undertaken by mothers in the home with the support of family members and neighbours (Tizard, 1986, Government of Ireland 1999a, DJELR, 2000) while children's education was the responsibility of the DES. In the latter half of the 1990s, Ireland experienced significant economic and demographic change resulting in a marked increase in

labour market participation, especially amongst women (Kennedy, 2001, OECD, 2004). These changes in turn, influenced the demand and need for out-of-home childcare arrangements (Government of Ireland, 1999b, OECD, 2004, 2006, DJELR, 2000, Kennedy 2001).

Thus, because of the historical polarity of care and education in Ireland, the need for qualified staff in the ECCE sector is a relatively new concept (OECD, 2004, 2006, Duignan, 2007, Share, Kerrins and Greene, 2011). Pointing to the diversity of ECCE provision which she attributes to the ad hoc nature of its development; Duignan (2007:5), claims that the workforce also evolved in the absence of structure and regulation with an equal level of complexity and diversity.

Prior to 1991, the sector was totally unregulated with diverse standards of provision throughout Ireland. In many ways therefore, the Childcare Act (1991) marked the beginning of the journey towards professionalism. It made provision for the introduction of Childcare (pre-school services) regulations for the purpose of securing the health, safety and welfare of children attending pre-school settings (DHC, 1996). It also gave powers to the Health Service Executive (HSE) to undertake annual inspections of such settings.

The first Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations (1996) arising from part V1 of the Childcare Act, 1991 were largely structural in their orientation placing a legal responsibility on ECCE staff to ensure that children had ''suitable means of expression and development through the use of books, toys, games and other play materials, having regard to his or her age and development'' (DHC, 1996:8). Ironically, this task was to be achieved by "a sufficient number of competent adults" (DHC, 1996:8). Staff qualifications, defined by others as core aspects of quality provision (OECD, 2006, Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, Nores 2004, Galinsky, 2006) were overlooked.

Following a review, the Revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (2006) were introduced. They promote the 'whole child perspective' (DHC 2000:10) and the use of *Síolta*: (CECDE, 2006). Unlike the previous regulations (1996), the revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (2006) incorporate a structural and process oriented focus and ''go further than any previous policies in placing children's learning at the centre of practice'' (Moloney, 2011: 81).

Regulation 5, calls upon ECCE staff to ensure ''that children's learning is facilitated through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions, materials and equipment, having regard for the age, stage and cultural context of the child'' (DHC, 2006:5). Consequently, practitioners are mandated to show evidence of planning for individual children's learning and development (Share, *et al.*, 2011). This regulation alone calls for specific practitioner knowledge and expertise. However, Moloney (2010a) argues that it is considerably weakened by regulation 8 which deals with management and staffing and simply requires that ''a sufficient number of suitable and competent adults must work with the children at all times'' (DHC 2006:37). In this respect, there is no discernible difference between these revised regulations and those issued in 1996. In both instances, suitable and competent adults are defined as persons (over 18 years) who have appropriate experience in caring for children under six years and/or who have an appropriate qualification in childcare (ibid:38).

As with the 1996 regulations, these revised regulations (2006) fail to specify any minimum level of training for working in ECCE. On the contrary, they recommend that at least 50% of staff should aim to have ''a qualification appropriate to the care and development of children'' (DHC, 2006:43). According to Moloney (2011) failure to redress the qualifications

required to work in the field is problematic and undermines the professional identity as well as the critical importance of this specialised branch of social care.

2.11.1 *Ready to Learn*

A pivotal publication in relation to narrowing the gap between the care and education sectors and in drawing attention to the complexity of working with young children is the White Paper on Early Childhood Education: *Ready to learn* (DES, 1999a). It aims to support the developmental and educational achievement of children through quality early education, focussing specifically on the needs of children from three to six years. Significantly, it acknowledges the "inextricable" link between care and education (DES, 1999a: 4), which heretofore had been overlooked as a result of the ways in which the formal primary school and the informal ECCE sector developed independently of each other. Critically, it identifies considerable inconsistencies in the sector including the lack of appropriate qualifications; the absence of clear progression routes and the lack of an early childhood specific curriculum.

2.11.2 *Our Children – Their Lives*

On foot of *Ready to Learn,* the government published the National Children's Strategy: *Our Children-Their Lives* (DHC, 2000). This strategy was intended to progress Ireland's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (1989) and called for an Ireland where children would be respected as young citizens with valued contributions to make and voices of their own (DHC, 2000). It proposed a holistic way of thinking about and working with children by establishing the 'whole child perspective' (DHC, 2000:10) and proposed three national goals (Figure 6)
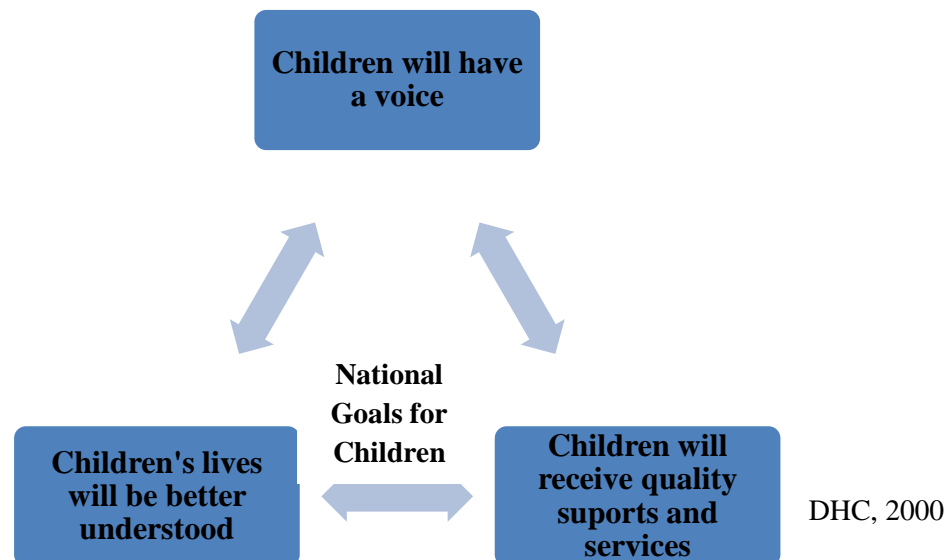
Figure 6: National Goals for Children

In order to realise these ambitious goals and clearly acknowledging the complexity of the task, the DHC (2000) highlighted the need for all those working with children to receive relevant support and training.

2.11.3 *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development*

In an attempt to redress the shortcomings in the ECCE sector in relation to training and qualifications, the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* was published (DJELR, 2002). This framework proposed a range of skills and knowledge considered essential for practitioners at different stages of professional development. In recognition of the need for progression within the sector, five professional development profiles were devised (Figure 7).

Expert   Basic

Advanced   Intermediate

Experienced
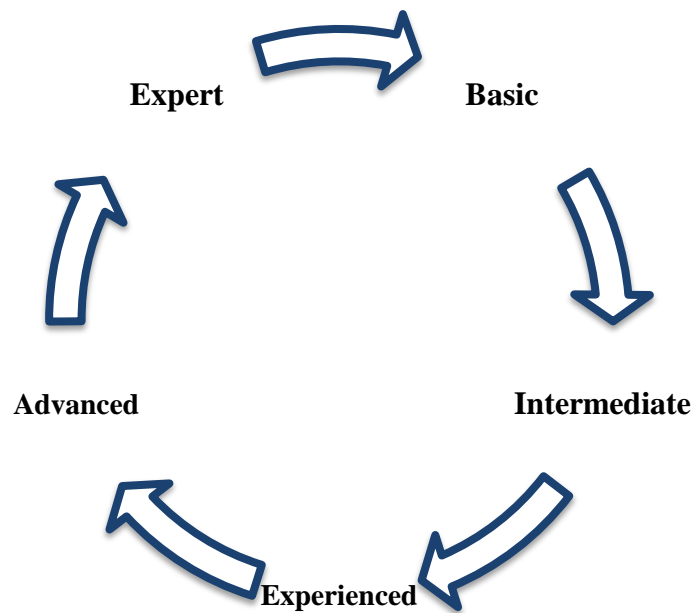
DJELR. 2000

Figure 7: Practitioner profiles

Each level, associated with key tasks and responsibilities would enable managers to assess practitioner's abilities and set goals for them to progress professionally (DJELR, 2000). The model framework positioned those with a Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Level 5 accredited training (appendix 17) as an intermediate practitioner, which is just above the basic practitioner level (Share *et al.,* 2011:31). Those staff with FETAC Level 5 training are therefore considered to be responsible for their own actions, but under direction from a more senior practitioner. In addition, practitioners with FETAC Level 6 accredited training are considered experienced practitioners who can operate with full autonomy with broad supervision, but have limited responsibility for the work of others. While increasing occupational coherence, the model framework did not specify any minimum level of training required to work in an ECCE setting (Ibid). On the other hand, and congruent with the DES, (1999) and the DHC (2000) the framework endorsed the necessity for highly trained and qualified personnel. Consequently, it set out a practical progression route and set the minimum standards required to successfully work with young children.

Interestingly, the Irish Preschool Play Association (IPPA) (1995) now Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) state that the creation of career ladders and movement within and between the different areas of the system would result in:

➢ The recruitment of new personnel to the field
➢ Maintaining workers for longer periods

This would maximise the state's investment in training and ensure continuity for vulnerable children in particular (ibid) resulting in a positive impact upon the professionalising of the sector (OECD, 2006). As noted by Adams (2008:205), quality early year's provision does not need differentiated staff, but more highly qualified staff who can work together with professional respect and collaboration.

Conversely, it is thought that the process of professionalization can serve to make early childhood work more exclusive, to the potential disadvantage of many working in the field. Interestingly, the OECD (2006) and Moloney (2011) claim that governments fear the funding consequences of raising staff qualifications. Higher qualifications may precede increased wage demands (Moloney, 2011), which, in turn, contributes significantly to the costs of service provision (OECD, 2006:161). This signifies a considerable challenge to the emerging professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland, which continues to be characterised by low salaries and poor qualification levels (Mahony and Hayes, 2005, Moloney and Pope, 2012, ECI, 2011).

2.11.4 *Síolta*

In 2002, the CECDE was established to realise the objectives of *Ready to Learn*; ''to facilitate the development of a high quality system of early childhood care and education'' (DES, 1999a: 43). Following extensive consultation, the CECDE launched *Síolta:* the National Quality Framework in 2006. It is the first ever government produced quality

standards for all early years settings including primary schools catering for children from birth to 6 years (Share *et al.,* 2011). It presents a vision of professional practice that has the potential to advance the development of professional identity within the sector as well as promoting practical professionalism (Duignan, 2007:2). Based upon twelve principles and sixteen standards (Appendix 13), *Síolta* helps practitioners improve and progress professionally by encouraging them to engage in reflective thinking and to look constructively and critically at their daily practice.

Síolta requires considerable practitioner skill. It calls upon practitioners to engage in thought processes that make them aware, in a critical way, of their everyday activities with a view to continuously improving and refining practice (CECDE, 2006:86). Indeed, Mac Naughton (2003) and Moyles (2001) argue that the ability to act upon and evaluate practice, prescription and one's own thoughts about it must be the key to professionalism in the early years (Moyles, 2001:92). An ECCE professional is ''strategic and reflective because he or she uses specialised knowledge as the basis for actions, and questions the effects of specialised knowledge in action'' (Mac Naughton, 2003:293).

The overarching objective within *Síolta* is to enhance practice by providing guidance and support to the sector and consequently to raise its professional profile. However Moyles (2001:92) cautions that ''change takes time while, paradoxically, practice (and politics) is grounded in an immediacy of response and reaction which is unsympathetic to achieving depth in professional thinking and vision and 'magic' in teaching and learning''.

2.11.5 Towards professionalism

The most significant development to date, with potential to influence the professional identity of the sector is *Aistear*: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009). Drake (2007) asserts that curriculum is central to the delivery of quality ECCE, offering guidance

and support to practitioners and highlighting goals and expectations for children at different developmental stages. According to the DES (1999b) curriculum implementation involves a collaborative planning process focusing on the identification of developmental goals and teaching and learning priorities. The OECD (2001a) note that a national curriculum framework helps practitioners to focus upon and to clarify their work with children while also highlighting progression in children's learning. Children's holistic development and learning requires the implementation of a verifiable broad based, documented and flexible curriculum (CECDE, 2006:53).

In Ireland, young children's needs were historically associated solely with the provision of care while education was the remit of primary school (OECD, 2004, 2006). However, much progress has been made in terms of narrowing the gap between care and education with *Aistear* being of critical importance in this regard. For the first time in the history of ECCE in Ireland, there is now an Early Childhood Curriculum Framework aimed solely at enhancing young children's learning and development in both the formal and informal education sectors. *Aistear* highlights the need for a highly skilled and qualified workforce. It is based upon twelve principles (Appendix 15) divided under three sub-headings:

- Children and their lives

- Children's connections with others and

- How children learn and Develop (NCCA, 2009)

It adopts a thematic approach using four themes; well being, exploring and thinking, identity and belonging and communicating (Appendix 16). Each theme describes desired child dispositions, attitudes, values, skills, knowledge and understanding. The framework encourages practitioners to consider all aspects of children's lives when devising learning experiences. The necessity of staff training and qualifications is evident within *Aistear*, which

highlights the critical role played by adults in supporting and extending children's learning and development (NCCA, 2009).

While the initiatives outlined "serve as markers on the landscape of evolving attitudes and increasing provisions for children in society" (CECDE, 2006:11); Moloney (2010b) urges caution; claiming that their ability to influence the sector in any comprehensive manner is limited by the voluntary nature of their implementation. She also holds that their implementation is undermined by lack of practitioner training which she argues has been further devalued by the lack of a mandatory minimum training requirement in Ireland.

2.11.6 *Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme, 2010*

In an historic move, the OMCYA introduced the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). This scheme is available to all children aged 3 to 4 years enabling them to access a free pre-school year in the year before they start primary school. ECCE providers receive a capitation fee in respect of each participating child. However, they must provide an educational programme that meets *Síolta* standards (OMCYA, 2010).

Unlike the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 2006, this scheme requires playgroup leaders working directly with children to hold a minimum qualification at FETAC level 5 by 2012. This marks a significant change in Irish ECCE policy and demonstrates a direct link between state funding and quality linked to qualified staff (Moloney, 2011, Sweeney, 2010). Notably, the capitation fee is increased by €10 per child per week where staff hold a level 8 degree with three years experience. This progressive step indicates macro recognition of the benefits of more highly trained staff working with young children and may well be the first step towards progressing the professional identity of the sector.

2.11.7 Department of Children

In a further historic move, the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, announced the appointment of Frances Fitzgerald TD, as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in March 2011 and also established a new Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This new department focuses on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education (www.dcya.gov.ie). The decision to establish the DCYA indicates a clear commitment to improving the lives of children and young people. The department has identified nine key areas of achievement to be reached over the next five years, including ''provision of high quality early childhood care and education, including embedding the free pre-school year as an essential building block of early education'' (DCYA, 2011:4). Inherent in this goal and essential to its success and achievement are highly skilled and qualified personnel, working with children in the early year's sector.

2.12 Problems with professional identity

Notwithstanding the myriad of progressive initiatives discussed thus far, work within the ECCE sector continues to be undervalued and underestimated (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012, OECD, 2004, 2006). It does not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations; teaching and medicine (OECD, 2006), law and academia for example (Hanlon, 1998, Hoi Choi-Wa Dora, 2006). The low status of ECCE has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children (Lobman and Ryan, 2007, OECD, 2006). Dalli (2002) argues that the traditional alignment of childcare with the role of mothering, and the attendant discourses of love and care, disempower early childhood practitioners from claiming professional status. Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford declares that practitioner disillusionment is justified, when their role is seen as synonymous with 'care' in general, and when they perceive themselves to be treated merely as unskilled child-minders

(1993:396). Similarly, Moloney (2010) found that practitioners described themselves as little more than babysitters. However, both Moloney (2011) and Dalli (2003a, 2006b), claim that the discourses of love and care persistently arise in practitioner's own descriptions of their work with young children. Indeed, while Moyles urges practitioners to be passionate about their work, she warns that a ''culture of passion can be perceived as anti-intellectual, idealistic, objective, indecisive and feminine'' (2001:86). Passion can therefore become the antithesis of professional identity. However, Dalli (2006b) claims that passion for one's work may be used positively, suggesting that the time has come to revise notions of love and care so that they may be transformed into pedagogical and political tools.

While agreeing with the connotations associated with the caring and nurturing nature of ECCE, other researchers (Cameron *et al.*, 1999, Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999, Osgood, 2010) claim that the issue is compounded by the highly gendered nature of the sector which according to Osgood (2010) is hyper–feminine. Accordingly, gendering reinforces the notion that child rearing is essentially ''women's work'' (OECD, 2006, Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moss, 2003). Therefore, as mentioned, those working within ECCE have traditionally been paid less than other professions and their work is considered less important (Government of Ireland, 1999b, OECD, 2006). Moyles highlights practitioner concerns regarding criticisms directed towards their female caring roles which incline them towards ''non-professional'' and ''woolly'' thinking (2001:86). These perceptions lie in stark contrast to calls for these women to take on, the perceived ills of society (e.g. low income families), high level assessments of children's current and potential capabilities and work with a wide range of other people, for low salaries (Moyles, 2006). All of these demands occur within a context which practitioners view as antithetical to their role in caring for and educating young children (ibid). Notwithstanding calls by Bennett (2003) and the OECD for instance, that governments develop strategies to ''recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and

to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable'' (2006:25), little progress has been made in any of these areas in Ireland to date (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012).

More recently, the DES (2010) undertook widespread consultation on the development of a Workforce Development Plan (WDP). This consultation process identified the type of workforce needed to support the development of quality ECCE services in Ireland and the challenges associated with it. It highlighted the need to support the ECCE workforce to "achieve the qualifications that equip them with the skills, knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes" (DES, 2010:2) to deliver quality enriching experiences for children aged birth to six years; work effectively with parents and guardians and engage in interdisciplinary professional work practices (Ibid).

As such, the WDP identifies measures to up-skill the existing workforce while simultaneously advocating that future ECCE workers are appropriately prepared for their roles (DES, 2010). While training and up-skilling should positively impact the quality of practice within the ECCE sector, professionalism is also about the public status of the job (Evans, 2008). In this context, the WDP does not address the status of the sector or the terms and conditions of employment.

Moloney and Pope (2012) and Moloney (2012) are also critical of the approach to practitioner qualifications within '*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life'* (DES, 2011). They stress that this strategy simply commits to encouraging and supporting the "up-skilling" of those working within the ECCE sector. Further concerns relate to its failure to specify a minimum qualification. Commenting upon the contrast between the approach to the ECCE sector and the primary school sector within the strategy, Moloney and Pope (2012 forthcoming) argue that...

> These diverse commitments blur the construct of professional identity within ECCE. The message is clear. Teaching is a profession that is dependent upon graduate level pre-service training. By contrast those working within ECCE do not require academic qualifications.

Hence, as noted by Moloney (2011), although the practitioner's role is complex and multi-faceted, their professional standing is weak (Moloney, 2010, 2011, OECD, 2006, Duignan, 2007). Clearly, training, working conditions and opportunities for ECCE staff often contradicts public rhetoric about the value placed on young children and the importance of their early development and learning. This is particularly true of ECCE traditionally viewed as one of the least powerful in society (Siraj – Blatchford, 1993:393) where salaries remain well below those of teachers, at times being pegged at minimum wage levels (ECI, 2011, Moloney, 2011, OECD, 2006:158).

