



An Roinn Caiteachais  
Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe  
Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform

# Prevention & Early Intervention Series, Focussed Policy Assessment No.5

## Early Learning & Childcare

Fiachra Kennedy and Mary Clarke  
Prevention & Early Intervention Unit

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This paper has been prepared by staff in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. The views presented in this paper are those of the author alone and do not represent the official views of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Under *A Programme for a Partnership Government*, the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform has established a Prevention and Early Intervention Unit (PEIU). The focus of the PEIU's work is on prevention and early interventions that can improve the life outcomes of children as well as the quality of life of older people dealing with long term conditions such as chronic illness; which the PEIU is locating within the context of population health.

There is a strong common-sense appeal of such interventions; most people are familiar with the idiom that "prevention is better than cure". However, effective prevention and early interventions rely on both knowing what to do (scientific understanding of cause and effect) and being in a position to act (the capacity of the government to intervene).

The PEIU is undertaking a series of Focussed Policy Assessments on key prevention and early interventions supported by public resources. The approach is to describe each intervention by following a common structure:

- *Rationale* for the intervention;
- *Public resources* provided to support the delivery of the intervention;
- *Outputs and services* provided; and
- *Achievements* of the intervention relative to its stated goal.

As a whole, this series of descriptive reports will provide the evidential base for a thematic consideration of prevention and early interventions in Ireland.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

How a child develops is influenced by a broad multiplicity of factors. While a child's home and family context has the most significant impact, external factors can also be important either in terms of supporting protective factors or in some cases mitigating risks.

The focus of this report is on government policies in the areas of early learning and childcare.<sup>2</sup> However, this report adopts an approach that is broader than that defined by the EU Quality Framework, and in particular its focus on "from birth to compulsory primary school age".<sup>3</sup> The policies included within the scope of this paper are not simply those that focus on infants and pre-school children but also includes those that are concerned with children of "school going" age. Childcare for this cohort has become an increasingly salient issue in Irish society; an issue government policy has given increased focus to over the last decade or so. As exemplified in both *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*<sup>4</sup> and *First 5*<sup>5</sup>, policy in this area has been moving toward a more integrated and holistic understanding of early learning and childcare. Those charged with designing and implementing such policies are faced with the challenge of trying to achieve a number of different aims: promote the optimal development for all children; narrow the gap in attainment between more and less advantaged children; enable parents to prepare for a return to paid employment by participating in training, education and other activation measures; and support families in making work pay and to reduce poverty.<sup>6</sup>

Over the last couple of decades there have been a number of landmark initiatives in the area of early learning and childcare. (See Box 1.) In particular, the introduction of the Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) Programme has been regarded as transforming policy in that it has contributed to increased participation rates and has shifted the focus from the provision of places to the impact of early learning and childcare experience on children. The developments in early learning and childcare reflect a recognition of the critical importance of high quality early learning and childcare. As McKeown et al. (2015: 246) have observed it is well established that the beneficial and lasting effects on children of pre-school age are only produced when it is of high quality.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Pianta et al. (2009: 49-50) have concluded

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<sup>2</sup> It should be acknowledged that there is a wide range of other government policies that also seek to shape such contexts (e.g. housing, health, education, reducing risk of poverty and social exclusion).

<sup>3</sup> European Commission. 2018. *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems*. COM(2018) 271 final.

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:05aa1e50-5dc7-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:05aa1e50-5dc7-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs. 2014. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People 2014-2020*.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs. 2018. *First 5. A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019-2028*.

<sup>6</sup> Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) on Future Investment in Early Years and School-Age Care and Education. 2015. *Report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland: 7*.

<sup>7</sup> McKeown, K., T. Haase and J. Pratschke. 2015. 'Determinants of child outcomes in a cohort of children in the Free Pre-School Year in Ireland, 2012/2013'. *Irish Educational Studies*. Vol.34 (3): 245-263.

that 'there is no evidence whatsoever that the average preschool program produces benefits in line with what the best programs produce'.<sup>8</sup>

In *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the Government has put *early intervention* into action through investment in early learning and childcare, including maintaining and extending free pre-school and implementing measures to support and regulate improvements to the quality of early learning and childcare services.

More recently, *First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*, identifies positive play-based early learning as one of four high level goals and identifies a range of actions to address affordability, accessibility and quality of early learning and childcare services.

The purpose of this report is to describe *early learning and childcare* in Ireland in terms of its rationale, the public resources provided, the services delivered and the results achieved. This is one of a series of descriptive reports that taken together will inform a thematic consideration of prevention and early interventions in Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pianta, R.C., W.S. Barnett, M. Burchinal and K.R. Thornburg. 2009. 'The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned with the Evidence Base, and What We Need to Know'. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. Vol.10 (2): 49-88.

<sup>9</sup> In drafting this report, the authors only considered publically available information and did not have access to any considerations that might be underway as to how the programmes considered could be developed. As noted this report is part of a series of reports that taken together will inform a thematic consideration of prevention and early interventions in Ireland. As such, within this overall approach the individual reports are not evaluations of the programmes considered and do not seek to arrive at any conclusions or make any recommendations.

### *Box 1 - Brief Summary of Key Early Learning & Childcare Policy Developments*

Establishment of the Rutland Street project - to support the educational development of pre-school children from a disadvantaged area (1969).

Implementation of the Early Start Pre-School Programme in 40 primary schools in areas of urban disadvantage to support pre-school children (1994/95).

Child Care (Pre School Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Pre School Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1997.

Establishment of the Pre-school Inspectorate (1996).

Publication of Ready to Learn, White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999).

Publication of National Childcare Strategy (1999).

Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) (2000-2006).

Publication of Our Children – Their Lives: The National Children’s Strategy (2000-2010) and establishment of the National Children’s Office to implement this strategy.

National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) (2006-2013).

Establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (2006).

Child Care (Pre- School Services) Regulations 2006.

Publication of Síolta (National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) (2006).

Introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement (2006) - a monthly payment to assist parents in accessing early learning and childcare in the private market.

Introduction of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCS) (2008) - subsidy to parents on low incomes to access early learning and childcare - only available in disadvantaged areas through community providers.

Publication of Aistear (National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) (2009).

Introduction of additional early learning and childcare subsidies through both the private and community providers under the Training and Employment Childcare Programmes (i.e. the Childcare Employment and Training Support Programme (2010), the After-School Childcare Programme (2013) and the Community employment Childcare (CEC) Programme (2014)). These Programmes provide subsidised early learning and childcare for some parents participating in eligible education and training courses and Community Employment schemes, and includes an after-school programme for certain categories of working parents.

Introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme (2010) - providing children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school.

Establishment of the Department of Children & Youth Affairs (2011).

Establishment of Tusla – Child & Family Agency (2014).

Establishment of Better Start, National Early Years Quality Development Service (2014) to establish a cohesive approach to quality across the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in Ireland.

Publication of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.

Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland (2015).

Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Supporting Access to the ECCE Programme for Children with a Disability (2015).

Introduction of Education-Focussed Inspections (2016)

Introduction of Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) (2016)

Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2016

Extension of the ECCE Programme to allow children to avail of free pre-school from the age of 2 years and 8 months until they enter primary school (2016).

Policy Paper on Development of a New Single Affordable Childcare Scheme (2016)

Extension of Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCS) to private providers (2016).

Action Plan on School Age Childcare (2017).

Extension of the ECCE Programme to allow children to avail of two years of free pre-school before they enter primary school (2018).

Affordable Childcare Scheme Act (2018).

Introduction of a universal early learning and care subsidy for children under 3 and increases in subsidies provided under existing programmes (2017).

Pathway to a Quality Support and Assurance System for Childminding in Ireland, Report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector (2018).

The In-School and ELC Therapy Support Demonstration Project (2018-19).

The identification of early learning and childcare as a national policy objective in Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework 2018-2027 (2018) with €250 million earmarked.

Publication of First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 (2018)

Launch of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (2019).

## Rationale

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of the main justifications for government interventions in early learning and childcare. The evidence from Ireland and elsewhere suggests that early learning and childcare policies can contribute to improved outcomes for both children and their families.

For children, such policy initiatives can complement the central role of the family in a child's development, in particular impacting on their personal and social development, supporting their initial and subsequent experiences of formal learning, and ultimately impacting on their future employability.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of children's families, early learning and childcare policies, including those that support after-school childcare, can have beneficial impacts on both the level and extent of labour market participation and consequently on household income and the affordability of early learning and childcare.