2.12.1 Nomenclature

The professional identity of the sector is also impeded by the diverse descriptors applied to those working within the sector. For instance, Adams (2005) identified 11 such terms in a Scottish study, while Moloney (2010b) identified 20 terms associated with the workforce in Ireland. Moloney claims that professional demarcation in ECCE remains ambiguous (2011:141) and cites a multitude of terms associated with the sector including "childcare assistant", ''crèche worker'', ''pre-school teacher'' and "practitioner" (ibid). Referring to the wide range of vague and ambiguous titles, McGillivray (2008:244) states that no other profession has experienced such great uncertainty and that the multiplicity of titles may have contributed to confusion about identity, creating uncertainty as to what the various titles, roles and responsibilities actually mean. Likewise, in questioning the rationale for the diversity of terms, Adams (2008:20) claims that the real danger of such multiplicity is that it disperses the focus of professionalism.

The development of a profession that is committed to working with young children requires an inclusive and coherent, versus a fragmented, occupational identity (Adams, 2008). Equally, the profession must be clear about what workers are doing *with* young children. Thus in Adams' words, ''the adult working with the child is practising care and education'' (ibid: 200). Regrettably, in relation to ECCE, ''a clear statement of the educative role within the job is missing and this could well be central to the struggle for professionalism in the sector'' (Ibid: 200).

Who and what constitutes an early childhood professional has been contested ground internationally (Woodrow, 2007). It results from an eclectic mix of policy and practice, informed by a diverse knowledge base, which in turn has contributed to the ambiguity in professional identity (Ibid). However, others (OECD, 2006, Moloney, 2010a, Moloney and Pope, 2012, Woodrow, 2007) associate weak professional identity with training structures, poor working conditions and low salaries. Conversely, Miller and Cable claim that the professionalization of those working within ECCE has been "on an upward trajectory for at least the last decade" (2010: 2). Likewise, and notwithstanding the many difficulties outlined, Duignan (2007:1) maintains that an agreed vision of professionalism in practice does exist and can be revealed through analysis of key national policy documents. While agreeing that an agreed vision has been articulated within policy, Moloney (2011) is critical of implementation suggesting that successive governments have failed to consolidate the identity of the sector through lack of resources and supports.

2.13 Structuring the workforce

According to Moss (2000) the structuring of the workforce, and therefore the structuring of training, reflects the structure of ECCE services (cited in Penn, 2000:107).

He proposes two dimensions related to the structuring of the workforce:

1. The complexity of the services

2. The different types of worker and qualifications (Moss, 2000)

Thus, a common issue concerns the balance between the most highly qualified workers and other less qualified or untrained workers. Citing Moyles & Suschitzky (1995), Moyles ascertains that qualified ECCE teachers tend to work 'down' to the level of their variously trained and qualified colleagues, rather than raising the standards within their settings through acknowledgement of different roles, experience and expertise (2001:86). Endorsing this perspective, Moloney and Pope (2012 forthcoming) claim that B.A. ECCE graduates devalue their role upon commencing employment within the ECCE sector and portray themselves as ''just minding children''. Moyles (2001:86) asserts that more qualified practitioners are fearful that if they dominate the environment with their views, experiences and expertise, they may marginalise those with less training within the setting. As a result, they devalue their role in order to keep the working relationships within the close environment of the early years setting running smoothly for the sake of both the children and parents (ibid).

Therefore, Penn (2000:108) asks: ''should the aim be, as in school, to move towards all staff having the highest level of training? Or should there be a group or groups of lesser trained auxiliary or assistant workers? If so what should be the mix?'' In this regard, the OECD (2006:163) state that the profiling of lead professional staff within ECCE is often blurred. They further claim that a large proportion of staff are in auxiliary positions and poorly paid as a result of the association between the work and the physical care undertaken by women without training. Mirroring Moloney's (2011) Irish findings, they claim that in countries where government interest and funding is weak, the majority of auxiliary staff in child care services may only have a one-year, post 16, vocational qualification, or be composed of

women with no qualifications in this field, employed at low wage levels and poor working conditions (OECD, 2006:164).

Employing auxiliary staff as Ireland does may not go without consequence (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000, Department for Education (DFE), 2004), for as noted by the OECD (2006); the best outcomes for young children attending ECCE settings occur in those settings employing well-educated personnel. France for example, has made it obligatory for large crèches to employ early childhood educators with a 27 month post-baccalaureate training, and more recently, a licence or three- year university degree (OECD, 2006). Likewise, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and New Zealand have all settled on training of at least three years as bench mark training for workers across the early childhood age range. This training is similar to or not much lower than training for teachers in primary schooling (ibid). The many variations in staffing profiles across ECCE underpins the need to have a suitable profile, specific training and clear career progression pathways for early childhood educators (OECD, 2006: 163).

On a more positive note however a new national awards system is soon to be introduced in Ireland. Known as the Common Awards System (CAS), it is the new way of developing FETAC awards which will provide awards at levels 1 – 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (appendix 18). It is a coherent and structured way of developing awards, which is consistent with the NFQ (www.EarlyChildhoodIreland.ie). Perhaps this improved system of training will result in better educated personnel and will further enhance the quality of ECCE service delivery.

2.14 Ongoing concerns

Earlier, the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme was highlighted as having the potential to positively impact the professional identity of the sector. However, proposed changes to this scheme announced in budget 2012 are of concern. Thus, capitation to ECCE settings will be

reduced by 3% from September 1st, 2012 (DCYA, 2012). Although this may seem a miniscule reduction in funding, for a typical pre-school catering for 24 children, it amounts to an annual reduction of over €2,000 (www.EarlyChildhoodIreland.ie) and sends a negative message with regard to the value and importance of the ECCE workforce. Little wonder Bellm and Whitebrook state that the "current childcare workforce appears to be losing ground in both education levels and compensation" (cited in Lutton, 2008:29).

However, Edwards (2010:5) argues that practitioners must be ''able to respond to changing conditions, resources and problems to be found in practices that can absorb new knowledge and ways of working''. In Ireland, ECCE staff are continually subjected to the introduction of new policies and initiatives that "rely on the ability of both the professionals and the setting in which they work, to learn, adapt and develop their practice'' (Edwards, 2010:5). This ever changing role of the ECCE practitioner indicates the need for both prolonged pre-service training, as well as continual professional development opportunities to remain abreast of new developments and to consolidate professional knowledge and skills. Adams (2008:199) suggests that engaging in further study exhibits both a desire for public recognition of one's abilities and a desire for up-to-date knowledge and self-improvement: both characteristics that are generally ascribed to a professional attitude.

In contrast to this, what can be said of the diversity of ECCE qualifications? Throughout the past decade, many third level institutions have developed degree level ECCE programmes including Mary Immaculate College, University College Cork, and Dublin Institute of Technology. Are graduates from these courses more professional than graduates from FETAC Level 5 or 6 training programmes? Or, is there, as suggested by Moloney (2011); a perception that degree level training is unnecessary when Ireland does not have a statutory minimum training requirement. Mirroring this perspective, Nutbrown (2012) and Adams

(2008:197) suggest that ECCE personnel who seek professional status through study are limited in the return they get for their efforts by the misconceptions that surround their job and by the terminology around job titles used by governments and employers. Consequently, practitioners do not feel the need to attain a higher than necessary qualification (Moloney, 2010b, Moloney and Pope, 2012). However, the OECD (2006) argues that education is a key to development and educators are the key to successful early childhood programmes. Practicing in a professional capacity in an ECCE setting is a complex and challenging career choice.

Although Nutbrown (2012:9) suggests that the 'hair or care' stereotype still exists for many considering a course in the early years, there is a growing realisation that working in ECCE is complex and that sound training is required (Moloney and Pope, 2012 forthcoming, OECD, 2006). Current qualification levels coupled with low salaries (OECD, 2006) and ineffective policy undermines and obscures the professional identity of the ECCE sector (Moloney, 2010b, 2011). Early years workers need to be particularly strong to protect their developing professional values in the face of pervasive societal undervaluing of their work (Adams, 2008:197).

2.15 Conclusion

This chapter explored the elements that shape a profession and thus professionalism. Typically professions are associated with a high level of education and lengthy training (Black and Gruen, 2005, Hanlon, 1998, Larson, 1977) certified by examination (Millerson, 1964). Consequently, a professional has the command of a body of knowledge, skills and expertise, acquired through lengthy training and education and provided by experts in the field that is generally unknown to the lay public. These processes in turn shape a person's professional identity which ''is related to finding self-meaning connected with ones work''

(Oleson, 2000 in Ulhmann *et al*., 2010:463) and is further associated with how we recognise ourselves and are recognised by others.

It is evident that education, training and consequently the command of a body of knowledge, skills and expertise ensure the profession's occupational status, economic rewards, and greater political powers while also demonstrating a commitment to high standards of professionalism. Not only is professionalism concerned with the need for practitioners to act and behave in certain ways (Boyt *et al*., 2001:322), it is also concerned with the "quality of practice and the public status of the job'' (Evans, 2008:23). Thus, professionalism is a "shifting, rather than a concrete phenomenon" (in Whitty 2006:282) where members are required to remain abreast of new information, practices and knowledge through continuous professional development opportunities. In addition, a profession should involve a voluntary commitment to a set of guiding principles (Hoyle and John, 1995) to further assist practitioners in setting boundaries about what is acceptable professional behaviour. Greene (2010) argues that if a profession lacks guiding principles, it can develop strategies that are not integrated with the organisation or with each other, leading to inconsistencies and conflicting interests and therefore such an organisation cannot be termed a 'profession'.

The second half of this chapter examined a range of policies, initiatives and frameworks in Ireland that shaped the professional identity of the ECCE sector. Traditionally, education was the remit of the DES while childcare was undertaken by mothers in the home (Tizard, 1986, Government of Ireland, 1999b, DJELR, 2000). However, following a marked increase in female labour market participation from the late 1990s (Kennedy, 2001, OECD, 2004) the need for out-of-home childcare arrangements (OECD, 2004, 2006, DJELR, 2000, Kennedy 2001) became critical. As a result, numerous policies and initiatives developed to delineate the roles and responsibilities of those working within the ECCE sector highlight the need for

training and point to the need for professional practice. In addition, they go a long way towards shaping the professional identity of the sector.

Despite the myriad of policy documents, Moloney (2011) is critical of their implementation suggesting that successive governments have failed to consolidate the identity of the sector through lack of resources and supports. Consequently, work within the ECCE sector remains undervalued and underestimated (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012, OECD, 2004, 2006). Dalli (2002) argues that the traditional alignment of childcare with the attendant discourses of love and care disempowered ECCE practitioners from claiming professional status. Accordingly, it does not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations. As a result, the demand and need to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce has been overlooked (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012). Moreover, as noted by researchers (Adams, 2008, Moloney and Pope, 2012 forthcoming, and Nutbrown, 2012), ECCE personnel who seek professional status through study are limited in the return they get for their efforts by the misconceptions that surround their job. Hence, there is a concern that practitioners may not see the need to attain a higher than necessary qualification (Moloney, 2010b, Moloney and Pope, 2012). Worryingly, the current qualification levels coupled with low salaries (OECD, 2006) and ineffective policy has undermined and obscured the professional identity of the ECCE sector (Moloney, 2010b).

<u>**Chapter Three**</u>

<u>**Research Methods and Study Design**</u>

<u>**3.1 Introduction:**</u>

This chapter provides an account of the methods used for data collection and justifies the use of a qualitative methodology. It describes the research design, participant selection, ethical considerations and research reliability. It further discusses the limitations associated with qualitative research.

<u>**3.2 Research design**</u>

As this study is primarily concerned with human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010), a qualitative methodology was used. While ''quantitative research is concerned with producing facts and figures; numerical data and quantities'' (Mac Naughton *et al.,* 2001:52, Silverman, 2006) and the use of 'surveys' or 'questionnaires' (Pole and Lampard, 2002, Silverman, 2006); ''qualitative research is a form of knowing that is particularly attuned to the study of how aspects of social life are constructed and reconstructed'' (McLeod, 2011:17). Although well designed quantitative studies can influence decisions across a wide range of areas in ECCE (Pole and Lampard, 2002:113), qualitative research enables the researcher to go beyond mere description at a generalizable level in empirical investigations (Neegaard and Ulhoi, 2007:5).

Qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive where words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon (Merriam, 2007:16). The main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere (Silverman, 2006:43). Consequently, given the personal nature of this study *'For Love or Money: Exploring the Professional Identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland*

today' and the embryonic nature of the topic, a qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate. Thus, the overarching rationale for employing a qualitative methodology was directed towards eliciting information from participants about their attitudes, feelings, opinions and perceptions of professional identity within the ECCE sector (Patton, 2002).

3.3 Research methods

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as multi method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Typically, it involves interviews, focus group discussions and observations (Silverman, 2006). Because it is concerned with developing an understanding of how the social world is constructed (McLeod, 2011, Merriam, 2007, Neegaard and Ulhoi, 2007), the research is undertaken in a natural setting (Merriam, 2007), thus, enabling the researcher to make sense of or interpret the data in terms of the meanings people bring to it in the context of participants' experiences, perspectives and viewpoints (Neegaard and Ulhoi, 2007:4). According to Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún ''interviews can give greater depth...you can encourage people to expand on their answers and cross check information'' (2001:206). In this study, both interviews and focus group discussions were used, allowing the researcher to contrast prevailing ideas between participants, enabling verification and confirmation of concerns, suggestions and perceptions.

Moreover, qualitative research is inductive where the researcher gathers data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam, 2007). Hence, qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field (Babbie, 2007, Merriam, 2007). The researcher is the main instrument for data collection and analysis, (Merriam, 2007, McLeod, 2011) and therefore, s/he can be responsive and adaptive throughout the research process (Merriam, 2007). As noted by Babbie (2007), a key strength

of qualitative research is that it helps the researcher to develop a comprehensive perspective that leads to deeper fuller and more realistic data.

3.3.1 Interviews:

Kvale and Brinkman describe an interview as a ''conversation that has a structure and a purpose'' (2009:3). It is a 'verbal exchange of information between two or more people for the principal purpose of one gathering information from the other(s)' (Pole and Lampard, 2002:128). Because the researcher defines and controls the situation, the interview is not a conversation between equal partners. The researcher introduces the topic and critically follows up on the subject's answers to his or her questions (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009:3). As such, interviews provide a forum where the researcher can gently probe and gain primary information regarding participant's views and opinions (Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún 2001). In this study, the researcher gained "access to the web of interactions" (Mac Naughton *et al.,* 200l: 117) within the ECCE sector between practitioners, ECCE students, lecturers and support organisations regarding the professional identity of the sector.

Ten semi-structured interviews were undertaken as follows:

Interviewee	Number of interviews undertaken	Sector
ECCE practitioners	4	Urban x 1 Rural x 1 Community x 1 Private x 1
FETAC Lecturer	1	
Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Lecturer	1	
City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) Representatives	2	
National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC) Representatives	2	

Table 1: Semi-structured interview participants

A semi-structured interview format was used, that was guided by a set of open ended questions allowing for flexibility during the interviews (appendices 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12). This format facilitated two-way communication between the researcher and the interviewees, allowing participants to speak freely and openly when elaborating on areas of interest or concern (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). Participants expressed "depth of emotion, thoughts, experiences and basic perceptions" (Patton, 2002:21) on the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland, enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the views of participants.

3.3.2 Focus group discussions

By their nature, focus groups bring a number of people together with a facilitator to discuss a particular issue or set of issues (Pole and Lampard, 2002). The purpose is not to "reach consensus about or solutions to the issues being discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on the issue" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:150). In addition to the interviews outlined, four focus group discussions were undertaken as follows:

Interviewee	Number of focus groups undertaken	Number of participants
B.A. ECCE graduates	3	1 x 3 1 x 5 1 x 2
CCC representatives	1	1 x 4

Table 2: Focus group participants

As illustrated, 14 stakeholders participated in these focus groups.

Focus groups combine the strengths of semi-structured interviews with the opportunity to observe human interaction in the form of group dynamics (Pole and Lampard, 2002), giving the researcher a more realistic insight into the real issues and concerns. Krueger (1998) suggests that focus groups relax participants and allow them to lose their inhibitions to reveal their opinions, feelings and emotions. Thus, in this study, the focus group discussions facilitated the generation of realistic and dynamic accounts of what people thought. Accordingly, focus groups are well suited to exploratory studies in new domains (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009), such as the professionalism of the ECCE sector in Ireland today.

3.4 Sampling and participants

Research participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002) which requires the researcher to make theoretically informed decisions as to whom to include in the research sample (Lampard and Pole, 2002:36, Hardy and Bryman, 2004). Participants are chosen because they hold information in relation to the topic of interest (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Silverman, 2005).

In the context of the Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006, ECCE settings caring for more than three children are obliged to notify the Health Service Executive (HSE). Therefore, four ECCE practitioners representing urban, rural, community and private settings were randomly selected from the HSE's lists of notified ECCE settings.

As stated, interviews were also undertaken with NVCC and CCC representatives. These respective organisations are central to the ECCE infrastructure in Ireland offering support and advice to those working or intending to work in the sector (www.dcya.gov.ie).

Hence, six CCC representatives from Limerick County, Clare, North Tipperary, Cork City and County and Kerry were interviewed. This geographic spread helped to ensure the reliability and validity of the research data. Two NVCC representatives were also interviewed.

In addition, two lecturers involved in the training and education of ECCE students and practitioners were interviewed. One lecturer taught at FETAC level 5 and 6 on the National Framework for Qualifications Ireland (NQFI). Given the increasing emphasis on acquiring a FETAC Level 5 qualification resulting from the provisions of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010); those delivering training at this level, have significant responsibility in

preparing the ECCE workforce in Ireland. Consequently, their insight into the identity of the sector is salient.

The second lecturer worked within the University sector; delivering training to undergraduate students at Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) Level 8 on the NFQI. As discussed, there is a direct relationship between practitioner training and professional identity (Black and Gruen, 2005, Hakel *et al*., 2008, Moloney, 2010, 2011, Negrine, 2007). Increasing numbers of students are accessing B.A. ECCE since it was first introduced at University College Cork in 1995. The inclusion of this lecturer enabled the researcher to determine how a graduate Level 8 qualification impacted upon the professional identity of the sector.

A further ten interviews were undertaken with B.A. ECCE graduates each of whom had completed four years of full-time study and qualified as Bachelors. A particular provision of the free preschool year in ECCE scheme (2010) is that a higher capitation fee is paid to ECCE settings employing a lead practitioner with a B.A. in ECCE who also has three years experience. Although a B.A. in ECCE may now be more desirable because of the monetary gain associated with it (OMCYA, 2010), Moloney and Pope (2012) argue that there is continual lack of recognition for those who work with the youngest children in Ireland. The perspectives of B.A. ECCE graduates were therefore central to this study in terms of their insights into the status and professionalism of the sector today.

3.5 Data analysis

As mentioned earlier, ''qualitative research findings are inductively derived in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses and even theory about a particular aspect of practice'' (Merriam, 2007:16). Consequently, there is an element of interpretation associated with qualitative research which is undertaken in a systematic and

transparent/verifiable way. Thus, the end result can accurately reflect reality (McLeod, 2011:45). In this study, data was analysed using Grounded Theory, i.e., the discovery of theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:1). Data analysis brings together the technical expertise of data collection, theoretical insight and creative aspects of writing (Pole and Lampard, 2002:209). The products of analysis - the research findings, allow the researcher to contribute to the knowledge base in his/her chosen field (Ibid).

Many analyses of qualitative data begin with the identification of key themes and patterns which often depends on processes of coding data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996); ''the use of tags or labels assigned to units of meaningful descriptive information'' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56). Essentially ''coding is a process of categorizing and sorting data'' (Charmaz, 1983:111). However, as coded data are still not ready for interpretation (Tesch, 1990) a data organising system based on developing broad themes was created (Table 3) for this study. Concepts were then identified from the literature review, the research questions and the raw research data. The segmented data was coded according to those organising categories and then re-sorted, again according to those categories. These categories were linked together and used to form pathways through the data (Dey, 1993). In addition, drawing upon Delamont (1992), patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities were further identified before theorising the data.

Table 3 highlights the broad themes identified through the literature prior to data collection

What is a profession?
Professionalism within the ECCE sector
Qualities essential for the professional identity of an ECCE practitioner
Differences between the ECCE sector and other professions
How a B.A. in ECCE impacts professional identity
Benefits of a B.A. in ECCE
How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?
The impact of qualifications and training on the professional identity of the ECCE sector
The impact of qualifications and training upon others – parents and other professionals
FETAC level 5
Job titles

Table 3: Broad themes identified through the literature prior to data collection

Table 4 outlines the broad themes identified through initial data analysis in conjunction with the literature review and the research questions

Themes within literature Review	Themes within research Data
What is a Profession Characteristics of a Profession	- Qualifications and experience - Standards - Continuous Professional development - Status
Professional Knowledge and Licensure Autonomy and Responsibility	- Qualifications - Lengthy training - Baseline expectation for quality - Standards/ Guiding Principles
Professionalism Professionalism Quality and Status Towards Professionalism	- Qualifications and Experience - Set of Standards (ethical/ Protocols) - Personal v Professional qualities - Multidisciplinary approach Unprofessional practice - Value of degree misunderstood - Effectiveness of FETAC 5 - Problems with graduates - Lack of communication with parents
Professionalisation Professionalisation and Professional development	- Continuous professional development - International practice - Benefits of degree - Emerging profession - Great policies- no support - A lot done more to do (training and value)
Professional Identity Problems with Professional Identity Nomenclature	- Status (remuneration) - A greater sense of professional identity is enhanced with further study, higher job positions and experience - Up-skilling/training is resulting in a greater sense of professionalism/ professional identity - Professional identity increasing with qualifications - No recognition (not valued, no status, no rewards, emigration, training in new professions) - ECCE not on par with other professions/professionals - Gendered profession - Stagnant professional identity - Lack of government support - Educator/ Working titles

Structuring the workforce	- Management - Bad practice can be taken on by all - Workforce structuring in settings
On-going Concerns	- Lack of government support - Diversity of qualifications/training

Table 4: Broad themes identified through initial data analysis in conjunction with the literature review and the research questions

Table 5 outlines the themes reached following subsequent data analyses

Societal Context	- How deep rooted traditional views of ECCE have impacted the growth and professionalisation of the ECCE sector
Government policy impacting change	- The beginning of government support- EOCP 2000-2006 - The professional standing of the ECCE sector
Convincing Parents	- Parents are becoming increasingly aware of the value of the work involved in ECCE - Need to educate parents on the importance of ECCE - Are practitioners to blame for parents lack of knowledge on the ECCE sector
What is a profession	- Importance of qualifications - Experiential training - Graduate lead workforce
Characteristics of a profession	- Development of policies containing standards, ethical issues and guiding principles - Impact of lack of financial/government support - Continuous professional development - Status and nomenclature
What's in a title	- Profession, status and titles - Qualifications and professional identity
Professional Knowledge	- Higher education and training
Benefits associated with Higher qualifications	- Enhancing quality and professionalism - Lack of societal understanding on the value of a B.A. ECCE - Problems with higher qualifications - The need to change societal perceptions - Methods to enhance the professionalism of the ECCE sector - Professional imbalance - Licensure
Critique of FETAC level 5	- Effectiveness of FETAC level 5

Table 5: Themes reached following subsequent data analyses

3.6 Research reliability

Reliability pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009:245). One way to ensure research reliability is to 'triangulate' (Silverman, 2006) the data through ''the use of a variety of data sources in a study'' (Mac Naughton *et al.,* 2001: 214). In simple terms, triangulation is about confirming the validity of data, i.e., the degree to which the research has successfully measured the social phenomena being studied (Mac Naughton *et al.,* 2001) by ''obtaining data from a second or third source'' (2001:204). Mac Naughton *et al* (2001:125) further claim that triangulation helps in the quest for rich data that attempts to reduce aspects of bias. Therefore the five data sources outlined (ECCE practitioners, HETAC and FETAC lecturers, B.A. ECCE graduates, CCC and NVCC representatives) facilitated the process of triangulation and enhanced the validity of the research study.

Pole and Lampard (2002:153) assert that triangulation can also highlight interesting contradictions. This requires researchers to "consider alternative interpretations of the data and can usefully lead to caution in analysis and so prevent over-claiming from the evidence'' (Mac Naughton *et al.,* 2001:125). Applied to this study, the process of triangulation generated more reliable data as information could be checked and cross referenced.

3.7 Limitations of research methods and study

According to Pole and Lampard ''being realistic about research means recognising and working within constraints'' (2002:19). One such constraint relates to the time frame associated with the study. In this study, the primary data was collected over a three month period from December 2011-February 2012 and the entire research study was completed over a twelve month period from July 2011-July 2012. However, consistent with Pole and

Lampard (2002), the researcher felt that the time constraints provided important milestones with regard to what had to be completed and in what period of time.

Pole and Lampard (2002) also cite labour costs as the most significant aspect in undertaking research (Pole and Lampard, 2002). For example, ''an hour long interview takes approximately seven hours to transcribe'' (Pole and Lampard, 2002:40), thus making transcription a time consuming and lengthy process. Moreover, as noted by Mac Naughton *et al* (2001) data analysis involves several days or weeks of work.

Focus groups also present certain limitations. For example, the researcher may have less control and some group members may dominate the encounter and discourage others from expressing their own views (Krueger, 1994). Cognisant of these limitations, the researcher devised strategies to reign in, refocus and include all participants within the discussion. This involved repeating the question regularly, summarizing the main points and looking for affirmation, confirmation and participation from the group and from individuals throughout the discussion (Pole and Lampard, 2002).

In this study, the relatively small sample size (24 participants) may not support generalisation of the research findings to the entire ECCE sector in Ireland. However, it does provide an important insight into how the professional identity of the sector is viewed from the perspective of practitioners, support agency and lecturer representatives.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations add a further set of constraints to the design and conduct of research (Pole and Lampard, 2002:23). In qualitative research, ethical problems may arise because of the complexities of ''researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena'' (Birch, Miller, Mauthner and Jessop, 2002). Any potential ethical concerns should be taken

into consideration from the very start of an investigation to the final report (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). One such concern is the need for informed consent which is critical to ethical research and involves:

- Giving information about the research which is relevant to the subjects decisions about whether to participate

- Making sure that subjects understand that information

- Ensuring that participation is voluntary (Silverman, 2006:324)

Furthermore informed consent ensures participant confidentiality (Patton, 2002). Procedures associated with the confidentiality of research data include:

- Coding of data and keeping the key to the code separate from the data

- Keeping data in secure, locked storage

- Ensuring that only those researchers authorised by the appropriate ethics committee have access to the data

- Ensuring that reports, articles and conference papers do not contain identifying material (Patton, 2002:67)

Accordingly, each research participant was given clear extensive information about the project (appendices 1-5) and their informed consent (appendices 6 and 7) was sought prior to undertaking the research (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010). Participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without consequence at any time. In order to ensure the anonymity of data, ID codes were applied so that research participants could not be identified by anybody other than the researcher. Participants were fully informed about the purposes for which the research would be used.

3.9 Conclusion

The overarching aim of this study was to elicit information from participants in relation to their attitudes, feelings, opinions and perceptions of professional identity within the ECCE sector (Patton, 2002). Due to the emergent nature of the topic: '*For Love or Money: Exploring the Professional Identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland today*' a qualitative research methodology was utilised consisting of a series of interviews and focus group discussions. Moreover, as discussed in this chapter, data was analysed through grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which involved an iterative process where key themes and patterns in the data were identified and coded. In addition, this chapter also addressed research validity, reliability and limitations.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the research findings. These findings which are presented as a series of themes are located within the context of the literature review in chapter 2.

<center>**Chapter 4**</center>

<center>**Findings, Analysis and Discussion**</center>

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 2, work within the ECCE sector in Ireland is undervalued and underappreciated (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012, OECD, 2004, 2006). Likewise, the overarching finding of this study, based upon 96% (N=23) agreement between research participants, was that there is *"still a long way to come in seeing the sector as a profession and as professional''* (HETAC Lecturer (HL)) *''the complexity of this work is just not valued, recognised or understood''* (National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC-1)). This finding is underpinned by a range of factors that undermine and prevent professional identity formation in the ECCE sector in Ireland.

A predominant factor impeding the professional growth of the ECCE sector is the traditional view of ECCE where childcare was undertaken by mothers in the home (Tizard, 1986, DES, 1999b, DJELR, 2000) while children's education began upon entry to school. Thus, findings indicate that ECCE continues to be seen in terms of *"the mother looking after the children"* (NVCC-1) *''a very low paid and status job''* (City and County Childcare Committee (CC1)) *''that has not always been recognised''* (CC2). Equally, the discourse of love and care (Dalli, 2003a, 2006, Lobman and Ryan, 2007, Moloney, 2011) features prominently. Boyt *et al.,* (2001) associate professionalism with the attitudes and behaviour one possesses towards one's profession. Findings indicate that those working in the sector were passionate (Moyles, 2001) about their work. Therefore in this study, working with young children was seen as a vocation...it is about *''dedication...it's not about the money...I earn €8.65 an hour''* (Urban Practitioner (PU)). However, such passion can be perceived as ''anti-intellectual, idealistic, objective, indecisive and feminine'' (Moyles, 2001:6). Indeed, findings indicate that the

sector in Ireland is perceived as strongly gendered and not warranting any specialised training or expertise (Moloney, 2010, 2011). This perspective is embedded within Irish society *''from parent level to government level''* (community Practitioner (PC)) and has left a lasting legacy that greatly influences attitudes towards the sector (Siraj – Blatchford, 1993) as well as how training and remuneration is perceived. Therefore, the societal context which shapes the discourse of professional identity for the ECCE sector in Ireland is critical.

4.2 Societal context

Woodrow (2007) holds that who and what constitutes an early childhood professional has been contested ground internationally. In the context of Ireland, Moloney, (2010, 2011) argues that ECCE is located within a feminist paradigm that is aligned to a societal perception that anybody can mind a child. Congruent with Moloney (2010, 2011), Moloney and Pope (2012) and Siraj-Blatchford (1993), findings in this study suggest that working in ECCE is associated with child-minding or babysitting. Again, this viewpoint was located within a traditional context; *''women in the home minding children...the local woman who did it as a vocation''* (HL). Furthermore, reinforcing Osgood's (2010) claim that the sector is hyper-feminine; the FETAC Lecturer (FL) maintained that *''it goes along with the whole gender and mothering side of things''*. Although Bennett (2003) and the OECD (2006) call upon governments to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable (2006:25), little progress has been made in any of these areas in Ireland (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012). Consistent with researchers (Cameron *et al.*, 1999, Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999, Osgood, 2010), findings indicate that the highly gendered nature of the sector coupled with its association with caring and nurturance precludes the development of a

professional identity for the sector. Such 'gendering', reinforces the notion that child rearing is essentially ''women's work'' (OECD, 2006:170).

Findings further indicate that there is little appreciation for the complexity of the work involved in the care and education of young children. Thus, while those working in ECCE are increasingly called upon to take on the perceived ills of society (e.g. low income families), high level assessments of children's current and potential capabilities and work with a wide range of other people (Moyles, 2006), childcare is still perceived as *"a lovely job for a girl...that wouldn't be too hard''* (CC1). Concurring with researchers (Moloney and Pope, 2012, Moloney, 2011) NVCC-1 claimed that *''people are in this profession because they didn't get enough points to be a teacher''.* In common with the OECD (2004, 2006) and Siraj-Blatchford (1993:396); there was a belief that the practitioner's role was synonymous with 'care'

> *''there was this perception you were just minding children...there wasn't an emphasis on education or child development''* (CC1) unlike *"the UK where they have spent thirty years building on more investment...knowledge and understanding of what goes on and the purpose of Early Years Care and Education''* (CC3.Focus Group (FG)).

While these deep rooted societal issues will *"take a long time to shake''* (CC2), it is evident that much has changed in terms of government recognition for the sector. Thus the following section indicates that government policy is instrumental in shaping attitudes towards the ECCE sector in Ireland.

4.3 Government policy impacting change

On the one hand, findings indicate a level of dissatisfaction with ECCE policy, while on the other, policy was said to have greatly influenced the physical infrastructure that exists in Ireland today. Consequently, participants were critical of the Equal Opportunities Childcare

Programme (EOCP) (2000–2006) which was primarily associated with facilitating and assisting parents' return to the labour market (OECD, 2006). Therefore, as stated by CC1 Ireland's *"first EOCP funding programme...was given under an equality measure...the whole programme was designed around adults"*. Equally, CC3.FG claimed that *"it hasn't been a child centred purpose it has been an adult and labour force agenda"*. However, CC1 and NVCC-1 cited the benefits of the EOCP which considerably shaped the ECCE infrastructure resulting in *"purpose built services with equipment and materials that wouldn't have been there beforehand"* (CC1). In addition, as noted by FL, the EOCP was the beginning of a journey where the sector *"started to get more recognition"* and it pre-empted a *"demand for childcare"*.

The EOCP is not the only policy to impact upon the sector, for as highlighted in chapter 2, a myriad of initiatives including *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) were also developed. In recognition of the many policies developed, NVCC-2 articulated how *"the rate of change within the sector even in the last 3-5 years has been significant"*. Indeed, FL and CC1 asserted that such policies were resulting in *"a shift in the attitude towards childcare* (CC1); *"it has raised the standards and it has kept ECCE on the agenda...they are putting ECCE on a higher footing...but the process is slow"* (CC1). Consequently, CC1 cautioned that *"there is still a huge amount of work to be done"*.

This caution is rooted in the view that ECCE does not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations; teaching and medicine (OECD, 2006), or law and academia (Hanlon, 1998, Hoi Choi-Wa Dora, 2006) for example. Therefore, researchers (Duignan, 2007, Moloney, 2010, 2011, OECD, 2006) consider the professional standing of the ECCE sector to be weak. As commented by FL, ECCE is *"not regarded on the same level as other professions...the whole profile and professionalism of the early years sector needs to be*

promoted''. While participants called upon society in general to recognise the value of the ECCE sector, they were particularly concerned with the need for parents to articulate a professional identity for the sector.

4.3.1 Convincing parents

In terms of recognising and promoting the professional identity of the sector; 83% (N=20) of participants felt that the *''biggest job is buy in from parents''* (CC3.FG). There was currently little demand for a professional identity for the sector because *"parents and society don't recognise what early years education can do for children"* (ibid). Such lack of recognition is related to the historical polarisation of care and education (OECD, 2004, 2006). Analysis of data indicates that parents were viewed along a continuum (Figure 8).
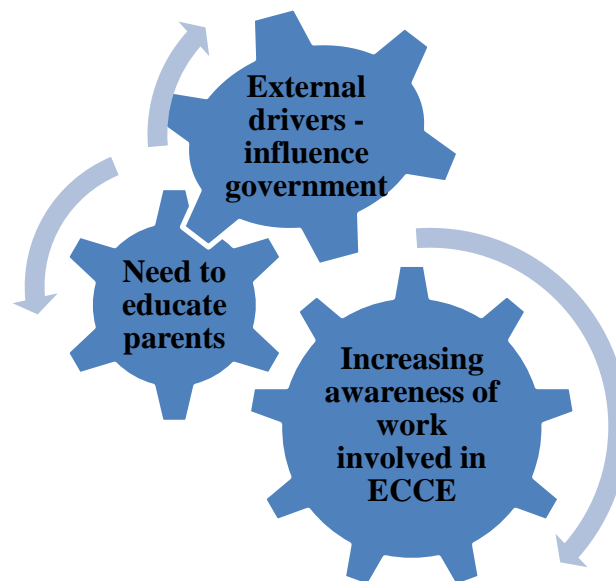

Figure 8: Stakeholders perceptions of parents

As shown, parents were seen as the *"external drivers"* who could *''push the government into doing more...until such time as parents and the wider society recognise ECCE as the start of their child's learning and development it's not going to be prioritised''* (CC3.FG).

In addition to influencing government, there was a belief that parents:

- Are increasingly aware of the value of the work involved in ECCE

- Should be educated in relation to the importance of ECCE

In relation to the former, *''parents are becoming aware of the value of early years education as opposed to just childcare''* CC1. Similarly, NVCC-2 claimed that

> *''Parents are now beginning to see practitioners as professionals and some of that is down to the professionals being able to highlight work that is being done in the service...it might look like they are only playing but in fact there is deep level learning going on''*

Highlighting the contradictory viewpoints with regards to parents, NVCC-1 added that *''unfortunately parents don't know what good practice is...there is a huge gap between parents' knowledge and what is actually happening in settings''.* There was therefore, a parallel discourse concerning the *''need to do an awful lot more on educating parents''* (CC2)*; ''some parents don't understand the value of education and it's trying to tap into that...it's difficult''* (CC1). The implication is clear, knowledgeable parents who understand the value of ECCE would recognise and promote it as a profession.

Moreover, in common with Moloney (2011), and in keeping with the societal context within which attitudes towards ECCE are shaped, findings point to the disparate perceptions of primary school teachers and ECCE practitioners. Such disparity was linked to how the work undertaken in school is seen as valuable, while work in ECCE is undervalued. In this respect, a participant from CC3.FG summed it up by claiming that

> *''if you spoke to a parent about their children they would see as soon as they step inside the school gates they are being taken care of by professionals and until then it's only a childcare service...education is seen as being paper and pencils...they don't see that learning happens every waking moment of that child's life the whole lifelong learning goes straight over their heads''*

Conversely, a further two members of CC3.FG questioned whether the ECCE sector itself is to be held responsible for parents' lack of knowledge

> *"we are not making it clear to parents what actually playing with sand and water means...what manipulation of objects is actually doing to the baby's brain''* (CC3.FG)

More concerning however, was a perception that those working with young children did not have the capacity to engage in such a meaningful way with parents

> *''Some people don't even have the ability to have that conversation with a parent* (CC3.FG)

The DES (2010:2) is acutely aware of deficiencies within the sector citing the need for the workforce to "achieve the qualifications that equip them with the skills, knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes" to deliver enriching experiences for children; to work effectively with parents and engage in interdisciplinary professional work practices (Ibid). Moreover, staff must be appropriately qualified for the level of responsibility and practice expected of them (CECDE, 2006).

Overall, CC1 described the relationship between parents and ECCE providers as *"a chicken and egg situation...the more parents are informed the more they will demand in terms of quality''.* This creates a challenge for the ECCE sector in terms of how it responds to parental demands. In the words of Edwards (2010:5) practitioners must be ''able to respond to changing conditions, resources and problems to be found in practices that can absorb new knowledge and ways of working''. Indeed, many researchers (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000, OECD, 2006, Littledyke, 2008, Moss, 2008, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012 forthcoming) question whether those working within ECCE possess the professional skills and expertise that are critical to professional identity formation. While this question is critical to the construct of professional identity, it cannot be considered without first discussing the research findings in terms of defining a profession and the characteristics of a profession.

4.4 What is a profession?

The word 'profession' has multiple meanings, and is related to ideas about professionals, professionalism, and professionalization attached to an occupational group (Ho Choi-Wa Dora, 2006). Congruent with researchers (Becker, 1962, Larson, 1977, Hanlon, 1998, Black and Gruen, 2005) findings indicate that a profession was clearly associated with *''a particular type of work'' (FL) ''doctors and psychologists''* (Rural Practitioner (PR)), or *''nurses and teachers''* (CC2) for example. Equally evident and further concurring with Black and Gruen (2005), Hanlon, (1998), Larson (1977), a profession was associated with lengthy training and qualifications.