## Children's Outcomes

While parents are the primary educators of their children, and parent-child interaction is the most important protective factor for a child's longer term development, participation in high quality early learning and childcare has the potential to make a considerable difference to children's futures. In addition to ensuring the provision of high quality early learning and childcare, in designing policies in this area it is important to be cognisant of how the impact of such interventions can vary depending on a variety of other factors such as the age of the child, the duration of care (i.e. the number of hours per week) and the setting in which the service is provided.

McKeown et al. (2015: 246) have summarised the economic rationale as one in which investment in the early years provides a good return to public funds in terms of the lifetime benefits to individuals and society relative to the opportunity cost of not making this investment. That said, they recognise that the strength of the economic argument rests more on the benefits to disadvantaged children since that is where the biggest economic gains and cost savings arise,<sup>11</sup> and the central importance of having a high quality early learning and childcare if the investment is to produce beneficial and lasting effects on children. Similarly, the European Commission (2011) has highlighted that policy in this area is not simply about providing places as the most successful systems also provided high-quality early learning and care. Quality of such services was based on effective curricular frameworks, competent staff and governance and funding arrangements that were necessary to delivering them.

## Cognitive Outcomes

Language and non-verbal reasoning are core elements of cognitive development in children. Research in this area often focuses on skills associated with problem solving, communications and vocabulary as well as more formal skills in mathematics and reading. As such then

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<sup>10</sup> European Commission. 2011. *Early Childhood Education and Care - Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*. COM(2011) 66 final: 1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0066&from=EN> Accessed: 8 October 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Heckman, J. 2011. 'The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education'. *American Educator*. Spring: 31-36.

cognitive development is important for children's future educational achievements and their subsequent life outcomes (e.g. employment, income and health).<sup>12</sup>

Cognitive ability is held to be more adaptable early in the life cycle.<sup>13</sup> The evidence suggests being able to access high quality early learning and childcare services is important in terms of achieving better cognitive and language development amongst young children aged three years and older and that doing so will have a positive impact on their ability to acquire skills later in life.<sup>14</sup> The evidence suggests that while the benefits from high quality early learning and care provision are broadly universal, disadvantaged and vulnerable children benefit most, particularly those who have experienced a poor home learning environment in the early years, and that these gains are most likely in settings with a diverse mix of young children.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there is also evidence that suggests that these cognitive gains can persist into early adolescence and that such effects are again more notable for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>16</sup>

### Gross and Fine Motor Skill Development

Children's fine and gross motor skills develop during infancy and early childhood. Fine motor skills are important for a range of school related tasks (e.g., turning pages of a book and holding a pencil) and self-care tasks (e.g., buttoning a coat). Children's academic progress is supported by how well children acquire and become proficient in these skills. The development of gross motor skills (e.g. walking, running, throwing, kicking) are important for their social and physical progress.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McGinnity, F., H. Russell and A. Murray. 2015. *Non-Parental Childcare and Child Cognitive Outcomes at age 5: Infant Cohort. Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children*. Dublin: Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs.

<sup>13</sup> It has been noted that while many early learning interventions occur relatively early in the life of a child, such interventions are not early with respect to brain development. (Shonkoff, J.P. 2011. 'Protecting Brains, Not Simply Stimulating Minds'. *Science*. Vol.333: 982-983.)

<sup>14</sup> Doyle, O. 2012. *Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation: an Experimental Evaluation of an Early Childhood Intervention*, UCD Geary Institute Discussion Paper Series, Geary WP2012/12; Heckman, J.J. 2008. 'Schools, skills and synapses'. *Economic Inquiry*, Vol. 46 (3): 289-324.

<sup>15</sup> Gambaro, L., K. Stewart and J. Waldfogel (eds). 2014. *An Equal Start? Providing Quality Early Education and Care for Disadvantaged Children*. Bristol: Policy Press; Sylva, K., A. Stein, P. Leach, J. Barnes and L.-E. Malmberg. 2011. 'Effects of early child-care on cognition, language, and task-related behaviours at 18 months: an English study', *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*. Vol.29 (1): 18-45; Sylva, K., E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford and B. Taggart. 2004. *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Early Primary Years*. London: DfES.

<sup>16</sup> Sylva et al., 2004; Sylva, K., E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford and B. Taggart. 2012. *Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 project (EPPSE 3-14) – Final Report from the Key Stage 3 Phase: Influences on students' development from age 11-14*. London: DfES; Vandell, D.L., J. Belsky, M. Burchinal, N. Vandergrift and L. Steinberg. 2010. 'Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD study of early child care and youth development'. *Child Development*. Vol.81 (3): 737-756; Belsky, J., D. Vandell, M. Burchinal, K. Clarke-Stewart, K. McCartney, M. Owen and NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. 2007. 'Are there long-term effects of early child care?' *Child Development*. Vol.78: 681-701; Melhuish, E.C., B Taggart, L. Quinn, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford and K. Sylva. 2004. *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report. A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004*. London: The Institute of Education; Melhuish, E.C. 2003. *A Literature Review of the Impact of Early Years Provision on Young Children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds*. London: National Audit Office; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. 2002. 'Direct and indirect influences of child care quality on young children's development'. *Psychological Science*. Vol.13: 199-206.

<sup>17</sup> Doherty, J. and M. Hughes. 2009. *Child Development: Theory and Practice 0-11*. Essex: Pearson.

The development of fine and gross motor skills is in part associated with genetics, in particular, the development of brain and body capacities. However, environmental factors can also contribute to the development of motor skills. The quality of the early learning and childcare environment can influence the development of these skills in particular the provision of structured pedagogical activities, access to and manipulation of a wide range of materials and plenty of space for play and structured physical activities.<sup>18</sup>

## Social, Emotional and Behavioural Outcomes

As children grow they become better able to control their feelings and behaviour.<sup>19</sup> Social development includes skills that support a child in their social interactions (e.g. pro-social skills such as co-operation and empathy). How a child interacts with others and behaves is strongly tied to their emotional development. A crucial aspect of emotional self-regulation is 'effortful control' which 'involves the child's ability to inhibit a powerful behavioural response and to respond with a more appropriate behaviour'.<sup>20</sup> While older children are better able to control their feelings and behaviour (for instance, children over the age of three years compared with younger children), some may experience difficulties and these may be expressed in a child's outward behaviour (disruptive, hyperactive and aggressive behaviours) or internalised behaviour (withdrawn, anxious and depressed behaviours).<sup>21</sup> As Sammons et al. (2012: 1) have observed:

The social-behavioural development of young people is important in its own right because it contributes to well-being, but also because it can influence current and future academic achievement, and shape developmental pathways.<sup>22</sup>

While the evidence suggests that children's socio-emotional development is influenced by factors associated with the home (e.g. maternal characteristics, family type and size, and the level of mother-child conflict),<sup>23</sup> external factors can also influence socio-emotional

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<sup>18</sup> Venetsanou, F. and A. Kambas. 2010. 'Environmental factors affecting preschoolers' motor development'. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. Vol.37: 319-327; Berk, L. 2008. *Infants, Children and Adolescents*. Boston MA: Pearson; Giagazoglou, P., O. Karagianni, M. Sidiropoulou and K. Salonkidis. 2008. 'Effects of the characteristics of two different preschool-type setting on children's gross motor development.' *European Psychomotricity Journal*. Vol.1 (2): 54-60; Waelvelde, H., W. Peersman, M. Lenoir, B. Smits Engelsman and S. Henderson. 2008. 'The movement assessment battery for children: Similarities and differences between 4-and-5-year-old children from Flanders'. *Paediatric Physical Therapy*. Vol.20 (1): 30-38; Barros, K.M., A.G. Fragoso, A.L. Oliveria, J.E. Cabral-Filho. 2003. 'Do environmental influences alter motor abilities acquisition? A comparison among children from day-care centers and private schools'. *Arquivos de Neuropsiquiatria*. Vol.61 (2-A): 170-175; Rule, A.C. and R.A. Stewart. 2002. 'Effects of practical life materials on kindergartners' fine motor skills'. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. Vol.30 (1): 9-13.

<sup>19</sup> Hinshaw, S.P. 2008. 'Developmental psychopathology as a scientific discipline: Relevance to behavioral and emotional disorders of childhood and adolescence' in T.P. Beauchaine and S.P. Hinshaw (eds.), *Child and adolescent psychopathology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, Inc: 3-26.