Lutton, maintains that there is "a consensus that early childhood teachers do not need specialised early childhood training and general education foundations in the curriculum areas taught in early childhood programmes" (2008:33). However, it is noteworthy that all 24 participants associated training and qualifications with a profession:

> ➢ *''you need the higher qualifications''* (PU)
> ➢ *''it's about the training''* (Private Practitioner (PP))
> ➢ *''you need to have a certain level of qualifications to be able to discuss and speak on a professional level''* (PC)
> ➢ *''someone doing such an important job such as nurturing the future of the country should be professionally qualified and act in an appropriate way''* (HL)

In addition, all 24 participants agreed that experience was a core aspect of a profession; *''a true professional has a degree"* (BA1.FG) coupled with *"the skill and the talent...it's about getting those two together''* (NVCC-1). Overall, 83% of research participants (N=20) stated that a graduate lead and experienced workforce is a key constituent of a profession. Therefore, in common with Moloney (2010, 2011) working in ECCE was described as *"a specialised*

area of work...you need high qualifications and experience'' (PU). As explained by HL, while *''you learn very practically through experience...if you don't have the theoretical back bone you may never be aware of things you really should be doing''.* These positive sentiments indicate that "we can no longer count on an army of young women with limited education to take up low status, poorly paid work in the childcare sector" (Littledyke, 2008:45). Conversely, as discussed later in this chapter, while participants were unequivocal on the need for training, findings suggest that this need has not yet been recognised at a societal level.

4.5 Characteristics of a profession

Although qualifications and experience ranked highly in terms of what a profession involves; various other aspects were highlighted by research participants (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Characteristics of a profession
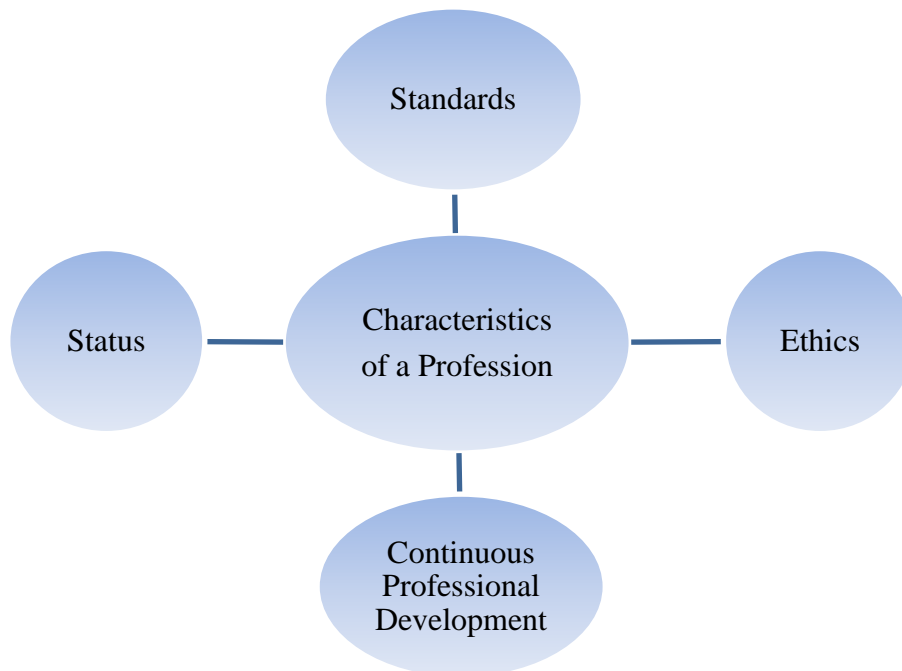
4.5.2 Standards

As discussed in chapter 2, the overarching objective of policy documents; The Revised Childcare (preschool services) Regulations, (DHC, 2006), *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) is to create a national practice standard for the ECCE sector. In this study, 75% (N=18) of participants highlighted standards as a mark of professionalism

> *''Professionally you should be implementing standards...adhering to quality at all times''* (FL)

> *''There needs to be a set standard from crèche to crèche...everyone will know what level we are working from''* (PU)

A professional therefore would

> *''Adhere to a distinct set of standards, beliefs and codes''* (FL)

> *''Be very aware of ethical issues...adhere to protocols...know what's acceptable work and practice in an organisation''* (HL)

> *''Work to some external guide or practice''* (NVCC-2)

Taking these perspectives into consideration, it is evident that a ''command of a body of technical expertise that is not shared by those outside the profession'' is essential (Hakel *et al.*, 2008:44). Furthermore, working to *"codes of behaviour and professional standards''* (CC2) and having *''a shared understanding of ethical issues contained within a certain sector''* (CC3.FG) were seen as core elements of a profession.

According to Greene (2010), if a profession lacks guiding principles, it can develop strategies that are not integrated with the organisation or with each other, leading to inconsistencies and conflicting interests. Ultimately, such an organisation cannot be termed a 'profession'. Although, there is no code of ethics per se for the ECCE sector in Ireland, the various policy initiatives outlined provide insight into the values considered important for the sector.

According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010) the implementation of policy and practices is a critical factor in determining professionalism. This study confirms this perspective. Thus, it was claimed that policy *"has definitely made it* [sector] *more visible...it's in the political arena...it has upped the ante''* (NVCC-1). Significantly, *''the establishment of the department of children and youth affairs and the full minister has really boosted the whole sector''* (CC2). Likewise CC3.FG stated

> *''for the first time having the department and the minister...and having the early years policy unit located within the department of children is all working...if the policies work then things on the ground change...now we have taken a while to get it right but I think we are moving towards good policy''*

Conversely, CC3.FG expressed cynicism in relation to policy development, suggesting that *"our government are only doing these measures because they signed up to the Barcelona agreement we need to influence change at a higher level".* Echoing this suspicion, HL argued that *''internationally we had to be seen to have these policies but the roll-out of them was a secondary thought".* Highlighting the diverse approaches to ECCE and primary school, CC3.FG succinctly delineated the difference between the two stating that there are only *"four people working in the Early Years Policy Unit",* while there is a *"whole department* [DES] *looking after education from 5 to 25"* (CC3.FG). Clearly unhappy with this anomaly, she claimed that *"there is something wrong...that is where recognition of professionals changes the national approach''.*

In general, not withstanding consensus regarding a common vision and standards for the ECCE sector, there were concerns about the abundance of existing policies. Therefore, while *Aistear* and *Síolta* were described as *"great"* (PU), there was a sense that it is *"very confusing there needs to be a national standard"* (ibid). As discussed in chapter 2, Moloney (2010b) claims that existing policies are unlikely to influence the sector in any

comprehensive way due to the voluntary nature of their implementation. Reflecting this viewpoint, CC1 claimed that because policy *"is voluntary...it is weakening it"* [professionalism of the sector].

Apparently, much work has been done in relation to familiarising the sector with policies that contain guiding principles, values and ethical considerations; *"it's good that there are regulations and it's good that the HSE are on board"* (PP) and *"it's all positive"* (PC). However, congruent with Moloney (2010, 2011); findings point to a considerable capacity issue within the sector:

> *"we have put the cart before the horse...we have all of these policy documents but the capacity within the sector to even understand them not to mind implement them is very low and that's where education comes in"* (NVCC-1).

Consequently, the OMCYA's (2010) call for all providers participating in the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme to adhere to Síolta (CECDE, 2006) was welcomed by participants. *"Síolta is linked in with the ECCE scheme...its good"* (CC2); *"a certain level of training is required to implement Síolta and the ECCE scheme so it's improving"* (PU). However, there was also a belief that there was insufficient funding and support available to practitioners to enable them to implement policy

> *"the resources to implement Síolta and Aistear on the ground are nonexistent...more support is required"* (CC1)

> *"regrettably the funds just aren't there at the moment...if there were more resources for training then the minimum qualification level 5 could be introduced sooner"* (NVCC-1)

These findings resonate with Moloney (2010, 2011) and Evans (2008:27) who assert that professionalism has to be something that people-professionals actually 'do', not simply

something that a government or agency wants them to do, or mistakenly imagines they are doing.

4.5.2 Continuous professional development

Although experience was given high priority along with qualifications; participants argued that *''you can't rely on experience alone''* (HL). Consequently, *''CPD is crucial you have to keep-up-to-date with all new approaches''* (PC). Gusky (2000:17) describes CPD as, ''a deliberate process, guided by a clear vision of purposes and planned goals designed to bring about positive change and improvement''. However, participants felt that CPD could not be imposed; rather the desire to continue to develop must come from those working within the sector; *''it's down to yourself''* (FL). Thus, a person's attitude and work ethic must be encouraged and managed once they are in position. Many authors (Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, 1989, Drago-Severson, 1994, Guskey, 2000, NPDCI, 2008) further claim that professionalism is enhanced when professionals improve their personal growth which can be achieved through professional development opportunities for example. Accordingly, *''qualifications, experience and dispositions''* (NVCC-2) were considered essential *''I'm not saying you have to do your master's and doctorate but you need to be constantly developing''* (CC3.FG); *''it's about what happens after your initial training''* (NVCC-2). Therefore professional development is a process that is intentional, on-going and systemic (Guskey, 2000:16). Likewise, Fullen (2001:73) argues that ''significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can be expected to take a minimum of two to three years''.

4.5.3 Status and profession

Chapter 2 established a clear link between status and profession (Goode, 1969, Black and Gruen, 2005, Ho Choi-Wa Dora, 2006, Evans, 2008). For example, Black and Gruen suggest that the term donates ideas of public appreciation and value such as ''privilege...social control, economic rewards and greater political powers' (2005:53). Findings confirm the association between status and profession with 79% (N=19) of participants making the link. Participants also claimed that status invokes public respect *''it involves a perception of status...and respect''* (CC1). Congruent with Black and Gruen (2005), status was thought to lead to adequate remuneration and economic rewards. Hence, as noted by CC2, *''if society values that work then pay is big...it goes with the status''*.

4.5.4 What's in a title?

Closely linked to a profession and status are the titles applied to occupations that denote status and identity (Adams, 2005, Moloney, 2011, MacGillvray, 2008). Within this study, the perception that titles such as nurse, teacher and doctor, for example are instantly recognisable and understood within society was constantly reiterated. However, consistent with Adams, (2005, 2008), MacGillvray, (2008) and Moloney, (2010, 2011) the absence of a specific title for those working in ECCE was thought to considerably impede the sector's professional identity. For example, Adam's identified 11 titles within the sector in Scotland, while in Ireland, Moloney (2010) identified 20 such terms associated with the sector. According to Adams (2008) the multiplicity of titles can disperse the focus for professionalism. Ultimately however, *''a job title really does matter when defining a profession''* (CC3.FG). This study concurs with Adams (2005) and Moloney (2010) in terms of the diverse nomenclature within the sector. As shown in table 6, 16 terms were used in this study to describe the ECCE workforce in Ireland.

Crèche workers	Early Years Teacher	Early Years Educator	Early years manager	Preschool Owner/manager
Preschool teacher	Early years specialist	Early years supervisor	Educarer	Carers
ECCE teacher	Practitioners	Early childhood consultant	Educators	Nurturer
Teacher	Early Years Worker	Early years administrator		Preschool leader

Table 6 overview of terms used to describe the ECCE workforce

According to McGillivray (2008) no other profession has experienced such great uncertainty and the multitude of titles may contribute to confusion about identity, creating uncertainty as to what the various titles, roles and responsibilities actually mean.

Findings suggest that there was a preference among those participants working directly with children to be associated with teaching and/or education. Therefore, 54% (N=13) expressed a preference for *''ECCE teacher''* (PU) or *''educator''* (BA1.FG). This preference was specifically associated with status and identity. As commented by PC, *"the word teacher automatically adds professional status to the name''* (PC).

On the other hand, there was uncertainty about whether everybody working directly with children merited the right to be recognised as a professional. Crucially, this study established a link between professional identity and qualifications. Consequently, HL asked whether *"everybody in the early years has the right to be valued as a professional...maybe they didn't do all the qualifications''*. Equally salient is Adam's (2008) assertion that the sector must be clear about what workers actually do with children. Adding to this discourse, PC acknowledged that it is about *''what do* [people] *practice''*. Accordingly, *''if a title limits you*

it's a waste of time... [it] *has to match your qualifications and the work that you do''* (NVCC-1). In relation to the term 'educarer' for instance, NVCC-1 explained that *"nobody ever uses it...*

> *''educarer is a lovely working title but it needs to be understood...it's about what society values...society values education which is done in the primary schools...who cares about the carers...have you ever replied to a job looking for an educarer?...No it's either crèche worker or assistant...is that label going limit you in the future?''(NVCC1)*

She believed if a job title was used that it was critical that people understood, *"why that is your name...what your role is and what you are going to get paid to do''* thus confirming Moloney (2011) claims that professional demarcation in ECCE remains ambiguous.

4.5.5 Professional knowledge

As mentioned, participants identified a profession and thus professional knowledge with higher education and training. These rigorous processes not only protect the practitioners of that occupation against outsiders, they also create and sustain the social status of that profession (Goode, 1969). Likewise, in common with Ho Choi-Wa Dora, (2006) findings suggest that in addition to enhancing professionalism qualifications provide a lucid signal to the general public, that theoretical knowledge and expertise are essential components of a profession

> *''our sense of professionalism increases the higher qualified we are...so I would feel that qualifications are particularly important and strongly correlate with professionalism''* (HL).

While concurring with this viewpoint, CC1 articulated how qualifications not only benefitted the sector but reverberated at a much broader level also,

> *''Qualifications are hugely important for the individual, for the service, for the value in themselves but also for society and people from relative sectors looking in...they can see a minimum qualification and standards for this work''*(CC1)

As discussed in chapter two, the sector once associated with untrained women who merely loved and cared for children (Lobman and Ryan, 2007, OECD, 2006) now boasts B.A. ECCE graduates from numerous colleges and institutes of technology (e.g., Mary Immaculate College, University College Cork, and Dublin Institute of Technology). Consequently, *''a childcare worker can now study for four years''* (PU) *''you can become an early years graduate much easier than a physiotherapist or any other discipline...there are so many courses''* (CC3.FG) and *''in ten years time we will have so many more graduates''* (CC3.FG) entering the ECCE field. The many benefits of higher qualification levels are well documented (OECD, 2006, Duignan and Walsh, 2004, Bennett, 2003) and this study adds to the discourse concerning the benefits of such qualifications.

4.6 Benefits associated with higher qualifications

There is a growing realisation that the work of early childhood professional staff is complex, and that sound training is required (OECD, 2006, Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012). In other words, 'professionals' have a body of knowledge, skills and expertise, acquired through lengthy training and education that is generally unknown to the lay public. Thus, quality in ECCE depends upon the quality and training of the personnel involved (OECD, 2006, Duignan and Walsh, 2004, Bennett, 2003).

In addition to enhancing the professionalism and quality of ECCE services, 92% (N=22) of participants identified other benefits associated with a B.A. ECCE:

> *''it looks at a broad range of issues that affect young children and parents...it's a multidisciplinary approach and graduates have this multidisciplinary mindset''*
> (HL)

"ECCE graduates are in so many different areas...special educational needs...family support...outreach...youth work...early years intervention...it's really quite broad" (BA1.FG)

As mentioned, the societal context in Ireland where ECCE is primarily associated with untrained women (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) who love and care for children (Lobman and Ryan, 2006) has influenced attitudes towards the sector. Hence, as noted by Moloney (2011), while the practitioner's role is complex and multi-faceted, their professional standing is weak (Moloney, 2010, 2011, OECD, 2006, Duignan, 2007). Findings indicate that there was little understanding at societal level of the need for training to work in the sector. Indeed, even though B.A. ECCE graduates were unequivocal about the need for degree level training, their commentary was invariably undermined by an attitude of *"why would you bother studying"* (NVCC1). Thus, as noted by an ECCE graduate, *"I worked so hard to get my degree and it may as well not even be worth the piece of paper it's written on"* (BA1.FG).

4.6.1 The problem with higher qualifications

The discourse relating to higher qualification levels is fraught with challenges. In this study, it emerged as the most contentious issue in terms of how it enhances or diminishes the professionalism and hence, the professional identity of the ECCE sector. Consistent with Moloney (2011) and Moloney and Pope (2012) graduates expressed dismay that having *"spent four years in college* [they were] *seen as over qualified in the sector"* (BA1.FG). The predominant perception among graduates was that *"we are not valued or recognised"* (BA2.FG). Indicative of the perceived lack of understanding of higher qualifications within the sector generally, one graduate described how her manager asked her *"to bring in my*

FETAC level 5 certificate...she had no idea I had a level 8'' (BA2.FG). Adding to this discourse, HL suggested that

''Graduates are at a disadvantage...many of the people doing the hiring do not have the qualifications and therefore don't see them as necessary''

This point was corroborated by NVCC-1 who cautioned that *''because our degree is so new people don't know what our qualification entails'',* as a result, settings *''aren't advertising for ECCE graduates''* (NVCC-1). Further highlighting a historical context where primary school has an instantly recognisable identity and status, this study confirms that ''salaries remain well below those of teachers, at times being pegged at minimum wage levels'' (ECI, 2011, Moloney 2011, OECD 2006:158). Echoing OECD (2006) commentary; NVCC-1 established a correlation between remuneration, status and professional identity. She claimed that *''people don't see you as a professional unless you're getting recognised and well paid''.* Congruent with many researchers (OECD 2004, 2006, Mahony and Hayes 2006, Moloney 2010, Moloney and Pope, 2012) there was a widespread belief that working in ECCE was *"not valued financially"* (FL).

Researchers (Oleson, 2000, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) claim that professional identity is strongly related to feelings of self-worth or a perception that your work is valued and respected by government and society. As such, *''there is a huge feeling of unease within the sector...they are paying graduates absolutely nothing...after walking out of a degree...there is no respect for that professional''* (CC3.FG). ECCE graduates stated that *"being on minimum wage affects how you value yourself and your work"* (BA1.FG). In a critique of government inaction in relation to salaries; BA2.FG asked *''if it's not being valued by the higher authority then who is going to value it''.* Ominously, Forde *et al* (2006:5) believe that those who feel their professional expertise is under attack may become

disengaged with the work they do creating malaise within the profession and therefore adding to the problem of professionalism and professional identity.

In this respect, findings confirm claims by Moloney (2011) and Moloney and Pope (2012) that highly qualified graduates are being lost to the sector. NVCC-2 articulated how

> *"typically those of us that gain higher qualifications move out of direct work with children and into the work of managers, development officers and tutors''*

Mirroring Black and Gruen (2005), 54% (N=13) of participants claimed that those who undertake degree level training strive to achieve greater status and remuneration, by progressing to more specialised positions. Commenting upon her lecturing role, HL feels *"like a professional in what I do now"*. Likewise, NVCC-1 explained that having obtained her degree she was asked to undertake some tutoring at FETAC Level 5 which resulted in her *"been seen in a very different light''*. Similarly, BA1.FG who works for the HSE within a *''family support unit...*[is] *treated like a specialist...whatever it is about the* [ECCE] *sector itself it's not recognised''*. As indicated by these various commentaries that highlight the many roles that are not directly related to working in the ECCE sector, individuals adjust and adapt their professional identity during periods of career transition (Ibarra, 1999, Nicholson, 1984).