<sup>20</sup> Greene, S., M. Morgan, C. McCrory and S. McNally. 2014. *Review of the Literature Pertaining to the Second Wave of Data Collection with the Infant Cohort at Three Years*. Dublin: Department of Children & Youth Affairs: 38.

<sup>21</sup> Greene et al., 2014; Gialamas, A., M.N. Mittinty, M.G. Sawyer, S.R. Zubrick and J. Lynch. 2015. 'Time spent in different types of childcare and children's development at school entry: an Australian longitudinal study'. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 100: 226-232.

<sup>22</sup> Sammons, P., K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, I. Siraj-Blatchford, B. Taggart, D. Draghici, R. Smees and K. Toth. 2012. *Influences on students' development in Key Stage 3: Social-behavioural outcomes in Year 9, Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE 3-14)*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

<sup>23</sup> Fahey, T., P. Keilthy, and E. Polek. 2012. *Family Relationships and Family Well-Being: A Study of the Families of Nine Year-Olds in Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin and The Family Support

development. The *quality* of early learning and childcare has been shown to be directly related to social and behavioural development and that beneficial outcomes can persist to age 14 years.<sup>24</sup> However, the *quantity* of non-parental care can have a negative impact as evidence suggests that young children who have spent long hours in centre-based early learning and childcare settings are more likely to exhibit behavioural problems (though not to clinical levels) than those who have spent fewer hours, and that these problems can persist through to adolescence (e.g. greater risk taking, impulsivity).<sup>25</sup>

### Quality of Early Learning & Childcare

While the focus of policy is often on improving access to early learning and childcare, it is clear from international research that quality matters most in determining whether or not early learning and childcare has a beneficial and persistent impact on a child's development.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the OECD (2012: 9) has noted that early learning and childcare policy should give similar emphasis to improving quality:

Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.<sup>27</sup>

Kavanagh and Weir (2018: 69) in their study of educational achievement amongst children in urban DEIS primary schools state that:

Preschool education has been shown to have the potential to result in a range of short-, medium and long-term benefits for disadvantaged children who attend, but only if the preschool experience is of high quality and geared towards the needs of the children for whom it caters.<sup>28</sup>

In the UK, The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project investigated the effects of preschool education and care on children's development for children aged 3-7 years old. With regard to the quality of early learning and childcare settings, the EPPE project's messages for policy and practice were:

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Agency; McAuley, C., and R. Layte. 2012. 'Exploring the Relative Influence of Family Stressors and Socio Economic Context on Children's Happiness and Well Being.' *Child Indicators Research*. Vol.5 (3): 523-545; Pratschke, J., T. Haase, and K. McKeown. 2011. 'Well-Being and the Family System - A Structural Equation Model of Individual, Relational and Contextual Influences'. *Growing Up in Ireland Conference*. Trinity College Dublin, 1 December 2011; Hennessy, E., and M. Donnelly. 2005. *After-School Care in Disadvantaged Areas: the perspectives of children, parents and experts*. Combat Poverty Agency Working Paper Series 05/01.

<sup>24</sup> Sylva et al., 2004 and 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Vandell et al., 2010; Belsky et al., 2007; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002; Harrison, L.J. 2008. 'Does child care quality matter? Associations between socio-emotional development and non-parental child care in a representative sample of Australian children'. *Family Matters* - Australian Institute of Family Studies. No.79: 14-25; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. 2003. 'Does amount of time spent in child care predict socio-emotional adjustment during the transition to kindergarten?' *Child Development*. Vol.74: 976-1005.

<sup>26</sup> Sylva et al., 2004, 2008 and 2012; Vandell et al., 2010; Harrison, 2008; Belsky et al., 2007; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> OECD. 2012. *Starting Strong III - A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>28</sup> Kavanagh, L., and S. Weir. 2018. *The evaluation of DEIS: The lives and learning of urban primary school pupils, 2007-2016*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

The observed quality of pre-school centres is related to better intellectual/cognitive and social/behavioural development in children.

Settings that have staff with higher qualifications, especially with a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff, show higher quality and their children make more progress and better social/behavioural gains.<sup>29</sup>

The issue of quality early learning and childcare care is complex. While there is no internationally agreed concept of quality in these services, work commissioned by the European Commission (2014) has highlighted that high-quality services are associated with:

*Structural quality* - how the early learning and childcare system is designed and organised and are often aspects that can be regulated (though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated) (e.g. rules associated with the accreditation, the number of professionally trained staff, design of the curriculum, financing of provision, ratio of staff to children, children are treated fairly and in accordance with their individual needs, health and safety requirements);

*Process quality* - practice within an early learning and childcare setting and consists of what children actually experience (e.g. the role of play within the curriculum; relationships between (a) providers and children's families, (b) between staff and children and (c) between children; extent to which care and education is provided in an integrated way; the day-to-day pedagogic practice of staff). These experiences can have an influence on children's well-being and development; and

*Outcome quality* - the benefits for children, families, communities and society. Children's outcomes include measures of emotional, moral, mental and physical development; children's social skills and preparation for further learning and adult life; children's health and their school readiness.<sup>30</sup>

In addition it is also important to have in place a robust quality assurance regime to ensure the structural quality, process quality and outcome quality are being achieved.

## Early Learning Stages: Continuity and Transitions

In order for children to build relationships with their caregivers and peers, there is a need for stability both within the early learning and childcare setting and across the day. Multiple or changing arrangements can have a negative impact on young children in that they may find the transitions stressful and are not provided with adequate time to develop relationships.

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<sup>29</sup> Sylva, K., E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford and B. Taggart. 2004. *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*. London: DfES: 56. See also: Englund, M., B. White, A.J. Reynolds, L. Schweinhart and F.A. Campbell. 2014. 'Health outcomes of the Abecedarian, Child-Parent Center and High-Scope Perry Preschool Programs'. In A.J. Reynolds, A.J. Rolnick, and J.A. Temple (Eds.). *Health and education in early childhood: Predictors, interventions and policies*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Mathers, S., N. Eisenstadt, K. Sylva, E. Soukakou and K. Erekly-Stevens. 2014. *Sound Foundations: A Review of the Research Evidence on Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care for Children under Three. Implications for Policy and Practice*. London: Sutton Trust. Schweinhart, L.J., J. Montie, Z. Xiang, W.S. Barnett, C.R. Belfield and M. Nores. 2005. *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*. Michigan: High/Scope Press.

<sup>30</sup> Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (WGECEC) under the auspices of the European Commission. 2014. *Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. [http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

While there is some evidence that exposure to a diverse range of settings, adult caregivers, and peer groups may promote children's social skills<sup>31</sup>, continuity and stability within an early learning and childcare setting is seen as important with the evidence suggesting that it is associated with more sensitive care-giving and more positive child-caregiver interactions.<sup>32</sup>

Byrne and O'Toole's (2015: 12) review of the literature has highlighted the importance of the age at which a young child commences non-parental early learning and childcare<sup>33</sup>: some evidence suggests that non-parental early learning and childcare begun prior to three years of age can have positive effects<sup>34</sup> but other evidence points to negative effects of early maternal work<sup>35</sup> with these being more pronounced for full-time employment than part-time employment<sup>36</sup>.

The realities of day-to-day life mean that children encounter continuity and change. The transition to primary school is a particular milestone for young children and can be a time of potential challenge and stress for children and their families. The experiences of transition to school and between educational levels can be a critical factor for children's educational performance and development.<sup>37</sup> For young children, early learning and childcare can provide an opportunity to prepare them for moving on to primary education. Positive transitions

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<sup>31</sup> Provost, M. 1994. 'Day care and social competence in preschoolers: Continuity and discontinuity among family, teachers, and peer contributions'. In A. Vyt, H. Bloch and M.H. Bornstein (eds.). *Early Child Development in the French Tradition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>32</sup> Morrissey, T.W. 2009. 'Multiple child-care arrangements and young children's behavioural outcomes'. *Child Development*. Vol.80 (1): 59-76; Morrissey, T.W. 2008. 'Familial factors associated with the use of multiple child-care arrangements'. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol.70 (2): 549-563; Bacharach, V.R., and A.A. Baumeister. 2003. 'Child care and severe externalizing behaviour in kindergarten children'. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Vol.23: 527-537; Ritchie, S. and C. Howes. 2003. 'Program practices, caregiver stability, and child-caregiver relationships'. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Vol.24: 497-516; Youngblade, L.M. 2003. 'Peer and teacher ratings of third and fourth-grade children's social behaviour as a function of early maternal employment'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. Vol.44: 477-488; Elicker, J., C. Fortner-Wood, and I.C. Noppe. 1999. 'The context of infant attachment in family child care'. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Vol.20: 319-336; Cummings, E.M. 1980. 'Caregiver stability and child care'. *Developmental Psychology*. Vol.16: 31-37.