Highlighting the complexity of the issues within the ECCE sector, NVCC-2 asked *''have we got the resources to pay graduates to stay in the sector?''* mirroring OECD's claims that higher qualifications can be followed by increased wage demands (2006:161). Indeed, low pay levels were problematic on a number of levels; they devalued and undermined degree level training while also leading to low confidence and self esteem. A respondent within BA1.FG for instance explained how she felt *''very upset trying to explain and defend my position...my identity''*. Another member (BA1.FG) confirmed this assertion saying that she did not want to work in ECCE *''right now because at this time in my life, to feel like I'm*

being put down is not on''. Thus confirming concerns that early years workers who seek professional status through study are limited in the return they get for their efforts by the misconceptions that surround their jobs (Adams, 2005, Moloney, 2010b and McGillivray 2008, Adams 2008:197). Worryingly, in the context of the impending 3% decrease in capitation fees to those settings participating in the Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme from 1st September, 2012 (DCYA, 2012), pay levels may drop even further.

In the context of the current economic climate, participants looked towards other ways of enhancing the professional status of the sector other than through increased remuneration

> *''is there any way to look at professionalism and value without involving money...there must be other things to boost the status and the value''* (CC1).

This could be in the form of public recognition of one's abilities and a desire for up-to-date knowledge and self-improvement (Adams, 2008). In this regard, a relatively small 25% (N=6) of research participants felt that status and recognition was beginning to improve because of the Free preschool year in ECCE scheme which was *"giving the sector recognition and status''* (CC1). Moreover, as highlighted in chapter 2 the capitation fee is increased by €10 per child per week where staff hold a level 8 degree with three years experience (OMCYA, 2010). Accordingly, HL asserted that *''even with the specifications of the free preschool year in ECCE scheme...graduates are becoming more sought after particularly if they have some experience''* (HL). There is a considerable link between training and support of staff- including appropriate pay and conditions and the quality of ECCE services (Bowman *et al.*, 2000, OECD 2001, 2006). However, findings support Bellm and Whitebrook's (2006) assertion that the "current childcare workforce appears to be losing ground in both education levels and compensation" (cited in Lutton, 2008:29).

4.6.2 Professional imbalance

Indicative of the many challenges associated with degree level training, participants cited a further anomaly in this regard. Thus, while they were primarily positive about the increasing availability of degree courses in ECCE, they also expressed concerns that perhaps the accessible nature of this training could impact negatively on the sector. Mirroring previous discussion concerning the need to attract the right people into the sector, CC3.FG expressed concern about the abundance of degree courses; *''it's going to keep the points down...we are not going to attract the standard of student we need''.* Clearly mirroring Moloney (2010, 2011) on the need to be selective about who works in the ECCE sector, CC3.FG claimed *''I don't think a whittling out process happens in the ITs or universities ''.*

Further problems emerged in relation to graduates especially with regard to the balance between the most highly qualified and other less qualified workers (Moss, 2000). As discussed, becoming a doctor requires students to give ten to fifteen years of their life to training alone (Blundell *et al.,* 2011). In the context of ECCE, CC3.FG explained the need for graduates not to look on the degree as an end point that enables them to establish an ECCE service, rather to view it as a *"starting point''*

> Respondent 1: *''graduates don't have the practical experience...graduates are not capable of being managers straight out of college''*
>
> Respondent 2: *''qualification doesn't always equal quality...however it could be argued that you would be more capable of taking on the good practice if you have the higher qualification''*

However, two participants in CC3.FG offered possible solutions to the problem

> Respondent 3: *''we need to be able to have a conversation between the experienced practitioner and the graduate but we don't know how to have those conversations''*

Respondent 4:*''graduates have a built capacity...a potential but that potential has to be realised within the practice of a supportive training environment with experienced peers''*

Moyles & Suschitzky (1995:86) highlight the other side of the coin, claiming that graduates tend to work 'down' to the level of their variously trained and qualified colleagues, rather than raising the standards within their settings. Findings suggest that this danger prevails.

''I have seen level 8 students and I am absolutely amazed at what I am observing...there are so many staff members who haven't a clue what they are doing...and graduates begin to embed bad practice...they can't implement change because people are only laughing at them you still get paid the same if you sit there and do nothing'' (NVCC-1)

Further highlighting OECD (2006) claims that the profiling of lead professional staff is often blurred as well as assertions by Moloney and Pope (2012) that B.A. ECCE graduates devalue their role upon commencing employment within the ECCE sector, BA3.FG and BA1.FG confirmed that *''you're working against a force and it becomes very mundane''* (BA3.FG). Additionally, BA1.FG stated that

''due to practice in the crèche...you could fall down very easily...to be honest it feels like my standards are dropping''

These findings draw attention to the need for a suitable profile, specific training and clear career pathways for early childhood educators (OECD, 2006:163).

4.7 Licensure

Uhlmann *et al* (2010:486) assert that licensure is the ''mark of a professional'' and ''provides at least a baseline expectation for the quality of services rendered'' (ibid). While the ECCE sector in Ireland is regulated through the Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006, which establish a baseline minimum standard of quality, they do not specify a mandatory training requirement. However, notwithstanding the absence of a mandatory training requirement, this study in common with others (DES, 2010, Mahony and Hayes, 2006, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) indicates that FETAC level 5 is emerging as the minimum qualification within the sector. In this study, all 24 participants agreed that a minimum qualification is of vital importance *''there has to be a minimum''* (HL), *''it's important that everybody is coming from the same knowledge base''* (FL). Yet again, alluding to the historical demarcation between ECCE and primary school, HL claimed that *''we have been very accepting of low levels of qualifications within the sector...there was up roar when unqualified teachers were working in schools and the figures were tiny...compare that to the childcare sector''*. However, she was optimistic about the future, and highlighted the significance of the Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme which requires *"everybody to have a level 5''* [by September, 2012]. (CC3.FG). The fact that *''96% - 98% percent of services have signed up to deliver the ECCE scheme''* which is linked to having *''your level 5 qualification...that one policy has begun to lift the qualifications''* (NVCC-2).

As the findings indicate, considerable change is occurring within the sector in relation to professional qualifications leading to status and public recognition (Ho Choi-Wa Dora, 2006, Hakel *et al.*, 2008). Equally, there is a commitment to high standards of professionalism which is associated with creating clear education, certification and continuing education

standards (Uhlmann *et al.,* 2010), thus making way for the sector's emerging professional identity.

4.7.1 Critique of FETAC level 5

However, 75% (N=18) of participants questioned the effectiveness of FETAC Level 5 training. HL and CC2 described it as *''a minimum qualification''* while CC3.FG stated that *''we have to move away from FETAC level 5 being a qualification its barely leaving cert standard''* (CC3.FG). Worryingly, a FETAC level 5 tutor described student knowledge at this level as being *''at such a low base...even with regards to basic literacy and numeracy...how do you expect children to learn if you have people slurring their words or using slang words''* (NVCC-1). She further claimed that knowledge at this level is *''based on arts and crafts things that really are not the foundation of early childhood care and education''* (NVCC-1).

In a further critique of FETAC training, BA1.FG claimed that *''looking at the learning objectives on FETAC childcare courses...there is no emphasis on curriculum development...everything is played down in favour of outdated practice''.* This assertion has implications for the implementation of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, which according to Moloney and Pope (2012) requires an in-depth level of practitioner knowledge and skill. Notwithstanding widespread criticism of FETAC Level 5 training, 21% (N=5) of participants argued in its favour *''you can't say level 5 is being cut...you will lose out on a certain bunch of people who are well able for the sector''* (PC). According to FL *''it depends on the abilities of those involved''.* PU concurred arguing that *''not everybody is able to afford college and not even that but not everybody is able for college''.* Adding to this PP stated *''some of the girls are brilliant but they wouldn't have the education to do the courses''.* It could be argued that is precisely what is wrong with the sector; it is dependent upon a largely untrained unskilled

workforce which only serves to undermine its professional identity (Moloney and Pope, 2012).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of the research data resulting from interviews and focus group discussions with 24 research participants. The overarching finding of this study was that there is *"still a long way to come in seeing the sector as a profession and as professional''* (HL) *''the complexity of this work is just not valued, recognised or understood''* (NVCC-1). Findings further indicate that the sector in Ireland is perceived as strongly gendered and not warranting any specialised training or expertise (Moloney, 2010, 2011). These viewpoints are located within a traditional context where the discourses of love and care feature prominently. As a result, ECCE continues to be seen in terms of *"the mother looking after the children"* (NVCC-1).

Evidently, the societal context which shapes the discourse of professional identity for the ECCE sector in Ireland is critical. In fact, parents were seen as the *"external drivers"* who could *''push the government into doing more''* (CC3.FG). Clearly, knowledgeable parents who understand the value of ECCE would recognise and promote it as a profession. However, findings indicate that primary school teachers and consequently, work undertaken in the school is recognised as valuable, while practitioners and work in ECCE is undervalued and underestimated. Although participants were unequivocal about the need for training to work in the ECCE sector, findings indicate that there is little understanding at societal level for such a requirement. Consequently, calls to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gendered workforce to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable (Bennet, 2003:25) have been overlooked (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012), thus embedding the view that ECCE does not

carry the social status that accompanies other occupations. Furthermore, this study upholds the view that early years workers who seek professional status through study are limited in the return they get for their efforts by the misconceptions that surround their jobs (Adams, 2005, Moloney, 2010b and McGillivray 2008, Adams 2008:197).

On the other hand, findings suggest that the myriad of ECCE policies, initiatives and frameworks has resulted in *"a shift in the attitude towards childcare''* (CC1). In spite of this, their voluntary nature coupled with insufficient support and funds have impeded their full implementation and thus the professional growth and development of the sector. As a result, this study concurs with many researchers (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000, OECD, 2006, Littledyke, 2008, Moss, 2008, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) in questioning whether those working within ECCE posses the professional skills and expertise that are critical to professional identity formation.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate Ireland's journey in the search for a professional identity for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. As a result, it warranted an in depth exploration of the characteristics that shape a profession and in turn, influence professionalism and professional identity formation in the ECCE sector. A qualitative methodology was utilised comprising a series of interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders involved in the ECCE sector in Ireland including, practitioners; lecturers; representatives of the City and County Childcare Committees (CCC); and the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC) as well as Bachelor of Arts in ECCE graduates. These interviews and focus group discussions yielded rich data in relation to attitudes towards and perceptions of the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. While the previous chapter presented and discussed the research findings against the backdrop of the literature review in chapter 2, this current chapter summarises these findings and makes a number of recommendations arising from the study.

5.2 Summary of research findings

As highlighted in chapter 4, the overarching finding of this study is that there is *"still a long way to come in seeing the sector as a profession and as professional''* (HECTAC Lecturer (HL)). This perception is rooted in a traditional view that ECCE does not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations. Consequently, findings confirm that those working within ECCE have traditionally been paid less than other professions *''€7.40* [per hour] *in some places''* (Bachelor of Arts1.Focus Group (BA1.FG)) and that their work is considered less important (Government of Ireland, 1999, OECD, 2006). As a result, and

consistent with Siraj-Blatchford, (1993), this study indicates that the practitioner's role is seen as synonymous with 'care' where ECCE continues to be seen in terms of *"the mother looking after the children"* ((NVCC-1). Therefore, as with Dalli (2002) findings indicate that the traditional alignment of childcare with the attendant discourses of love and care disempowers ECCE practitioners from claiming a professional identity and social status.

Moreover, findings suggest that the overall lack of recognition and appreciation for the ECCE sector and work with young children is further related to the historical polarisation of care and education (OECD, 2004, 2006). Consequently and more worryingly, the belief that ECCE does not warrant any specialised training or expertise (Moloney, 2010, 2011) prevails. Thus, consistent with Moloney (2011) findings indicate that attitudes towards ECCE are shaped within a societal context that hugely influences the discourse around the professional identity of the sector in Ireland.

5.3 Societal view of ECCE

As mentioned, this study suggests that ECCE has yet to be recognised and valued as a profession in Ireland. With the exception of a number of policy documents including the Revised Childcare (preschool-services) Regulations (DHC, 2006), *Síolta*: the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) that highlight the need for skilled and knowledgeable ECCE staff, findings indicate that there is little appreciation for the complexity of the work involved in the care and education of young children. These view points are located within a traditional context where the discourses of love and care feature prominently within ECCE. Moreover, it seems that passion, love and care can become the antithesis of professional identity (Moyles, 2001). Accordingly, in primary school for example, where teachers' work is primarily associated with education, their work is recognised as valuable and they have a distinct

professional identity. However, as indicated through this study, a different picture emerges within ECCE where the work is undervalued and underestimated and the sector struggles for a professional identity. This disparity is further emphasised by the requirement that primary school teachers must undertake a mandatory Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree followed by a year-long supervised higher diploma work placement after which they are deemed qualified. No such requirement exists for those working or intending to work in the ECCE sector which is characterised by a combination of trained, semi-trained and un-trained personnel (O'Mahony and Hayes, 2006, Moloney, 2011).

Worryingly, in common with Forde *et al*, (2006), findings suggest that those who feel their professional expertise is under attack may become disengaged with the work they do. This sentiment was strongly reflected within this study: *''I am disgusted* (Rural Practitioner)...*''I have always felt undervalued and underappreciated''* (Private practitioner). In agreement with Forde et al (2006), who believe these feelings can create malaise within the profession NVCC-1 claimed *''it's a joke...why would anybody do this work there are no rewards for it at all''.* Evidently such malaise adds to the problem of professionalism and professional identity formation.

5.4 Knowledgeable parents

In this study, parents were portrayed as the *"external drivers"* who could *"push the government into doing more''* (Childcare Committee3.Focus Group (CC3.FG)) for the professional identity of the ECCE sector. In this regard, it was felt that knowledgeable parents who understood the value of ECCE would recognise and promote it as a profession. More specifically, if parents were more aware of the immense benefits for children acquired through attendance at quality ECCE services, delivered by highly trained personnel, parental and public demand for mandatory training, finance and support would be far greater.

On the other hand, concerns were expressed that those working with young children may not have the capacity to engage in a meaningful way with parents. This claim was also associated with a lack of appropriate training for those working within the sector in Ireland. For example within this study, there was a concern that *"we are not making it clear to parents what actually playing with sand and water means what manipulation of objects is actually doing to the baby's brain''* (CC3.FG). Accordingly, there was uncertainty about whether those working within ECCE possess the professional skills and expertise considered critical to professionalism and professional identity formation (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000, OECD, 2006, Littledyke, 2008, Moss, 2008, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012).

Fuelling this uncertainty, was a perception that training at FETAC Level 5 - *''the most commonly acquired level of training in Ireland''* (CC3.FG) was ineffective and insufficient for what is required from practitioners in terms of quality ECCE and practical professionalism. A further concern related to those students graduating from degree level training programmes taking up positions within the ECCE sector, where it was felt that they tend to work 'down' to the level of their variously trained and qualified colleagues (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1995:86). This worrying finding underpins perceptions of disillusionment amongst participants who ask *''why bother studying''* (NVCC-1). It suggests that B.A. ECCE graduates may have little impact upon practice in unsupportive environments where staff fail to consider and appreciate new information and practices.

5.5 Training, qualifications and professional identity

As discussed in chapter 4, research participants were unequivocal about the need for training. This study therefore, established a strong link between professional identity and qualifications. However, findings clearly indicate that neither the need for qualifications nor a

professional identity for the ECCE sector have been recognised at a societal level. This lack of recognition was attributed to the:

- Association between ECCE and untrained women

- Historical polarisation of the care and education sectors

- Poor social status of the ECCE sector generally by comparison to other occupations

Consequently, as noted by other researchers (Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) calls upon government by the OECD (2006) to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce to ensure that a career in ECCE is satisfying, respected and financially viable have been overlooked. Taking all of these factors into account, this study raises the question as to whether everybody working directly with children merits the right to be recognised as a professional.

Moreover, findings are also consistent with Adams (2005) and Moloney (2010) in terms of the diverse nomenclature of the sector. As highlighted in chapter 4, a total of 16 terms were used in this study to describe the ECCE workforce in Ireland. Therefore, in common with Adams, (2005, 2008), MacGillvray, (2008) and Moloney, (2010, 2011) this study found that the absence of a specific title for those working in the ECCE sector impedes the sector's professional growth and identity. Hence, as noted by Moloney (2011) and Moloney and Pope (2012) while the practitioner's role is complex and multi-faceted, their professional standing is weak (Moloney, 2010, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012, OECD, 2006, Duignan, 2007).

5.5.1 Degree level training

Despite this, the sector once solely associated with untrained women who merely loved and cared for children (Lobman and Ryan, 2007) now boasts B.A. ECCE graduates from numerous colleges and institutes of technology. However, mirroring Nutbrown (2012) and

Moloney (2011) concerns were articulated in relation to the calibre of applicants to training programmes. Caution was expressed in relation to the abundance of degree courses; *''it's going to keep the points down...we are not going to attract the standard of student we need''* (CC3.FG). In a further critique of the suitability of the ECCE workforce it was claimed that *''people are in this profession because they didn't get enough points to be a teacher''* (NVCC-1).

B.A. ECCE graduates however, were unequivocal about the need for degree level training in ECCE arguing that their *''sense of professionalism increases the higher qualified we are''* (HL). Notwithstanding this positive finding, graduate commentary was invariably undermined by the attitude of *''why would you bother studying''* (NVCC-1) when having *''worked so hard to get my degree* [sic] *it may as well not even be worth the piece of paper it's written on''* (BA1.FG). Thus confirming concerns by researchers (Adams 2005, 2008, Moloney, 2010b and McGillivray 2008) that early years workers who seek professional status through study are limited in the return they get for their efforts by the misconceptions that surround their jobs.

Even more disheartening was the query regarding the availability of *''resources to pay graduates to stay in the sector''* (NVCC-2). Indeed, this study further confirms previous research (Moloney, 2010 and Moloney and Pope, 2012) that poor remuneration, lack of recognition for degree level training and the absence of a professional identity for the ECCE sector in Ireland had resulted in the loss of highly qualified graduates to the sector.

5.6 How policy has influenced professionalism

In general, research participants held negative perceptions in relation to the professional identity of the ECCE sector, however their attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of policy upon the sector was primarily positive. In particular, the establishment of the

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the appointment of a minister to this department has *''really boosted the sector''* (Childcare Committee2 (CC2))...*''it has raised the standards and it has kept ECCE on the agenda''* (CC1). In addition, research findings indicate that ECCE policy and regulation have had a positive impact upon the sector, helping to make it *"more visible...in the political arena''* (NVCC-1).

Overall, the Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (OMCYA, 2010) was considered the most salient policy. Its importance was attached to the requirement that all providers participating in it adhere to the principles and standards within *Síolta*: the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and for all those working directly with children to hold the minimum FETAC level 5 qualification by September 2012. In this regard, it is interesting to note that research participants highlighted standards (Hoyle and John, 1995, Rodd, 2006, Dally, 2007, CECDE, 2006) as well as training and qualifications (Hakel *et al.*, 2008, Black and Gruen, 2005, Hanlon, 1998, Larson, 1977) as key characteristics of a profession and professional identity.

As such, findings indicate that there is now a commitment to high standards of professionalism which is associated with creating clear education, certification and continuing education standards (Uhlmann *et al.,* 2010), thus making way for the sector's emerging professional identity. Clearly, there is a perception that recent frameworks, i.e., *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and policy initiatives including the Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, (DHC, 2006) and the Free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (OMCYA, 2010) have *''all been positive''* (CC1) in the development and growth of professionalism within the sector.

Worryingly however, this optimism was tapered by strong concerns not only about the abundance of existing policies but also, by the voluntary nature of their implementation

(Moloney, 2011). As a result, the process of practical professionalism has been slow and therefore there is *"a huge amount of work to be done''* (CC1).

5.7 Characteristics of a profession

In terms of professional identity formation, findings correspond with Olesen, (2000), Moloney, (2011), Moloney and Pope, (2012) in that a person's professional identity is strongly related to feelings of self-worth or a perception that your work is valued and respected by government and society and is closely bound with professional and personal values and aspirations (Kelchtermans, 1993). Thus, figure 10 highlights the most salient characteristics of a profession.
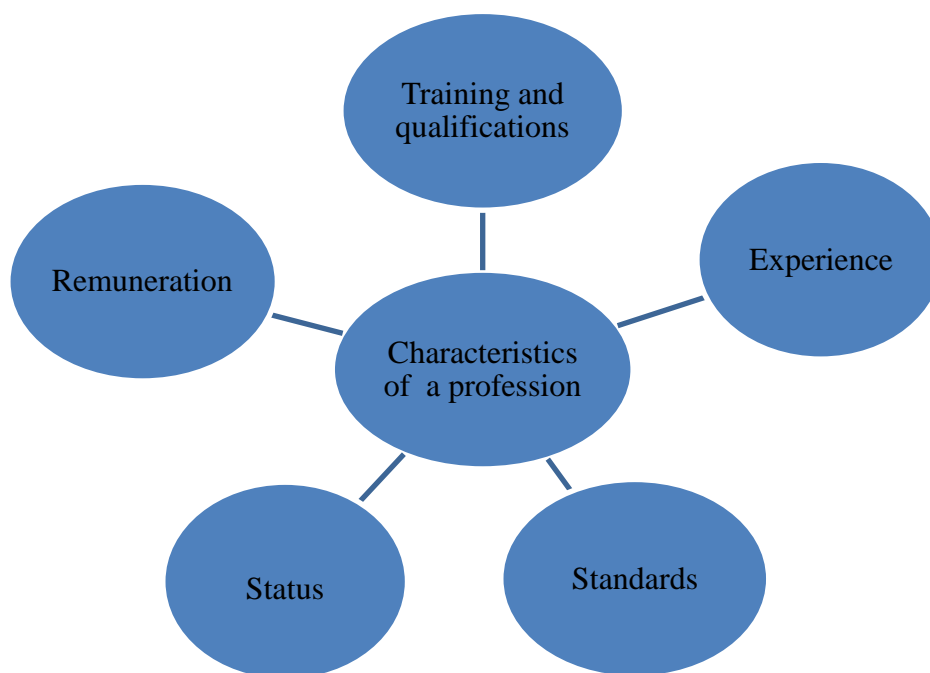

Figure 10: Characteristics of a profession

Concurring with numerous researchers (Hakel *et al.*, 2008, Black and Gruen, 2005, Hanlon, 1998, Larson, 1977) this study found that 'professionals' do indeed require a body of knowledge, skills and expertise that is generally unknown to the lay public. In relation to

ECCE professionals, knowledge, skills and expertise as determined through policy (e.g., CECDE, 2006, DHC, 2006, NCCA, 2009) include child development, child health and wellbeing, child protection, play and early education, cultural contexts, special educational needs, partnership with parents, management and team building skills that are required to run and manage a quality ECCE service. This expertise is acquired through lengthy training and education and work placements that are guided by standards and principles (Hoyle and John, 1995, Rodd, 2006, Dally, 2007, CECDE, 2006). Equally, in common with Goode, (1969) Whitty, (2000) and Ho Choi-Wa Dora, (2006) it was perceived that, in turn for their efforts, professionals are reimbursed with significant remuneration and social status.

Ultimately, these processes influence societal perceptions on whether or not an occupation can be deemed a profession and in turn who can be considered a professional. Taking all of these factors into consideration, a key question remains - should the ECCE sector be recognised as a profession in Ireland in today's society?

5.8 Recommendations

This study highlights that ECCE has yet to be recognised and valued as a profession in Ireland. It further highlights that there is little appreciation for the complexity of the work involved in the care and education of young children. Issues of inappropriate training levels and poor salaries prevail within the sector in Ireland. As argued by Dalli, it is timely to revise notions of love and care so that they may be transformed into pedagogical and political tools (2006b). It is therefore important that the public, parents, ECCE practitioners and policy makers become aware of the critical importance of how love and care impact upon the young child's learning and development. Such awareness may well prove to be the first step in recognising the need to acknowledge that ECCE is a profession worthy of its own professional identity.

The following recommendations have been formulated in an effort to develop the ECCE workforce, to increase practical professionalism and to impact upon the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. The recommendations which are directed towards practitioners, parents, training and education providers as well as policy makers are therefore intended to present a vision for the sector that will subsequently alter the societal context that hugely influences the discourse around the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland (Moloney, 2011). Furthermore, these recommendations will aid in the sector's struggle for better remuneration whenever the current economic climate improves.

5.8.1 Training and qualifications

This study endorses the need for higher staff training and qualifications. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Once practitioners have acquired a FETAC Level 5 qualification as required through the free preschool year in ECCE scheme, that all those currently working with children should be required to pursue a qualification at FETAC level 6 from January 2013. This would create a continuum of professional training for those working within the ECCE sector while also sending a positive message to parents and the general public about the importance of training and thus promote the sector's emerging professional identity.

5.8.2 Degree level training

It is further recommended that certain changes be made in relation to degree level training in Ireland. It is recommended that:

1. In addition to the current entry level requirements for degree courses in ECCE, Universities and Institutes of Technology offering such programmes should also use

an interview process to select candidates. This measure could potentially redress concerns about the calibre of students applying to ECCE programmes.

2. All those in managerial and room leader positions should hold a degree in ECCE coupled with sufficient and relevant experience working in the field. This would ensure that those working in the most senior positions within ECCE settings would exude a greater sense of professionalism and expertise. Equally, they would be empowered to support a similar work ethic and effort in terms of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) from their staff members. Thus further adding to the sector's sense of professional identity.

3. A mentoring system be put in place to facilitate the sharing of information and support between graduates and existing staff within the sector. This system would allow graduates to access valuable expertise, support and advice, while also ensuring that new knowledge is received and taken on board by the sector. Not only would this allow graduates to make an impact on practice but it would also ensure that practical professionalism is promoted on a regular basis, thus enhancing the sector's overall sense of professionalism.

4. Due to the continued growth of the sector and the ever changing needs of children a system of CPD for students, parents and practitioners at all levels should be put in place. This process where possible, should include a pre-determined number of government aided annual training days, on-line training sessions and webinars coupled with practitioner, student and parent fee paying workshops, seminars and conferences. These CPD opportunities would ensure the professional growth and development of the sector while also highlighting the importance of ECCE and further enhancing the quality of services.

5. ECCE becomes a graduate lead profession with at least 55% of the workforce holding a degree in ECCE by 2017. Not only would this measure improve the quality of practice, it would considerably impact upon practical professionalism within the sector while also elevating the status of those working with young children. Ultimately, it would yet again send a positive message to society that working in ECCE warrants highly trained and qualified staff, resulting in an enhanced professional identity for the sector.

5.8.3 Professional identity

As with Adams, (2005, 2008), MacGillvray, (2008) and Moloney, (2010, 2011) this study found that the absence of a specific title for those working in the ECCE sector has impeded the sector's professional growth and identity. Therefore, it is recommended that once training and qualification requirements are met that the professional identity of the ECCE workforce be addressed. Thus, it is recommended that:

1. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs distribute an ECCE survey to all those involved in the sector. This process could be used to develop core titles consistent with the varying levels of qualifications and experience of students and practitioners. Once these professional titles have been decided upon, those working within the ECCE sector will identify with appropriate job titles linked to their position, training and experience. The sector will be seen as a collective unit, therefore strengthening their confidence and sense of professionalism.

5.8.4 Knowledgeable parents

Findings indicate that knowledgeable parents who understood the value of ECCE would recognise and appreciate the importance of the work undertaken in the sector and would therefore promote it as a profession. As a result, it is recommended that:

1. Parents should be encouraged to undertake an ECCE parenting programme covering the period from birth to six years. During this process parents should be exposed to all aspects of ECCE including the practice frameworks *Síolta*: the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009).
2. A greater emphasis is placed on partnership with parents. It is envisaged that the NVCCs and the CCCs work with parents and ECCE practitioners to encourage partnership between home and pre-school.

These measures are intended to support parents in realising the importance of the work undertaken in the sector while also highlighting the benefits for children in terms of their learning and development in the early years.

5.8.5 Policy documents

It is apparent that the introduction of the practice frameworks; *Síolta:* the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) are viewed positively within the sector. However, this study in common with Moloney (2011) found that because implementation is voluntary, that these frameworks do little to enhance practical professionalism within the sector in Ireland. As a result, it is recommended that:

1. All policy documents and practice frameworks become embedded within all levels of mandatory training and continuous professional development opportunities in the ECCE sector.

2. ECCE policy documents and practice frameworks should become further ingrained within B.Ed training. This measure will guarantee a continuum from pre-school to primary school as well as ensuring that primary school teachers value and understand the importance of ECCE and therefore help to promote it as a profession.

5.8.6 Recommendations for future research

This study emphasises the significant progressive changes within the ECCE sector over the past decade. While extensive research has been undertaken in relation to the quality of the sector, there is little research available on the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. Therefore, it is recommended that:

1. A further more prolonged study spanning 3 – 4 years on the professional identity of the ECCE sector be undertaken on a nationwide basis with a considerably larger primary data base. Such a study would allow future researchers to gain insight into how policy implementation affects professionalism and the professional identity of the ECCE sector.

2. Aligned to the aforementioned study, that an investigation into how the introduction of the Common Awards System (CAS) impacts the professionalism and professional identity of the sector. Perhaps the introduction of this new system of training will improve the quality of ECCE services in Ireland and therefore promote a greater sense of professionalism and professional identity for the ECCE sector.

3. The Workforce Development Plan (DES, 2010) be implemented. In this regard, it is imperative that funding is allocated to its implementation and specifically to the

training and up-skilling of staff. These issues delay the professional growth of the sector and require immediate attention and revision.

5.9 Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that ECCE does not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations, and that ultimately, there is still a long way to go before the sector is recognised and valued as a profession in Ireland. This study indicates that the societal context in which attitudes and perceptions towards ECCE were formed hugely impacted the professional standing and identity of the sector.

The low status and weak professional identity of the sector can be linked to the historical polarisation of care and education and is further rooted in a traditional view that ECCE is merely an issue of care undertaken by mothers in the home. As a result, work within the sector continues to be seen as less important than work undertaken in the primary school for example. This is reflected in the lack of a mandatory training requirement, poor policy implementation and abysmal remuneration levels. Although Bennett (2003) and the OECD (2006) call upon governments to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable (2006:25), consistent with Moloney, (2011) and Moloney and Pope (2012) this study indicates that little progress has been made in any of these areas in Ireland.

However, as highlighted in chapter 4, various ECCE policies and initiatives have resulted in a positive change in societal attitudes towards ECCE. However, the voluntary nature of the policies coupled with insufficient support and resources have impeded their full implementation and further hampered the professional growth and development of the sector. As a result, this study coincides with many researchers (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000, OECD, 2006, Littledyke, 2008, Moss, 2008, Moloney, 2011, Moloney and Pope, 2012) in

questioning whether those working within ECCE posses the professional skills and expertise that are critical to professional identity formation.

Bibliography

Adams, K., 2008: *What's in a name? Seeking professional status through degree studies within the Scottish early years context.* European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16:2, pp. 196-209.

Adams, K., 2005: *What's in a name?* Paper presented at the 15th Annual Conference of EECERA (European Early Childhood Educational Research Association), 1-3 September 2005, St Patrick's College. Dublin.

Adamson, J.E. and Morrison, A., 2011: *Law for Business and Personal Use*. USA:South Western Cengage Learning.

Babbie, E., 2007: *The practice of social research*. Eleventh Edition. California: Thompson Wadsworth.

Barnett, R. and Di Napoli, R., 2008: *Changing Identities in Higher Education: Voicing Perspectives.* Oxon: Routledge.

Becker, H.S., 1962: *The nature of a profession*. In: Henry, N.(Ed.), Education for the Professions: National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 26–46.

Bellm, D. and Whitebrook, M., (2006): cited in Lutton, A (2008): *NAEYC early childhood professional preparation standards: A vision for tomorrow's early childhood teachers.* In A. Gibbons and C. Gibbons (Eds): Conversations on Early Childhood Teacher Education. Redmond, WA: World Forum Publications, pp. 26 – 29.

Bennett, J., 2003: *Starting strong the persistent division between care and education.* Early Childhood Research: Sage Publications Vol 1(1) pp. 21–48.

Birch, M., Miller, Mauthner, M.L and Jessop, J., 2002: *Ethics in qualitative research.* London [u.a]: Sage Publications.

Black, N. and Gruen, R., 2005: *Understanding Health Services, Understanding Public Health*. England: Open University Press.

Blundell, A., Harrison, R. and Turney, B.W., 2011: *Essential Guide to becoming a doctor*, Third Edition. Sussex: BMJ publishing.

Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S. and Burns, M. S., (Eds)., 2000: *Eager To Learn.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Boyt, T. E., Lusch, R. F. and Naylor, G., 2001: *The role of professionalism in determining job satisfaction in professional services: a study of marketing researchers*, Journal of Service Research, 3 (4), pp321–330.

Brymann, A., 2008: *Social Research Methods.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Cabinet Office, 2008: *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World Class Public Service.* London: The Cabinet Office.

Cameron, C., Moss, P. and Owen. C., 1999: *Men in the nursery: Gender and caring work.*

London: Sage Publications.

Carl, A.E., 2009: *Teacher empowerment through curriculum development. Theory into practice.* Third Edition. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006: *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.* Dublin: CECDE.

Charmaz, K., 1983: *The Grounded theory method: an explication and interpretation, in R.M. Emerson (ed.) Contemporary Field Research*, Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown.

Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P., 1996: *Making sense of qualitative data. Complementary Research Strategies.* London. Sage Publications.

Cost Quality, and Child Outcomes (CQCO) Study Team: 1995, *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centres,* Department of Economics, University of Colorado at Denver, Denver. CO.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence. A., 1999: *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives.* London: Falmer Press.

Dalli, C., 2002: *Being an early childhood teacher: Images of professional practice and professional identity during the experience of starting childcare*. New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies 37, no. 1: pp. 73–85.

Dalli, C., 2003a: *The challenges of professionalism*. Keynote address at the Early Childhood Council's annual conference, April, in Christchurch: New Zealand: In Dalli, C., 2008: *Pedagogy, knowledge and collaboration: towards a ground‑up perspective on professionalism,* European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16:2, pp 171-185.

Dalli, C., 2006b: *Re-visioning love and care in early childhood: Constructing the future of our profession. The First Years.* New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education 8, no. 1: pp. 5–11.

Dally, K., 2007: *A Code of Ethics for the Early Childhood Profession: A Literature Review*. Early Childhood Australia. Accessed at: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au, 04/11/11

Day, C., 1999: *Developing Teachers: the Challenges of Lifelong Learning*. London: Falmer.

Delamont, S., 1992: *Fieldwork in Educational Settings: Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*. London. Falmer.

Denzin, N.K., 1970: *The Research Act in Sociology*. London. Butterworths.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.s., 1994: *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Second Edition. Thousand Oaks. London. New Dehli. SAGE Publications.

Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S., 2000: `*Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research'* in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition, London: SAGE Publications.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011: *Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, Vote 43, Report of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs,* November 11, 2011 at www.dcya.gov.ie accessed on 05/03/12.

Department of children and Youth Affairs, 2011: *City and County Childcare Committees*, at www.dcya.gov.ie accessed on 6/11/11.

Department of children and Youth Affairs, 2011: *National Childcare Organisations*, at www.dcya.gov.ie accessed on 6/11/11.

Department of children and Youth Affairs, 2012: *Minister Fitzgerald Welcomes Securing Future of Universal Free Pre-School Year*. Dublin Department of Children and Youth Affairs at www.dcya.gov.ie accessed on 6/11/11

Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004 in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006b: *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Dublin: OECD Publishing.

Department of Education and Skills, 2010: *A workforce development plan for the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs at www.dcya.gov.ie accessed on 03/04/12

Department of Education and Science, 1999: *The White Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education- Ready to Learn.* Government of Ireland: Stationary Office.

Department of Health and Children, 1991: *The Childcare Act*. Dublin: Stationary Office

Department of Health and Children, 1996: *Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations.* Dublin: Stationary Office.

Department of Health and Children, 2000: *The National Children Strategy, Our Children- Their lives.* Dublin: Stationary Office.

Department of Health and Children, 2006: *The Revised Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations.* Dublin: Stationary Office.

Department of Education and Skills, 2011: *Literacy and numeracy for learning and for life*: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills at www.education.ie accessed on 03/03/12

Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, 2002: *Quality Childcare and Life Long Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

Dey, I., 1993: *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User Friendly Guide for Social Scientists.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Drago-Severson, E., 1994: *What does "staff development" develop? How the staff development literature conceives adult growth*. Unpublished qualifying paper. Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Education in Guskey, R. T., 2000: *Evaluating Professional Development*. United States of America: Corwin Press, Inc, a Sage Publications Company.

Drake. J., 2007: *Planning Children's Play and Learning in the Foundation Stage*. Second Edition, Oxon: Routledge.

Duignan, M., 2007: *Practical Professionalism*. Dublin. CECDE vision into practice conference: CECDE publishing.

Duignan, M. and Walsh, T., 2004: *Insights on Quality: A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2004*. Dublin. CECDE publishing.

Early Childhood Ireland, 2012: *Childcare training and Childcare Education/Changes to the Awards system* at www.EarlychildhoodIreland.ie accessed 18/06/12.

Early Childhood Ireland, 2011: *Member Newsletter*. Available at: www.earlychildhoodireland.ie accessed 21st June, 2012.

Early Childhood Ireland, 2011: *Press Release on Adjustments to the Free Preschool Scheme* at (www.EarlyChildhoodIreland.ie) accessed 15/11/11.

Easton, L.B., 2004: *Powerful designs for professional learning*. Oxford. OH: National Staff Development Council in McIntyre, J. and Byrd, B.M., 2000: *Research on effective models for teacher education*. California, London: Corwin Press a SAGE Publications company.

Edwards, A., 2010: B*eing an Expert Professional Practitioner: The Relational Turn in Expertise.* University of Oxford: United Kingdom. Springer Publishing.

European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996: *The EC childcare Network 1986-1996.* Brussels: European Union.

Evans, L., 2008: *Professionalism, professionality and the development of education professionals,* British Journal of Educational Studies, 56:1, 20-38.

Fine, G.A., 1996: *Justifying work: Occupational rhetoric's as resources in restaurant kitchens.* Administrative Science Quarterly 41(1): 90–115.

Forde, C., McPhee, A.D., Mcmahon, M., Patrick, F., 2006: *Professional Development, Reflection and Enquiry.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Fullen, M., 2001: *The New Meaning of Educational Change.* Third edition, New York: Teacher College Press.

Galinsky, E., 2006: *The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs: What Makes the Difference?* Washington, DC: The Committee for Economic Development at www.CED.org accessed on 14/02/12.

Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L., 1967: *The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* Chicago: Aldine.

Goode, W.J., 1969: *The theoretical limits of professionalization.* In: Etzioni, A. (Ed.), *The Semi-professions and their Organization.* The Free Press, New York, pp. 266–313.

Government of Ireland, 1999a: *The Constitution of Ireland / Bunreacht na hEireann.* Dublin. Stationery Office.

Government of Ireland, 1999b: *National Childcare Strategy: Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Greene, R.J., 2010: *Rewarding performance: guiding principles, custom strategies.* Chicago: Routledge.

Guskey, R. T., 2000: *Evaluating Professional Development*. United States of America: Corwin Press, Inc, a SAGE Publications Company.