<sup>33</sup> Byrne, D. and C. O'Toole. 2015. *The Influence of Childcare Arrangements on Child Well Being from Infancy to Middle Childhood*. A Report for TUSLA: The Child and Family Agency.

<sup>34</sup> Sylva et al., 2011; Hansen, K., and D. Hawkes. 2009. 'Early childcare and child development'. *Journal of Social Policy*. Vol.38: 211-239; Andersson, B.E. 1989. 'Effects of public day-care – A longitudinal-study'. *Child Development*. Vol.60: 857-866.

<sup>35</sup> Berger, L., J. Brooks-Gunn, C. Paxson and J. Waldfogel. 2008. 'First-year maternal employment and child outcomes: Differences across racial and ethnic groups'. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol.30: 365-387; Ruhm, C.J. 2004. 'Parental employment and child cognitive development'. *Journal of Human Resources*. Vol.39: 155-192; Han, W., J. Waldfogel and J. Brooks-Gunn. 2001. 'The effects of early maternal employment on later cognitive and behaviour outcomes'. *The Journal of Marriage and the Family*. Vol.63: 336-354.

<sup>36</sup> Brooks-Gunn, J., W.J. Han and J. Waldfogel. 2002. 'Maternal Employment and Child Cognitive Outcomes in the First Three Years of Life: The NICHD Study of Early Child Care'. *Child Development*. Vol.73 (4): 1052-1072; Waldfogel, J., W.J. Han and J. Brooks-Gunn. 2002. 'The effects of early maternal employment on child cognitive development'. *Demography*. Vol.39: 369-392; Baydar, N. and J. Brooks-Gunn. 1991. 'Effects of maternal employment and child-care arrangements on preschoolers' cognitive and behavioural outcomes: Evidence from the Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth'. *Developmental Psychology*. Vol.27: 932-945.

<sup>37</sup> Moss, P. (ed.) 2013. *Early Childhood and Compulsory Education Reconceptualising the relationship*. Abington: Routledge; Woodhead, M., and P. Moss. 2007. *Early Childhood Education in Focus 2: Transitions in the Lives of Young Children*. Walton Hall: The Open University; Niesel, R., and W. Griebel. 2005. 'Transition Competence and Resiliency in Educational Institutions.' *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*. Vol.1 (8).

between early learning and care and primary school are supported where there are strong connections between early learning and care settings and local schools including the exchange of information between the sectors and continuity of curriculum and teaching style.<sup>38</sup>

## Family Outcomes

Family economic security is an important determinant of positive child outcomes. In an effort to promote family economic security governments seek to increase the number of parents in employment and provide income supports and opportunities for further education and training.

*Better Outcomes, Bright Futures* committed to removing barriers to employment through increasing the affordability of quality and accessible early learning and childcare and after-school services, meeting EU targets and encouraging flexible working arrangements.<sup>39</sup> The provision of such services can also help tackle disadvantage by supporting parents in accessing and participating in education, training and employment.<sup>40</sup>

## Provision of Early Learning & Childcare

The challenge for policy makers is to develop policies that support parents to most appropriately meet their child's needs at their given stage of development.

The Marmot Review (2010: 98) has outlined how children benefit from parental care in the first year of life:

Sensitive and responsive parent-child relationships are associated with stronger cognitive skills in young children and enhanced social competence and work skills later in school. It is therefore important that we create the conditions to enable parents to develop this relationship during the child's critical first year.<sup>41</sup>

The European Commission (2011) has advocated a 'progressive universalism' vision of early learning and childcare that seeks to ensure all children have access to quality provision with additional supports provided for those children who may struggle to achieve equitable access, participation and outcomes. In Ireland, the IDG (2015: 53) has highlighted how children with special needs were not getting the supports they required at pre-school age to enable their participation in mainstream settings (challenges accessing services and lack of appropriate supports). In particular, another Inter-Departmental report, *Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability* (2015), has found that while 95% of eligible children are participating in the ECCE Programme, a small

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<sup>38</sup> Moss, 2013; Dumclaus, R. et al. 2014. *Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving: final report*. European Commission. Report no.EAC/17/2012; Nolan, A., C. Hamm, J. McCartin and J. Hunt, J. 2009. *Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School*. Melbourne: Victoria University; OECD. 2006. *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014: 90-91.

<sup>40</sup> OECD. 2016. *Who Uses Childcare? Background Brief on Inequalities in the use of Formal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Among Very Young Children*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>41</sup> Marmot, M. 2010. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010*.

number of children with a disability experience difficulties in accessing and sustaining an ECCE place.<sup>42</sup>

A challenge in many countries is how best to provide childcare for children of school going age. Parents who work full-time during the day need to source appropriate childcare for their school going children. A study by the European Commission compared the availability, affordability and quality of school-age childcare in different European countries and noted there is considerable variability in access and provision of services, whereby most countries relied on a “complicated mixture of informal and part-time arrangements, with a (high) unmet demand for formal out-of-school care services”.<sup>43</sup> The *Action Plan on School Age Childcare* has noted:

The preference to date of Irish working parents to opt for more informal care for their school age children through childminders must be acknowledged and policy must reflect the need for affordability and quality measures to extend to this part of the sector also.<sup>44</sup>

A number of initiatives have been introduced under the National Childminding Initiative (launched in 2002), including National Guidelines for Childminders, a small capital grant (€1,000) to improve the safety of the environment and quality of resources at the childminder’s home, and a Quality Awareness Programme.<sup>45</sup>

## Employment

Female employment can have important impacts in terms of supporting family incomes and protecting children and their families from poverty. The available evidence suggests that the more young children a woman has the less likely she is to be engaged in paid employment. That said, it is important to note that female employment is often dynamic in that women may work part-time after childbirth, then move to full-time work, and then take time out of the labour market when a second child is born.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The difficulties that the children encountered ranged from those who were unable to access the ECCE setting to those who were not achieving their potential due to deficits in appropriate supports. The report noted that while some supports were in place for pre-school children with a disability, there was inconsistency in the provision of supports across the country. The Inter-Departmental Group noted that 544 children with a disability had availed of the available exemptions for that session of the ECCE Programme. (Children with a disability are exempt from the upper age limit for the ECCE Programme and are also entitled to extend the Programme over two years on a pro-rata basis, e.g. attending services for 2 days a week in the first year followed by 3 days a week in the second year.) The report acknowledged that many children with a disability participate in the ECCE Programme without seeking exemptions or requiring supports. With regard to the broader context, Census 2016 recorded that there were just under 10,000 children aged 4 years or younger with a disability. Pobal (2017: 45) found that almost 7,000 children with a diagnosed disability attended an early years services. (This refers to all children attending early years services not just those availing of the ECCE programme.) Of these, almost half were reported as having a learning or intellectual disability, 14% as having a sensory impairment and 9% as having a physical disability.

<sup>43</sup> Plantenga, J. and C. Remery. 2013. *Childcare services for school age children: A comparative review of 33 countries*. European Commission – Directorate-General for Justice: Luxembourg.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs and Department of Education & Skills. 2017. *Action Plan on School Age Childcare*. Dublin: Department of Children & Youth Affairs: 4.

<sup>45</sup> Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector. 2018. *Pathway to a quality support and assurance system for childminding*. Volume 1: 15.