Hakel, M.D. and Keonig, J.D., Elliot, S.W., 2008: *Accessing accomplished teaching: advanced level certification programmes*. Washington DC: The National Academies Press at www.nap.edu accessed on 25/06/12

Hall, D.T., 1987: *Careers and socialization*. Journal of Management 13(2): pp. 301–322.

Hanlon, G., 1998: *Professionalism as Enterprise: service class politics and the redefinition of professionalism*, Sociology, 32(1), pp. 43–63.

Hardy, M., Bryman, A., 2004: *Handbook of data analysis*. London. Thousand Oaks California. New Dehli: SAGE Publications.

Hayes, N., 2007: *Perspectives on the relationship between education and care*: *Background paper to the Framework for Early Learning*. Commissioned by the NCCA at www.ncca.ie NCCA: Dublin accessed on 07/05/12

Ho Choi-Wa, D., 2006: *Understanding the complexity of preschool teaching in Hong Kong: The way forward to professionalism.* International Journal of Educational Development 26 (2006) pp. 305–314.

Hollingsworth, H.L. and Buysse, V., 2009: *Program Quality and Early Childhood Inclusion, Recommendations for Professional Development*. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education Volume 29 Number 2, pp. 119-128.

Hoyle, E., 1980: *Professionalization and deprofessionalization in education*, in Hoyle. E., Megarry, J., (Eds) *The Professional Development of Teachers: World year book of education*. London: Kogan Page.

Hoyle, E. and John, P., 1995: *Professional Knowledge and Practice*. London: Cassell.

Ibarra, H., 1999: *Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation*. Administrative Science Quarterly 44(4): pp. 764–791.

Irish Preschool Play Association 1995, in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006b: *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Joyce, B. and Calhoun, E., 2010: *Models of professional development: a celebration of educators.* California, London, New Dehli and Singapore: Corwin a SAGE company.

Kane, E. and O'Reilly-De Brún, M., 2001: *Doing your own research.* London. Marion Boyars Publishers.

Kelchtermans, G., 1993: *Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career stories to teachers' professional development*. Teaching and Teacher Education, 9, pp. 443–456.

Kennedy, F., 2001: *Cottage to Crèche: Family Change in Ireland*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Krueger, R., 1988: in Babbie, E., 2007: *The practice of social research.* Eleventh Edition. California: Thompson Wadsworth pp. 286-313.

Kultgen, J., 1988: *Ethics and Professionalism.* United States of America: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S., 2009: *Interviews- Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* London: SAGE Publications.

Larson, M.S., 1977: *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis.* Berkeley, CA. University of California Press.

Lisle, A.M., 2010: *Reflective practice: Dialectic encounter in psychology and education.* United States of America: Angela Mary Lisle.

Littledyke, R., 2008: *What are our priorities for preparing student teachers to work in the early childhood care and education sector?* In Gibbons A., and Gibbons, C., (Eds): Conversations on Early Childhood Teacher Education. Redmond, WA: World Forum Publications, pp. 29 – 37.

Lobman, L. and Ryan, S., 2007: *Differing Discourses on Early Childhood Teacher Development.* Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 28:4, pp. 367-380.

Lodico, M., Spaulding, D., and Voegtle, K., 2010: *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice.* San Francisco: CA. Wiley and Sons.

Lutton, A., 2008: *NAEYC early childhood professional preparation standards: A vision for tomorrow's early childhood teachers.* In A. Gibbons and C. Gibbons (Eds): Conversations on Early Childhood Teacher Education. Redmond, WA: World Forum Publications, pp. 26 – 29.

MacNaughton, G., 2003: *Shaping early childhood.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S.A and Siraj-Blatchford, I., 2001: *Doing early childhood research, International perspectives on theory and practice*, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Mahony, K. and Hayes, N., 2006: *In Search of Quality: Multiple Perspectives.* Centre for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology. Dublin: Ireland, Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Maister, D., 1999: *True Professionalism: The Courage to Care about Your People, Your Clients and Your Career.* New York. The Free Press.

McGillivray, G., 2008: *Nannies, nursery nurses and early years professionals: constructions of professional identity in the early years workforce in England*, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16:2, pp. 242-254.

McIntyre, J. and Byrd, B.M., 2000: *Research on effective models for teacher education.* California, London: Corwin Press a SAGE Publications company.

Mcleod, J., 2011: *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy.* Second Edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Meece, J.L. and Eccles, J. S., 2010: *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development,* New York: Routledge pp. 6-21.

Merriam, S.B., 2007: *Qualitative Research, A Guide to Design and Implementation- Revised and Expanded from Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint.

Millar, L. and Cable, C., 2010: *Professionalism in the Early Years*. London: Hodder Education. Millerson, G., 1964 in Whitty, G., 2000: *Teacher professionalism in new times*, Journal of In-Service Education, 26:2, pp. 281-295.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., 1994: *Qualitative Data Analysis: an expanded resource book*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Moloney, M., 2010 a: *Professional identity in early childhood care and education; perspectives of pre-school and infant teachers.* Irish Educational Studies, Vol: 29(2) pp. 167 − 187.

Moloney, M., 2010b: *Unreasonable expectations; the dilemma for pedagogues in delivering policy objectives*. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal. Vol: 18 (2), pp. 181−198.

Moloney, M., 2011: *Locating Quality in Early Childhood Care and Educational Discourse in Ireland: Pre-school and Infant classrooms as a crucible of Learning and Development,* Unpublished Thesis (PhD), University College Limerick.

Moloney, M., 2012: *Pre-school, a scaled down version of school: impact of school readiness on children's agency within ECCE settings.* Presentation at the BECERA Conference, Evidencing practice through professional enquiry. Birmingham: UK. 15th February, 2012.

Moloney, M., and Pope, P., 2012 (forthcoming): *A study of the professional identity of BA ECCE Graduates in an Irish context.* Pedagogy, Learning and Education network: Our Children − Our Future, Policy, Practice and Professional Identity. Sligo Institute of Technology. Conference Proceedings.

Moss, P., 2003: B*eyond caring: The case for reforming the childcare and early year's workforce. Facing the Future Policy Paper No 5.* London: Daycare Trust.

Moss, P., 2000: Cited in Penn, H., 2000: *Early Childhood Services, Theory and Practice.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Moss, P., 2008: cited in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006b): *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing

Moyles J., 2001: *Passion, Paradox and Professionalism in Early Years Education*. Early Years, 21:2, pp. 81-95.

Moyles, J., 2006: *Effective Leadership and management in the Early Years*, England: Open University Press.

Moyles, J. and Suschitzky, W., 1995: *A matter of difference: nursery teachers and nursery nurses working together,* Education 3–13, 23 (3), pp. 41–46.

Mullins, L.J., 2007: *Management and organisational behaviour*. Eighth edition. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009: *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.* Dublin: Stationary Office.

National professional development centre on Inclusion, 2008: *What Do We Mean by Professional Development in the Early Childhood Field?* National professional development centre on Inclusion at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov. Accessed on 12/10/11

 Neegaard, H. and Ulhoi, J.P., 2007: *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship.* Cheltenham, Massachusetts*:* Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Negrine, R.M., 2007: *The professionalization of political communication. Changing Media Changing Europe.* Volume 3. Bristol: Intellect Books.

Nicholson, N., 1984: *A theory of work role transitions*. Administrative Science Quarterly 29(2): pp. 172–191.

Nutbrown, C., 2012: *Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications. Final Report*. Available at: www.education.gov.uk Accessed 21st June, 2012.

Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, 2010: *Free Pre-school Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme.* Dublin: Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs at www.dyca.gov.ie accessed on 09/02/12

Olesen, H.S., 2000: In Uhlmann, W.R, Schuette, J.L, Yashar, B.M, 2010: *A guide to genetic counselling*. Second Edition. New Jersey, Canada: John Wiley and Sons.

OMNA - DIT/NOW 2000: The Final Report of OMNA - DIT/NOW Early Childhood Project 1995. *Life is a Learning Curve*. Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2001a): *Knowledge Management in the Learning Society:* Paris: OECD Publishing.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004: *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Background Report.* Ireland: OECD Publishing.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006b: *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Osgood, J., 2010: *Reconstructing the Professionalism in ECEC: the case for the critically reflective emotional practitioner*, Early Years, 30:2, pp. 119-133.

Patton, M, Q., 2002: *Qualitative Evaluation methods.* California: SAGE publications.

Penn, H., 2000: *Early Childhood Services, Theory and Practice.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Pole, C. and Lampard, R., 2002*: Practical Social Investigation Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Social Research.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Roberts-Holmes, G., 2005: *Doing your early years research project: a step-by- step guide.* London: Sage Publications.

Rodd, J., 2006: *Leadership in Early Childhood*. Buckingham. Third Edition. Berkshire:Open University.

Schein, E.H., 1978: *Career Dynamics. Matching Individual and Organizational Needs.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schweinhart, L. J., Montie., J. Xiang., Z. Barnett., W.S. Belfield., C.R and Nores., M. 2004: *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 40: Summary, conclusions, and frequently asked questions*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation at www.highscope.org accessed 17/11/11

Share, M., Kerrins, L. and Greene, L., 2011: *Developing Early Years Professionalism Evaluation of the Early Learning* Initiative's *Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands*. Trinity College Dublin: Children's research centre at www.tcd.ie accessed 05/11/11

Shonkoff, J.P., Phillips. D., 2000: *From Neurons to Neighbours: The Science of Early Childhood Development.* United States of America. National Academy of Sciences

Silvermann, D., 2005: *Doing Qualitative Research.* Second Edition. SAGE Publications. London.

Silverman, D., 2006: *Interpreting Qualitative Data.* Third Edition. London. SAGE publications

Siraj-Blatchford, I., 1993: *Educational Research and Reform: Some implications for the Professional Identity of Early Years Teachers.* British Journal of Educational Studies Vol xxxx1 No 4, pp. 393-407.

Simpson, D., 2010: *Becoming Professional? Exploring Early Years Professional Status and its Implications for Workforce Reform in England.* Journal of Early Childhood Research, 8:3, pp. 269-281.

Sparks, D. and Loucks-Horsley, S., 1989: *Five models of staff development.* Journal of Staff Development, Vol. 10, No. 4 pp.40-57

Stake, E.R., 2010: *Qualitative Research- Studying how things work.* New York. The Guildford Press.

Sweeney, D., 2003: *Learning along the way: professional development by and for teachers.* United States of America: Stenhouse Publishers.

Sweeney, A., 2010: *Enabling Smooth Transitions to Quality Frameworks in Ireland.* Early Childhood Care and Education Seminar: Ireland at www.Pobal.ie. Accessed on 10/01/12

Tesch, R., 1990: *Qualitative Research: Analysis and Software tools.* London. Falmer.

Thomas, N., Costine, G.P. and Heraty, N., 1995: *Training and Development in Ireland: Context, Policy and Practice*. Oak Tree Press. Dublin.

Tizard, B., 1986: *The care of young children: implications of recent research*, University of London: Institute of Education. London .

Tucker, S., 1999: *Making the link: Dual 'problematisation', discourse and work with young people.* Journal of Youth Studies 2, no. 3: pp. 283–95.

Tucker, S., 2004: *Youth working: Professional identities given, received or contested*? In Youth in society (Ed). Roche, J., Tucker, S., Thomson, R., and Flynn, R., 81_9. London: SAGE Publications.

United Nations, 1989: *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York. United Nations at www.UNESCO.org.education accessed 03/11/11

Uhlmann, W.R., Schuette, J.L. and Yashar, B.M., 2010: *A guide to genetic counselling*. Second Edition. New Jersey, Canada. John Wiley and Sons.

Whitty, G., 2000: *Teacher professionalism in new times,* Journal of In-Service Education, 26:2, pp. 281-295.

Woodrow, C., 2007: *W(H)ither the Early Childhood Teacher: tensions for early childhood professional identity between the policy landscape and the politics of teacher regulation.* Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, Volume 8, pp. 233 – 243.

Appendix 1: Information Letter: Practitioners

<div align="right">

Ruth Madden
1 Clanmaurice Gardens,
Ennis Road,
Limerick.

</div>

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Research in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. My research thesis 'For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland today, is concerned with the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector throughout the past decade including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the revised Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006 and the introduction of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice and enhance the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. However, there is a paucity of research relating to the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data about the professional identity of the sector.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short interview (30 minutes approx). I will phone you beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you, your setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by xxx in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on Ruth.Madden@mic.ul.ie or via mobile at 0851554664. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor Dr Mary Moloney at mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie or by telephone at 061 204316.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick.

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

_____

Ruth Madden.

Appendix 2: Information Letter: Lectures

Ruth Madden
1 Clanmaurice Gardens,
Ennis Road,
Limerick.

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Research in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. My research thesis 'For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland today is concerned with the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector throughout the past decade including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the revised Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006 and the introduction of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice and enhance the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. However, there is a paucity of research relating to the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data about the professional identity of the sector.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short interview (30 minutes approx) in January, 2012. I will phone you beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you, your setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by xxx in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on Ruth.Madden@mic.ul.ie or via mobile at 0851554664. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor Dr Mary Moloney at mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie or by telephone at 061 204316.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick.
061-204515
mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

_____

Ruth Madden.

Appendix 3: Information Letter: National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative Representative

<div align="right">

Ruth Madden
1 Clanmaurice Gardens,
Ennis Road,
Limerick.

</div>

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Research in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. My research thesis 'For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland today is concerned with the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector throughout the past decade including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the revised Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006 and the introduction of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice and enhance the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. However, there is a paucity of research relating to the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data about the professional identity of the sector.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short focus group discussion with four other Childcare Committee representatives in January, 2012. I will phone you beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you or your organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by xxx in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on Ruth.Madden@mic.ul.ie or via mobile at 0851554664. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor Dr Mary Moloney at mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie or by telephone at 061 204316.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick.

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Madden

Appendix 4: Information Letter: City and County Childcare Committee representatives

Ruth Madden
1 Clanmaurice Gardens,
Ennis Road,
Limerick.

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Research in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. My research thesis 'For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland today, is concerned with the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector throughout the past decade including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the revised Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006 and the introduction of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice and enhance the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. However, there is a paucity of research relating to the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data about the professional identity of the sector.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short focus group discussion with four other Childcare Committee representatives in January, 2012. I will phone you beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you or your organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by xxx in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on Ruth.Madden@mic.ul.ie or via mobile at 0851554664. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor Dr Mary Moloney at mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie or by telephone at 061 204316.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick.

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Madden

Appendix 5: Information Letter: BA ECCE Graduates

Ruth Madden
1 Clanmaurice Gardens,
Ennis Road,
Limerick.

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Research in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. My research thesis 'For Love or Money: An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland today' is concerned with the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector throughout the past decade including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the revised Childcare (pre-school services) Regulations, 2006 and the introduction of the free pre-school year in ECCE scheme (2010). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice and enhance the professional identity of the sector in Ireland. However, there is a paucity of research relating to the professional identity of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data about the professional identity of the sector.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short focus group discussion with four other BA ECCE graduates in January, 2012. I will phone you beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you, your setting or your organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by xxx in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on Ruth.Madden@mic.ul.ie or via mobile at 0851554664. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor Dr Mary Moloney at mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie or by telephone at 061 204316.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick.

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Madden

Appendix 6: **Informed Consent Form**

An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland Today

I (signature) _____ agree to participate in research being undertaken by Ruth Madden into the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland.

I understand that my participation involves taking part in a short interview (30 minutes approx) in January, 2012.

I also understand that:

- My involvement in this research is voluntary
- I may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project.
- ID codes will be applied to the research data so that I, my setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by the researcher, Ruth Madden
- All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research.
- Research findings may be published; however my anonymity and the anonymity of my setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

Signed: _____

Research Participant

Date: _____

Appendix 7: **Informed Consent Form**

An Exploration of the Professional identity of Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland Today

I (signature) _____ agree to participate in research being undertaken by Ruth Madden into the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland.

I understand that my participation involves taking part in a short focus group discussion in January, 2012.

I also understand that:

- My involvement in this research is voluntary

- I may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project.

- ID codes will be applied to the research data so that I, my setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by the researcher, Ruth Madden

- All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research.

- Research findings may be published; however my anonymity and the anonymity of my setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

Signed: _____

Research Participant

Date: _____

Appendix 8: Questions for Practitioners

1. In your opinion, what is a 'professional?

2. How does the term 'professional' apply to working in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector?

3. How do you feel about your professional identity as an early childhood practitioner?

4. What is the difference between a professional working in the ECCE sector and other professionals?

5. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon the professional identity of the sector?

6. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon others (i.e. parents other professionals) perceptions of the ECCE sector?

7. How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?

8. How do you feel about a minimum qualification level in order to work in the ECCE sector?

9. What else is required to be a professional within ECCE?

10. What job title would be appropriate for somebody working in the sector? Why?

11. Any further comments?

Appendix 9: Questions For Lecturers at both HETAC and FETAC levels

1. In your opinion, what is a 'professional?

2. How does the term 'professional' apply to working in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector?

3. What qualities do you consider essential for the professional identity of an ECCE practitioner?

4. What is the difference between a professional working in the ECCE sector and other professionals?

5. How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?

6. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon the professional identity of the sector?

7. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon others (i.e. parents other professionals) perceptions of the ECCE sector?

8. How do you feel about a minimum qualification level in order to work in the ECCE sector?

9. What else is required to be a professional within ECCE?

10. What job title would be appropriate for somebody working in the sector? Why?

11. Any further comments?

Appendix 10: Questions for NVCC Representatives

1. In your opinion, what is a 'professional?

2. How does the term 'professional' apply to working in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector?

3. What qualities do you consider essential for the professional identity of an ECCE practitioner?

4. What is the difference between a professional working in the ECCE sector and other professionals?

5. How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?

6. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon the professional identity of the sector?

7. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon others (i.e. parents other professionals) perceptions of the ECCE sector?

8. How do you feel about a minimum qualification level in order to work in the ECCE sector?

9. What else is required to be a professional within ECCE?

10. What job title would be appropriate for somebody working in the sector? Why?

11. Any further comments?

Appendix 11: Questions for CCC Representatives

1. In your opinion, what is a 'professional?

2. How does the term 'professional' apply to working in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector?

3. What qualities do you consider essential for the professional identity of an ECCE practitioner?

4. What is the difference between a professional working in the ECCE sector and other professionals?

5. How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?

6. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon the professional identity of the sector?

7. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon others (i.e. parents other professionals) perceptions of the ECCE sector?

8. How do you feel about a minimum qualification level in order to work in the ECCE sector?

9. What else is required to be a professional within ECCE?

10. What job title would be appropriate for somebody working in the sector? Why?

11. Any further comments?

Appendix 12: Questions for BA ECCE Graduates

1. In your opinion, what is a 'professional?

2. How does the term 'professional' apply to working in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector?

3. What qualities do you consider essential for the professional identity of an ECCE practitioner?

4. As a B.A ECCE graduate; how do you view your professional identity?

5. What are the benefits for you in holding a B.A ECCE?

6. What is the difference between a professional working in the ECCE sector and other professionals?

7. How has policy influenced the professional identity of the ECCE sector?

8. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon the professional identity of the sector?

9. In what ways do qualifications and levels of training impact upon others (i.e. parents other professionals) perceptions of the ECCE sector?

10. How do you feel about a minimum qualification level in order to work in the ECCE sector?

11. What else is required to be a professional within ECCE?

12. What job title would be appropriate for somebody working in the sector? Why?

13. Any further comments?

Appendix 13: Principles and Standards of Siolta: The National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006)

The 12 Principles of Síolta:

1. **The Value of Early Childhood**

Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.

Early childhood, the period from birth to six years, is a significant and unique time in the life of every individual. Every child needs and has the right to positive experiences in early childhood. As with every other phase in life, positive supports and adequate resources are necessary to make the most of this period. Provision of such supports and resources should not be conditional on the expectations of the economy, society or other interests.