<sup>46</sup> Russell, H., F. McGinnity, E. Fahey and O. Kenny. 2018. *Maternal Employment and the Cost of Childcare in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI; OECD. 2011. *Doing Better for Families*. Paris: OECD

As Russell et al. (2018: 12-18) outline, analysing the impact of early learning and childcare costs on mothers' employment is complicated: early learning and childcare and mothers' employment is often a simultaneous decision; not all parents face the same market for early learning and childcare (some parents can use informal, low-cost or free non-parental care by relatives); preferences for parental care versus non-parental care (including preferences about relative versus centre-based). In their review of the literature they highlight a variety of studies that focus on the effects of the price of early learning and childcare on maternal labour supply. These studies have found that a reduction in costs and increased availability of early learning and childcare has positive impacts on mothers' participation and working hours while higher costs has a negative effect (though the negative effect is not large and is sometimes insignificant). The employment of lone mothers is more sensitive to early learning and childcare costs than is the case for married mothers as is the employment of low-income mothers than mothers with higher income; full-time employment is also more sensitive to early learning and childcare costs than part-time work. The evidence suggests that the effect may also be related to the levels of maternal employment in that reducing early learning and childcare costs and/or introducing subsidies may have less of an effect where there are already very high levels of maternal labour market participation/employment.<sup>47</sup>

### Cost of Early Learning and Childcare

The cost of early learning and childcare for parents in Ireland has been a salient issue for some time and comparative analyses of costs for parents have shown that such costs in Ireland are amongst the highest in the developed world.<sup>48</sup> Such costs are often cited as a barrier to female labour market participation and their impact can be particularly acute for low income families. The European Commission (2017: 6) has noted that 'the availability and cost of quality fulltime childcare present barriers to female labour market participation and hinder efforts to reduce child poverty'.<sup>49</sup>

### Poverty

When children are young, the costs associated with early learning and childcare (or the reduction in family income associated with employment breaks), can have a considerable impact on a household. These impacts can be experienced in terms of day-to-day living, the affordability of important services (e.g. medical, dental) and as a source of stress within the

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Publishing; OECD. 2007. *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life. A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>47</sup> Akgunduz, Y.E. and J. Plantenga. 2017. 'Child care prices and maternal employment: a meta-analysis'. *Journal of Economic Surveys*. Vol.32 (1): 118-133; Morrissey, T.W. 2017. 'Child care and parent labor force participation: a review of the research literature'. *Review of Economics of the Household*. Vol.15 (1): 1-24; Nollenberger, N. and N. Rodríguez-Planas. 2015. 'Full-time universal childcare in a context of low maternal employment: Quasi-experimental evidence from Spain'. *Labour Economics*. Vol.36: 124-136; Lundin, D., E. Mörk and B. Öckert. 2007. 'Do reduced child care prices make parents work more?'. Working Paper 2007. Uppsala, Sweden: The Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation; Tekin, E. 2007. 'Childcare Subsidies, Wages, and Employment of Single Mothers'. *The Journal of Human Resources*. Vol.42 (2): 453-487; Han, W. and J. Waldfogel. 2001. 'Child Care Costs and Women's Employment: A Comparison of Single and Married Mothers with Pre-School-Aged Children'. *Social Science Quarterly*. Vol.82 (3): 552-568.

<sup>48</sup> Russell et al., 2018; OECD, 2007.

<sup>49</sup> EU Commission. May 2017. *Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2017 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2017 Stability Programme of Ireland*. Com(2017) 507.

household. In economically insecure households, the negative impacts of childcare costs can be particularly acute.<sup>50</sup>

Poverty can have both immediate and long-lasting impacts on childhood. In particular, persistent poverty and social exclusion can limit and undermine opportunities for children's emotional, social and intellectual development. Policies to address early learning and childcare costs can have an important impact on children and families' risk of poverty. The evidence suggests that when a lone parent takes up employment the chances of experiencing consistent poverty fall by three-quarters and that maternal part-time employment can have a substantial reduction on child-specific deprivation.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 1, 67; Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014: 90; Watson, D., B. Maître and C.T. Whelan. 2012. *Understanding Childhood Deprivation in Ireland*. Social Inclusion Report No. 2. Dublin: ESRI; Connolly, S. and M. Gregory. 2008. 'Moving Down: Women's Part-Time Work and Occupational Change in Britain 1991-2001'. *The Economic Journal*. Vol.118: 52-76; Dex, S., H. Joshi, A. McCulloch and S. Macran. 1998. 'Women's employment transitions around childbearing'. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*. Vol.60 (1): 79-98.

<sup>51</sup> Watson et al., 2012; Indecon. 2017. *Indecon Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment since January 2012*. Dublin: DEASP and Indecon.

## Resources

In 2018, some €484.7m was allocated to the early learning and childcare within the Department of Children & Youth Affairs. Figure 1 describes how expenditure on the provision of the early learning and childcare programmes set out in Box 2 has developed over last few years.

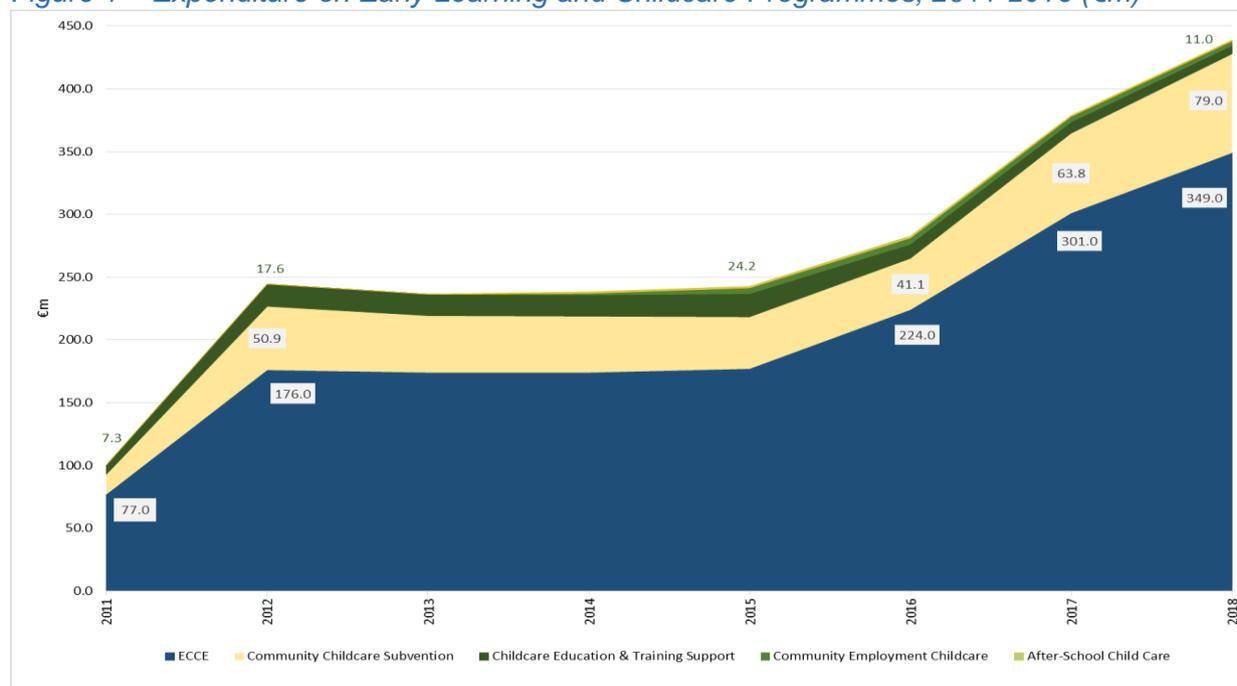
As is clear from Figure 1, a large share of the resources provided under these programmes is accounted for by the ECCE Programme. In 2018, some €349m was provided and of this €304m was allocated for ECCE capitation and a further €25m was provided for the AIM Programme. The remaining funding was allocated to provide for costs associated with administering the programme and other related supports. The increase in the cost of the ECCE Programme is in the main due to the expansion of the eligibility criteria for pre-school children as well as an increase in the capitation rates paid to providers.

The next largest share of overall expenditure on early learning and childcare is accounted for by the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme. In 2018, some €79m was provided and this is almost twice the amount spent in 2016. This increase is associated with the expansion of the CCS (see Box 2), in particular to introduction of a universal element.<sup>52</sup>

The allocations for the various programmes under the Training and Employment Childcare Programme account for a much smaller share of the overall allocation (2%).

While not included in Figure 1, it is worth noting that in 2018 some €8.4m was provided to support the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, €21.3m was provided to support the administration of the early learning and childcare programmes (non-ECCE), €9.4m to support the development of a quality early learning and childcare service and €6.9m for investment in the sector.

Figure 1 – Expenditure on Early Learning and Childcare Programmes, 2011-2018 (€m)



Source: Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

Note: Allocation in 2018, all other years are outturns.

<sup>52</sup> Lenihan et al., 2018: 11.

### Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) and Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

The ECCE Programme is a universal programme available to children from the age of 2 years and 8 months until they transfer to primary school. It is intended to provide children with the opportunity to benefit from a first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The programme spans 3 hours a day, for 5 days a week over 38 weeks a year. Children are entitled to two full years of this programme. All services which take part in the ECCE Programme must provide an appropriate pre-school educational programme that adheres to the principles of Aistear and Siolta, the national practice frameworks.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced in September 2016 to ensure that children with disabilities can avail of the ECCE programme, and that preschool providers can deliver an inclusive pre-school experience.

### Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCS)

The *Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCS)* is a targeted programme aimed at supporting low income parents to enable them to access reduced early learning childcare costs at participating services. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) provides a subvention payment for eligible children with the parents of the child paying the remainder of the costs. The child must be under the age of 15 years and not enrolled on any other D/CYA programmes and, in general, eligibility for CCS is dependent on the possession of a Medical Card and/or receipt of certain social welfare payments. The scheme is limited to providers registered with Tusla and can cover infant, preschool and afterschool places and incorporate a breakfast club.

The *Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCS Plus)* Programme is a targeted programme aimed at supporting low income parents (with the same eligibility criteria as CCS) to enable them to access reduced early learning and childcare costs at participating services. This Programme is open to private and community / not for profit providers.

The *Community Childcare Subvention Universal (CCSU)* is a recently introduced universal subsidy of up to €20 a week for children aged between 6 - 36 months (or until they qualify for ECCE) who are enrolled in Tusla-registered early learning and childcare service. It is intended to alleviate the cost of early learning and childcare for parents/guardians who do not qualify for the targeted subsidies.

The *Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (CCSR)* is a targeted programme aimed at supporting refugee children to access early learning and childcare at participating services.

Under the existing Community Childcare Subvention Programme access to free early learning and childcare is provided to children of families experiencing homelessness (CCSR(T)) as well as those transitioning from homelessness to permanent accommodation.

<sup>53</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these programmes see K. Lenihan, F. Kane and D. O'Callaghan. 2018. *Targeted Childcare Programmes – Social Impact Assessment Series*. Dublin: Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. <https://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SIA-Series-Targeted-Childcare-Programmes.pdf>

## Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Programmes

The *Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Programmes* sets out to support parents who attend eligible training courses and certain categories of parents returning to work through the provision of subsidised early learning and childcare places. Each of the TEC Programmes are geared to fulfil specific needs of parents.

The *Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) Programme* provides early learning and childcare to certain training course participants on approved courses. The duration of CETS corresponds with the start and end dates of the training course up to a maximum of 50 weeks per year. An eligible child must be under the age of 15 years on commencement of the programme.

The *After-School Child Care (ASCC) Programme* supports low income parents to return to work, by offering subsidised childcare places for children who are in primary school. The ASCC is available for a once off maximum of 52 weeks but the allowance does not need to be used consecutively. The Programme provides after school care for primary school children (and places can be approved on full day childcare for up to 10 weeks for school holidays). In some cases, where parents need childcare in the morning before school rather than after school, this can be arranged. However, places are limited and available on a first come first served basis.

The *Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme* provides early learning and childcare for children under the age of 13 years whose parents participate on Community Employment schemes and is coterminous with participation on CEC up to a maximum of 50 weeks per year.

## Affordable Childcare Scheme

The intention of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme is to replace the *Community Childcare Subvention Programmes* and *Training and Employment Childcare Programmes* by 2019 in order to provide more streamlined and user friendly public support of early learning and childcare costs.

## Outputs and Services

The purpose of this section is to describe the provision of early learning and childcare services in Ireland and the efforts that have been made to ensure the provision of high quality and affordable services.

### Utilisation of Various Types of Early Learning and Childcare

Up until the introduction of the ECCE Programme, parental care had been the dominant form of early learning and childcare from infancy through pre-school to middle childhood. In three out of five families, care provided by a parent / guardian was the main type of arrangement for pre-school children; it is worth noting that this was 70% amongst lone parent families. For about a tenth of families, centre-based early learning and childcare was the main type of arrangement for pre-school children.<sup>54</sup>

McGinnity et al. (2015: 44, 47) have noted that by age five, almost all of the children in the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (96 per cent) had participated in the ECCE Programme. They have also noted that just over one in five parents said they would not have been able to afford to send their child to preschool without the ECCE Programme. This was particularly so in the case of lone parents (36%), those in the lowest income quintile (36%) and amongst those who had “never worked” (42%).

While the *Growing Up in Ireland* Survey focuses on the study child at a particular point in time it provides a more refined understanding of early learning and childcare arrangements than earlier survey data. (See Figure 2.) The evidence suggests that the main type of arrangement changes as the child grows. For infants, parental care is the main form of childcare. Parents opt for a greater use of non-parental early learning and childcare for pre-school children (even at a time with the ECCE Programme was beginning to be implemented<sup>55</sup>). However, parental care again becomes the main type of arrangement as children commence primary school. It should also be noted that some parents rely on multiple types of early learning and childcare. Russell et al. (2018: 30-31) have found that about a seventh of children (14%) are in multiple types of arrangement at age three with more than half of these children attending a combination of centre-based and relative care (57%).

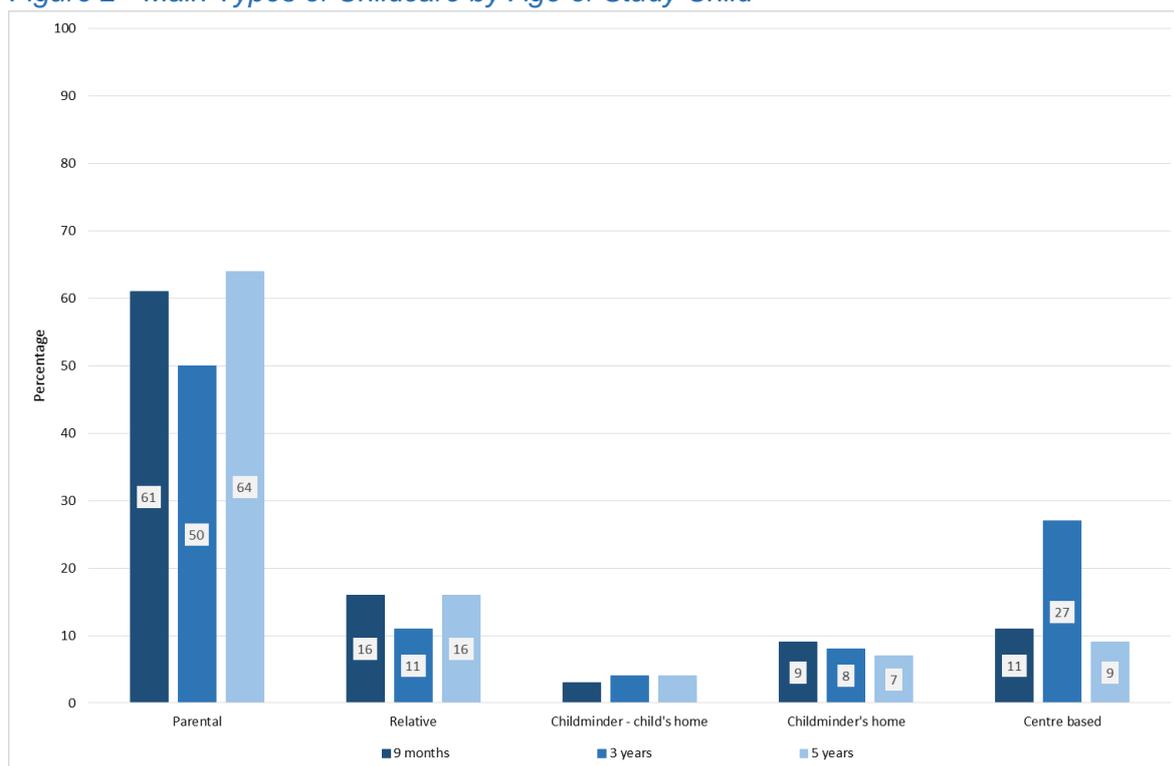
Byrne and O’Toole (2015: 19-20) have noted that by middle childhood (nine years) over three quarters are in parental care (only about 3% are in centre-based) but that some of these might be described as “latch-key” children (i.e. return from school to an empty house because parent(s) are at work).

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<sup>54</sup> Central Statistics Office. 2009. *Quarterly National Household Survey – Childcare*: 4; Central Statistics Office. 2006. *Quarterly National Household Survey – Childcare*: 8, 12.

<sup>55</sup> The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme was introduced in January 2010 shortly before the data-collection phase for the three-year old study children (December 2010-August 2011).