2. **Children First**

The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.

The child is an active agent in her/his own development through her/his interactions with the world. These interactions are motivated by the individual child's abilities, interests, previous experiences and desire for independence. Each child is a competent learner from birth and quality early years experiences can support each child to realise their full potential. Provision of these experiences must reflect and support the child's strengths, needs and interests. Children have the right to be listened to and have their views on issues that affect them heard, valued and responded to.

3. **Parents**

Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.

Quality early childhood care and education must value and support the role of parents. Open, honest and respectful partnership with parents is essential in promoting the best interests of the child. Mutual partnership contributes to establishing harmony and continuity between the diverse environments the child experiences in the early years. The development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows.

4. **Relationships**

Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.

The relationships that the child forms within her/his immediate and extended environment from birth will significantly influence her/his well-being, development and learning. These relationships are two-way and include adults, peers, family and the extended community. Positive relationships, which are secure, responsive and respectful and which provide consistency and continuity over time, are the cornerstone of the child's well-being.

5. Equality

Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education.

Equality, as articulated in Article 2 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and in the *Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004*, is a fundamental characteristic of quality early childhood care and education provision. It is a critical prerequisite for supporting the optimal development of all children in Ireland. It requires that the individual needs and abilities of each child are recognised and supported from birth towards the realisation of her/his unique potential. This means that all children should be able to gain access to, participate in, and benefit from early years services on an equal basis.

6. Diversity

Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.

Diversity is a term which is generally used to describe differences in individuals by virtue of gender, age, skin colour, language, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, religion, race or other background factors such as family structure, economic circumstances, etc. Quality early childhood environments should demonstrate respect for diversity through promoting a sense of belonging for all children within the cultural heritage of Ireland. They should also provide rich and varied experiences which will support children's ability to value social and cultural diversity

7. Environments

The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her/his well-being, learning and development.

The child's experiences in early childhood are positively enhanced by interactions with a broad range of environments. These include the indoor and outdoor, built and natural, home and out-of-home environments. The environment should be high quality and should extend and enrich the child's development and learning. These experiences stimulate curiosity, foster independence and promote a sense of belonging. The development of respect for the environment will also result from such experiences.

8. Welfare

The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.

The promotion of child well-being is a characteristic of a quality environment. This involves the protection of each child from harmful experiences and the promotion of child welfare. Additionally, the opportunity to form trusting relationships with adults and other children is a key characteristic of quality. Promotion of safety should not prevent the child from having a rich and varied array of experiences in line with her/his age and stage of development.

9. Role of the Adult

The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental
Quality early childhood practice is built upon the unique role of the adult. The competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience of adults, in addition to their capacity to reflect upon their role, are essential in supporting and ensuring quality experiences for each child. This demanding and central role in the life of a young child needs to be appropriately resourced, supported and valued.

10. Teamwork

The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.

Teamwork is a vital component of quality in early childhood care and education. It is the expression of cooperative, coordinated practice in any setting. Shared knowledge and understanding, clearly communicated among the team within the setting; with and among other professionals involved with the child; and with the parents is a prerequisite of quality practice and reflects a "whole-child perspective". This also ensures the promotion of respectful working relationships among all adults supporting the well-being, learning and development of the child. Such teamwork, coordination and communication must be valued, supported and resourced by an appropriate infrastructure at local, regional and national levels

11. Pedagogy

Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.

Pedagogy is a term that is used to refer to the whole range of interactions which support the child's development. It takes a holistic approach by embracing both care and education. It acknowledges the wide range of relationships and experiences within which development takes place and recognises the connections between them. It also supports the concept of the child as an active learner. Such pedagogy must be supported within a flexible and dynamic framework that addresses the learning potential of the 'whole child.' Furthermore, it requires that early childhood practitioners are adequately prepared and supported for its implementation.

12. Play

Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Play is an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world around her/his. These interactions with, for example, other children, adults, materials, events and ideas, are key to the child's well-being, development and learning. Play is a source of joy and fulfilment for the child. It provides an important context and opportunity to enhance and optimise quality early childhood experiences. As such, play will be a primary focus in quality early childhood settings.

Appendix 14: Síolta's 16 Standards Quality (CECDE, 2006)

Standard 1: Rights of the Child

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

Standard 2: Environments

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

Standard 3: Parents and Families

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

Standard 4: Consultation

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

Standard 5: Interactions

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

Standard 6: Play

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

Standard 7: Curriculum

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

Standard 8: Planning and Evaluation

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

Standard 9: Health and Welfare

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

Standard 10: Organisation

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

Standard 11: Professional Practice

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

Standard 12: Communication

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

Standard 13: Transitions

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

Standard 14: Identity and Belonging

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

Standard 15: Legislation and Regulation

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

Standard 16: Community Involvement

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

Appendix 15: Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009)

Principles of early learning and development

Aistear is based on 12 principles of early learning and development. These are presented in three groups:

1. The first group concerns **children and their lives in early childhood:**
   - The child's uniqueness
   - Equality and diversity
   - Children as citizens.

2. The second group concerns **children's connections with others:**
   - Relationships
   - Parents, family and community
   - The adult's role.

3. The third group concerns **how children learn and develop:**
   - Holistic learning and development
   - Active learning
   - Play and hands-on experiences
   - Relevant and meaningful experiences
   - Communication and language
   - The learning environment.

Each principle is presented using a short statement.

Children and their lives in early childhood

The child's uniqueness

Each child has his/her own set of experiences and a unique life-story. He/she is an active learner growing up as a member of a family and community with particular traditions and ways of life.

Equality and diversity

Nurturing equality and diversity is important in early childhood. Promoting equality is about creating a fairer society in which everyone can participate equally with the opportunity to fulfil his/her potential. Diversity is about welcoming and valuing individual and group differences, and understanding and celebrating difference as part of life.

Children as citizens

Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities. They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy. From this experience they learn that, as well as having rights, they also have a responsibility to respect and help others, and to care for their environment.

Children's connections with others

Relationships

Children have a fundamental need to be with other people. They learn and develop through loving and nurturing relationships with adults and other children, and the quality of these interactions impacts on their learning and development.

Parents, family and community

Parents are the most important people in children's lives. The care and education that children receive from their parents and family, especially during their early months and years, greatly influence their overall development. Extended family and community also have important roles to play.

The Adults Role

Early learning takes places through reciprocal relationships between the adult and the child- sometimes the adult leads the learning and sometimes the child leads. The adult enhances learning through a respectful understanding of the child's uniqueness. He\she alters the type and amount of support as the child grows in confidence and competence, and achieves new things.

How Children Learn and Develop

Holistic learning and development

Children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn.

Active Learning

Active learning involves children learning by doing things. They use their senses to explore and work with the objects and materials around them and they interact enthusiastically with the adults and other children that they meet. Through these experiences, children develop the dispositions, skills, knowledge, and understanding, attitudes, and values that will help them to grow as confident and competent learners.

Play and hands-on experiences

Much of children's early learning and development takes place through play and hands-on experiences. Through these, children explore social, physical and imaginary worlds. These experiences help them to manage their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and learners

Relevant and meaningful experiences

Relevant and meaningful experiences make learning more enjoyable and positive for children. On-going assessment of what children do, say and make, and reflection on these experiences helps practitioners to plan more developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for children. This also enables them to improve their practice. Assessment is about building a picture of children's individual strengths, interests, abilities, and needs and using this

to support and plan for their future learning and development.

Communication and language

The ability to communicate is at the very heart of early learning and development. Communication helps children learn to think about and make sense of their world. They communicate from birth using many different ways of giving and receiving information. Each of these ways is important in its own right. Learning to communicate in early childhood is shaped by two main factors: children's own ability and their environment.

The learning environment

The learning environment (inside and outside) influences what and how children learn. An inviting environment encourages and helps children to explore and to take advantage of opportunities for fun, choice, freedom, adventure, and challenge

Appendix 16: Aistear's themes

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children's learning and development using four themes. These are:

- Well-being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. Some of these goals may be more suited to children as they get older.

Figure 1: Describing children's learning and development through themes

Theme: Wellbeing

The theme of Well-being is about children being confident, happy and healthy.

Aim 1: Children will be strong psychologically and socially

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. make strong attachments and develop warm and supportive relationships with family, peers and adults in out-of-home settings and in their community
2. be aware of and name their own feelings, and understand that others may have different feelings
3. handle transitions and changes well
4. be confident and self-reliant
5. respect themselves, others and the environment
6. make decisions and choices about their own learning and development

Aim 2: Children will be as healthy and fit as they can be.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. gain increasing control and co-ordination of body movements
2. be aware of their bodies, their bodily functions, and their changing abilities
3. discover, explore and refine gross and fine motor skills
4. use self-help skills in caring for their own bodies
5. show good judgement when taking risks
6. make healthy choices and demonstrate positive attitudes to nutrition, hygiene, exercise, and routine.

Aim 3: Children will be creative and spiritual

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1.express themselves creatively and experience the arts
2.express themselves through a variety of types of play
3.develop and nurture their sense of wonder and awe
4.become reflective and think flexibly
5.care for the environment
6.understand that others may have beliefs and values different to their own

Aim 4: Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. show increasing independence, and be able to make choices and decisions
2. demonstrate a sense of mastery and belief in their own abilities and display learning dispositions, such as determination and perseverance
3. think positively, take learning risks, and become resilient and resourceful when things go wrong
4. motivate themselves, and welcome and seek challenge
5. respect life, their own and others, and know that life has a meaning and purpose
6. be active citizens.

Theme: Identity and Belonging

The theme of *Identity and Belonging* is about children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community.

Aim 1: Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. build respectful relationships with others
2. appreciate the features that make a person special and unique (name, size, hair, hand and footprint, gender, birthday)
3. understand that as individuals they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities
4. have a sense of 'who they are' and be able to describe their backgrounds, strengths and abilities
5. feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment
6. express their own ideas, preferences and needs, and have these responded to with respect and consistency.

Aim 2: Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. feel that they have a place and a right to belong to the group
2. know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed
3. be able to share personal experiences about their own families and cultures, and come to know that there is a diversity of family structures, cultures and backgrounds
4. understand and take part in routines, customs, festivals, and celebrations
5. see themselves as part of a wider community and know about their local area, including some of its places, features and people

6. understand the different roles of people in the community

Aim 3: Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. express their views and help make decisions in matters that affect them
2. understand the rules and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour
3. interact, work co-operatively, and help others
4. be aware of and respect others' needs, rights, feelings, culture, language, background, and religious beliefs
5. have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour
6. demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation,

Aim 4: Children will see themselves as capable learners.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. develop a broad range of abilities and interests
2. show an awareness of their own unique strengths, abilities and learning styles, and be willing to share their skills and knowledge with others
3. show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing their own learning
4. demonstrate dispositions like curiosity, persistence and responsibility
5. experience learning opportunities that are based on personal interests, and linked to their home, community and culture
6. be motivated, and begin to think about and recognise their own progress and achievements.

Theme: Communicating

The theme of *Communicating* is about children sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes

Aim 1: Children will use non-verbal communication skills.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. use a range of body movements, facial expressions, and early vocalisations to show feelings and share information
2. understand and use non-verbal communication rules, such as turn-taking and making eye contact
3. interpret and respond to non-verbal communication by others
4. understand and respect that some people will rely on non-verbal communication as their main

way of interacting with others

5. combine non-verbal and verbal communication to get their point across

6. express themselves creatively and imaginatively using non-verbal communication.

Aim 2: Children will use language.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing and taking turns in conversation

2. explore sound, pattern, rhythm, and repetition in language

3. use an expanding vocabulary of words and phrases, and show a growing understanding of syntax and meaning

4. use language with confidence and competence for giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, negotiating, problem-solving, imagining and recreating roles and situations, and clarifying thinking, ideas and feelings

5. become proficient users of at least one language and have an awareness and appreciation of other languages

6. be positive about their home language, and know that they can use different languages to communicate with different people and in different situations.

Aim 3: Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. use language to interpret experiences, to solve problems, and to clarify thinking, ideas and feelings

2. use books and ICT for fun, to gain information and broaden their understanding of the world

3. build awareness of the variety of symbols (pictures, print, numbers) used to communicate, and understand that these can be read by others

4. become familiar with and use a variety of print in an enjoyable and meaningful way

5. have opportunities to use a variety of mark-making materials and implements in an enjoyable and meaningful way

6. develop counting skills, and a growing understanding of the meaning and use of numbers and mathematical language in an enjoyable and meaningful way

Aim 4: Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. share their feelings, thoughts and ideas by story-telling, making art, moving to music, role-playing, problem-solving, and responding to these experiences

2. express themselves through the visual arts using skills such as cutting, drawing, gluing, sticking, painting, building, printing, sculpting, and sewing

3. listen to and respond to a variety of types of music, sing songs and make music using

instruments
4. use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences
5. respond to and create literacy experiences through story, poetry, song, and drama
6. show confidence in trying out new things, taking risks, and thinking creatively.

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

The theme of *Exploring and Thinking* is about children making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others, playing, investigating, questioning, and forming, testing and refining ideas.

Aim 1: Children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. engage, explore and experiment in their environment and use new physical skills including skills to manipulate objects and materials
2. demonstrate a growing understanding of themselves and others in their community
3. develop an understanding of change as part of their lives
4. learn about the natural environment and its features, materials, animals, and plants, and their own responsibility as carers
5. develop a sense of time, shape, space, and place
6. come to understand concepts such as matching, comparing, ordering, sorting, size, weight, height, length, capacity, and money in an enjoyable and meaningful way.

Aim 2: Children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating, and problem-solving, and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. recognise patterns and make connections and associations between new learning and what they already know
2. gather and use information from different sources using their increasing cognitive, physical and social skills
3. use their experience and information to explore and develop working theories about how the world works, and think about how and why they learn things
4. demonstrate their ability to reason, negotiate and think logically
5. collaborate with others to share interests and to solve problems confidently
6. use their creativity and imagination to think of new ways to solve problems.

Aim 3: Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects, and actions through symbols.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. make marks and use drawing, painting and model-making to record objects, events and ideas
2. become familiar with and associate symbols (pictures, numbers, letters, and words) with the things they represent
3. build awareness of the variety of symbols (pictures, print, numbers) used to communicate, and use these in an enjoyable and meaningful way leading to early reading and writing
4. express feelings, thoughts and ideas through improvising, moving, playing, talking, writing, story-telling, music and art
5. use letters, words, sentences, numbers, signs, pictures, colour, and shapes to give and record information, to describe and to make sense of their own and others' experiences
6. use books and ICT (software and the internet) for enjoyment and as a source of information.

Aim 4: Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. demonstrate growing confidence in being able to do things for themselves
2. address challenges and cope with frustrations
3. make decisions and take increasing responsibility for their own learning
4. feel confident that their ideas, thoughts and questions will be listened to and taken seriously
5. develop higher-order thinking skills such as problem-solving, predicting, analysing, questioning, and justifying
6. act on their curiosity, take risks and be open to new ideas and uncertainty.

Appendix 17: Model Framework for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (DJELR, 2002)

Table of occupational profiles and descriptors

Occupational Profile	Intellectual skills/attributes	Processes	Accountability
Basic Practitioner	Elementary understanding of core knowledge areas. Ability to apply solutions to familiar problems. Ability to receive and pass on information.	Ability to carry out routine tasks. Basic competence in a range of clearly defined operations.	Directed activity under supervision. Reliance on external monitoring and quality control.
Intermediate Practitioner	Broad range of core knowledge with some depth. Ability to interpret and reflect on information .Well – developed range of practical skills.	Ability to carry out varied range of tasks in a limited range of different contexts.	Responsibility for own actions under direction. Some responsibility for quality of services within prescribed guidelines.
Experienced Practitioner	Broad range of core knowledge with greater depth. Ability to acquire specialist theoretical knowledge in one area. Ability to access, evaluate, compare and interpret information. Well - d e v e l o p e d range of skills and ability to employ in complex non-routine situations.	Ability to select from a broad range of skills appropriate to context . Present information to audience.	Operate with full autonomy with b road guidance/ e v a l u a t i on .Responsibility for quality of services in accordance with specified standard s. Limited responsibility for work of others
Advanced Practitioner	In-depth understanding of comprehensive body of knowledge. Expertise in particular area of Knowledge. Generate responses, demonstrating some innovation, to challenging situations. Analyse, evaluate and interpret a wide range of information.	Perform effectively in a wide range of contexts involving creative and non-routine activities. Use judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources.	Full autonomy and responsibility for own for actions and those of others. Responsibility for meeting required quality standards.

Expert Practitioner	Mastery of complex theoretical knowledge. Ability to critically evaluate knowledge, concepts, and practice. Expertise in research, policy development.	Apply diagnostic and creative skills in a wide range of situations. Engage in planning, policy development, and management. Engagement in research, publication and dissemination of knowledge and skills	Complete autonomy in professional activities. Responsibility for achieving personal and group outcomes. Accountability for all decision making

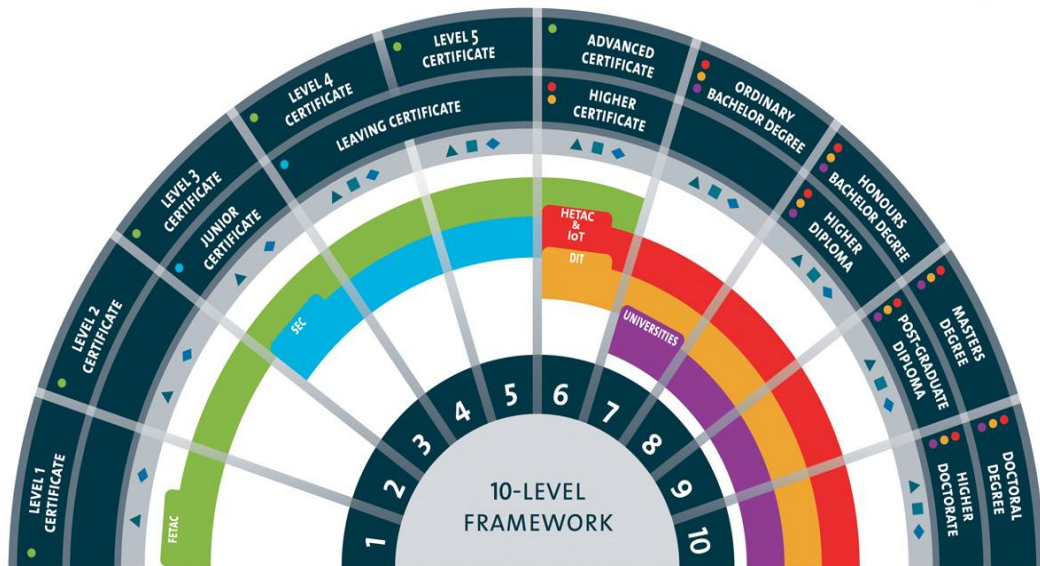**Appendix 18: National Framework of Qualifications Ireland (www.nfq.ie)**

Framework Levels

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence i.e what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning. It includes learning from the very initial stages to the most advanced stages and all such learning may be achieved in schools or colleges at work or in the home or community.

Award Type

At each level of the NFQ there will be at least one award-type. Some award types fulfil a broader range of purposes and are therefore labelled major award-types. Other more limited or specialised learning can be recognised by minor, supplemental or special purpose award-types. This gives the learner the freedom to build their qualifications in ways that suits their needs. As well as this ten level structure, the NFQ includes different classes or categories of award types.

National Awarding Bodies

An awarding body is a national body that has the power to give you a qualification in order to recognise your learning. There are a number of national awarding bodies that have their awards included in the framework. However many other professional bodies or UK awarding bodies have had their awards in the NFQ.