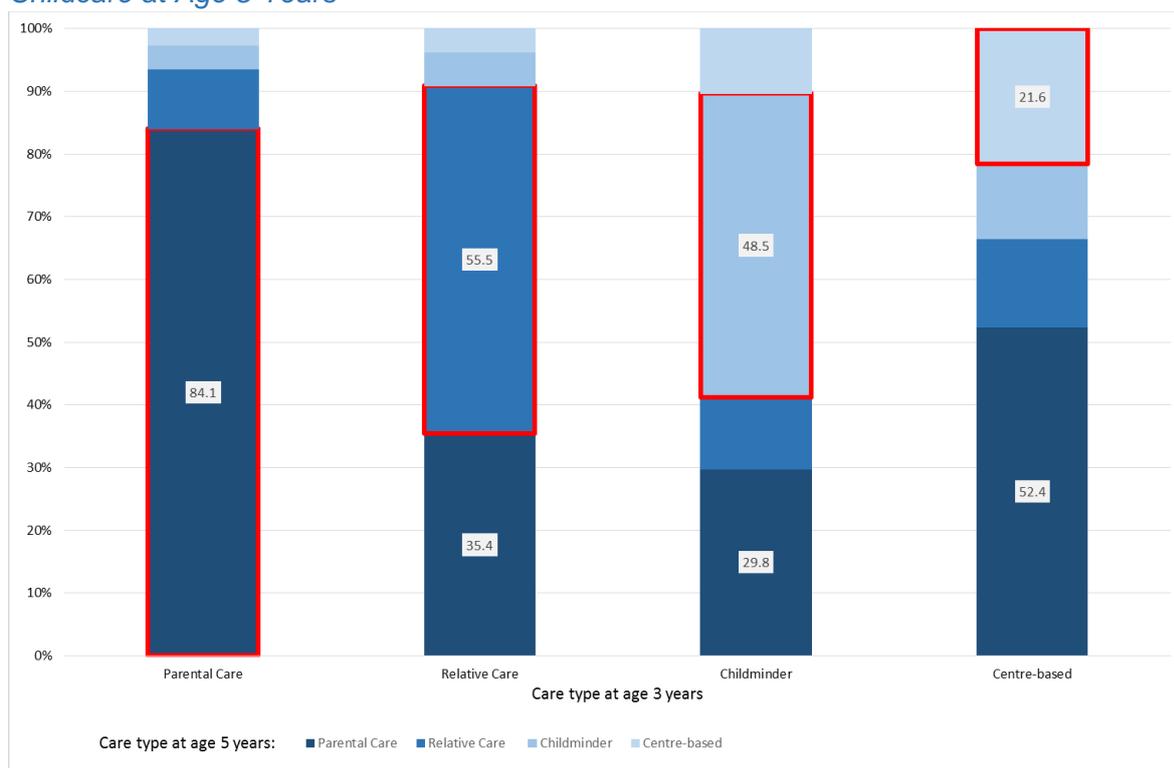
Figure 2 - Main Types of Childcare by Age of Study Child



Source: Russell et al., 2018: 30, 44 (*Growing Up in Ireland* - Wave 1 2008; Wave 2 2011 and Wave 3 2013)

In addition to providing details about the early learning and childcare arrangements of children at specific ages, *Growing Up in Ireland* also provides an opportunity to examine how children transition from one type of arrangement to another after they enter primary school. Figure 3 illustrates data presented by Russell et al. and shows that the likelihood of transitioning from one type of arrangement to another is associated with the type of early learning and childcare relied on at age three years though with an increased reliance on parental care. For instance, children who were in parental care at three years of age are very likely to remain in parental care after they commence primary school. On the other hand, only a fifth of children who were in centre-based arrangement at three years are likely to be in a centre-based arrangement at five years; instead, more than half of this cohort are likely to be in parental care after starting primary school. The type of early learning and childcare arrangements for around half of those who were in relative care or with a childminder at three years are likely to remain unchanged, and for those who do change, parental care is the next most likely option.

Figure 3 – Childcare Transitions from Care Arrangement at Age 3 Years to After-School Childcare at Age 5 Years



Source: Based on Table 3.9, Russell et al., 2018: 45 (*Growing Up in Ireland – Infant Cohort, Wave 2 2011 and Wave 3 2013, excluding children that had not started school by Wave 3 interview.*)

Figure 4 presents the average number of early learning and childcare hours consumed by Irish households in 2016. Households with pre-school children, on average, access a greater number of hours of early learning and childcare (27 hours) than those with primary school children (14 hours).

Data from *Growing Up in Ireland* shows that of pre-school children in non-parental care, children aged nine months (26.3 hours) spend on average slightly longer in non-parental care than those aged three years (25 hours).<sup>56</sup> For three year olds, the evidence suggests children in non-relative care spend on average 28 hours a week in non-parental care while those in centre-based early learning and childcare attend for an average of 24 hours a week with those in relative care spending 25 hours in non-parental care.<sup>57</sup>

Of those pre-school children who are participating on the ECCE Programme, three-quarters attend for no more than the 15 hours provided under the Programme. Of the remaining group who attend for additional hours in the centre, most of these attend for up to 15 more hours while about 8% of the total ECCE participants attend the centre for between 30 and 40 hours.<sup>58</sup>

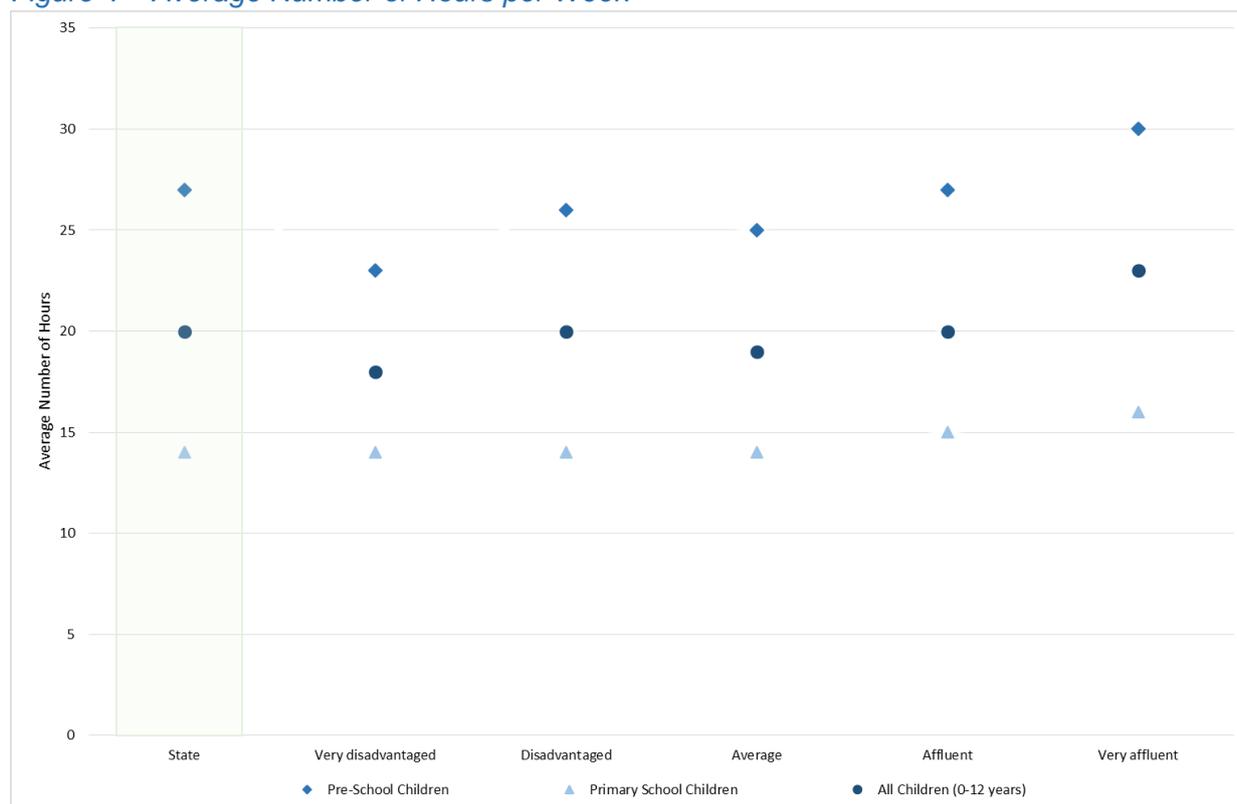
From Figure 4 it is also evident that the average number of early learning and childcare hours consumed is associated with the child’s background. Children from “very affluent” areas consume more than the average number of hours while those from “very disadvantaged” areas consume fewer than average hours.

<sup>56</sup> McGinnity et al., 2015: 40.

<sup>57</sup> Russell, H., O. Kenny and F. McGinnity. 2016. *Childcare, Early Education and Socio-Emotional Outcomes at Age 5: Evidence from Growing Up in Ireland study*. Dublin: ESRI (pages 37-38).

<sup>58</sup> McGinnity et al., 2015: 46-47.

Figure 4 – Average Number of Hours per Week



Source: CSO. 2017. *QNHS Childcare Quarter 3 2016*: Tables 7.

## Provision of Early Learning and Childcare Places

### Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) Programme

The ECCE Programme was explicitly intended to be educational and give increased recognition to early learning and care as essential supports for optimising children’s full potential. The goal of the ECCE programme is that pre-school children can reap the benefits of quality early learning and care experiences. As noted above, research shows that a person’s ability to acquire skills later in life can be enhanced by accessing high quality services that contribute to improved cognitive ability early in life.<sup>59</sup>

The European Commission has advocated a ‘progressive universalism’ vision of early learning and childcare under which all children should have access to quality provision with additional supports provided for those children who may struggle to achieve equitable access, participation and outcomes. The implementation of the ECCE Programme is in keeping with this vision as the vast majority of eligible children participate in the ECCE programme (96%).<sup>60</sup>

Under the ECCE Programme, providers are paid capitation for each enrolled child. (The programme is provided for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week for 38 weeks a year). Over the last couple of programme years, the total number of children on whose behalf the Department of Children & Youth Affairs paid capitation to providers has averaged in the summer term at

<sup>59</sup> For overviews of the research in this area see Doyle, 2012; Heckman, 2008; National Economic and Social Forum. 2005. *Early Childhood Care and Education*. NESF Report 31.

<sup>60</sup> Eligible children are those aged between 2 years & 8 months and 5½ (or start primary school).

about 119,000. This is a very large increase on the numbers participating in 2015/16 (74,108 children) and is a direct result of changes in the programme provision allowing children to avail of ECCE beyond one year.<sup>61</sup> Since September 2018, children qualify for two full years of free pre-school.

### Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a child-centred model of progressive supports designed to ensure that children with a disability can access the ECCE programme and as such is in keeping with the European Commission's vision of 'progressive universalism'. The key objective of AIM is to support pre-school providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that children with a disability can fully participate in quality pre-school education.<sup>62</sup> The AIM is implemented as a series of universal supports (Level 1 – 3) and as targeted supports (Levels 4 – 7). The universal supports are designed to promote and support an inclusive culture within pre-school settings by means of a variety of educational and capacity-building initiatives.

In its first year (2016/17), AIM provided 2,486 children with 4,760 targeted supports to ensure that they could fully participate in the ECCE programme. In its second year (2017/18), AIM provided 4,107 children with 6,618 targeted supports. In the current programme year (2018/19), AIM has provided 3,944 children with 5,481 targeted supports to date (9th November 2018).<sup>63</sup>

### Targeted / Universal Early Learning and Childcare Programmes

Lenihan et al. (2018: 11-12) have examined the total number of supported early learning and childcare places and noted that these have expanded significantly over the last couple of years. The data published by Pobal indicates that in 2017/18 almost 38,850 children availed of CCS/CCSPlus both in community and private facilities, almost 39,320 availed of CCSU supports and 4,655 availed of supports under TEC.<sup>64</sup> The increase has been predominantly driven by the expansion of the *Community Childcare Subvention* (CCS) programme while participation on *Training & Employment Childcare* (TEC) programmes has decreased, something that is likely to be associated with the improving economy and labour market.

Earlier it was noted that children of school going age are unlikely to avail of centre-based childcare. Lenihan et al. (2018: 13-16) have examined the age distribution of children who participated on targeted early learning and childcare programmes and found that it tends to be younger children (i.e. those aged around 5-8 years) who participate, even when the programme is available to children up to the end of primary school.

### Affordable Childcare Scheme

Although the introduction of the ECCE Programme represented a significant policy shift in Ireland, care for children under the age of three continued to be seen as the sole responsibility

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<sup>61</sup> Pobal, 2018: 37.

<sup>62</sup> "Support" is a description of the outputs the programme is providing rather than an articulation of the result or outcome that the programme is trying to achieve.

<sup>63</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

<sup>64</sup> Pobal, 2018: 37.

of parents and remained costly.<sup>65</sup> The Affordable Childcare Scheme represents a major policy initiative to address this issue.<sup>66</sup>

The Affordable Childcare Scheme was announced in October 2015 as part of Budget 2016 and funding was provided for the development of the scheme. Budget 2017 provided funding for the launch of the scheme but as it was not possible to implement it in full a number of interim measures were introduced (i.e. the universal childcare subsidy for children under three years of age and increased rates on the targeted schemes to bring them more in line with proposed rates under the Affordable Childcare Scheme).

It is intended that the Affordable Childcare Scheme will have both universal and targeted elements and will replace the existing targeted schemes with a new single scheme. Along with streamlining existing targeted schemes (the Scheme will be based on parental income and will be available to children aged between 6 months and 15 years), the aims of the Affordable Childcare Scheme are to promote a reduction in child poverty; enable positive child development outcomes; encourage labour market activation and lead to improved quality in the early learning and childcare sector.

*Box 3 – First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families<sup>67</sup>*

In November 2018, the Government published a ten year plan to support babies, young children and their families. The implementation of *First 5* will be overseen by the Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

There are five major areas of action in which the Strategy will drive change:

*Access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring.* In order to support children to spend more time with their parents, especially in the first year, *First 5* sets out plans to develop a new parental leave scheme. This will deliver extended entitlements to paid leave for both fathers and mothers.

*New developments in child health.* *First 5* sets out new measures to promote positive health behaviours and the mental health of babies, young children and their families, and to enhance the National Healthy Childhood Programme. A dedicated child health workforce focussed initially in areas of high population density and disadvantage will be introduced.

*A new model of parenting support.* *First 5* streamlines and improves existing parenting supports provided across a range of Government Departments and State Agencies. Accessible, high-quality information and guidance will be made available for parents to promote healthy behaviours, facilitate positive play-based early learning and create the conditions to form and maintain strong parent-child relationships. A continuum of parenting services – ranging from universal to targeted - including high-quality parenting programmes, will also be made available.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfe, T., B. O'Donoghue-Hynes, and N. Hayes. 2013. 'Rapid change without transformation: the dominance of a national policy paradigm over international influences on ECEC development in Ireland 1995-2012.' *International Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol.45: 191-205.

<sup>66</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 6.

<sup>67</sup> For further information on *First 5* see: <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/docs/EN/19-11-2018-Government-launches-First-5-A-Whole-of-Government-Strategy-for%2%A0-Babies-Young-Children-and-their-Families/5037.htm> Accessed: 4 December 2018.

*Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system. First 5 builds on the very significant developments in ELC over recent years and seeks to further improve affordability, accessibility and quality. Measures include introducing the Affordable Childcare Scheme, moving progressively towards a graduate-led professional early learning and childcare workforce and the extension of regulations and supports to all paid childminders and school-age childcare services.*

*A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty. First 5 identifies new measures that will address poverty in early childhood, including expanded access to free and subsidised ELC, extensions to the Warmth and Well-Being and Warmer Homes Schemes and the introduction of a meals programme and DEIS-type model for ELC settings.*

## Quality of Early Learning and Childcare

In Ireland, the national frameworks, *Síolta* (the quality framework) and *Aistear* (curriculum framework), inform and support the provision of high-quality early learning and childcare for children aged 0-6 years in all settings including centre-based care, childminders and primary schools. *Síolta* is the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early learning and childcare settings. *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland and addresses issues related to supporting children's wellbeing, learning and development and provides a comprehensive set of information, guidance and practical tools.

Since the introduction of the ECCE Programme, participating services have been required to adhere to *Síolta* and *Aistear* because of the importance of quality. *Síolta* and *Aistear* give guidance for providers on how to support children's development and well-being by providing frameworks within which a range of pedagogical approaches can be adopted rather than setting a prescriptive approach which would not be appropriate for this age cohort.

## Workforce

The range of qualifications of those working in early learning and childcare is diverse. The Department of Children & Youth Affairs has sought to improve the qualifications of those working in the sector through the introduction of regulatory and contractual qualification requirements, investment in education and training and incentivising the employment of graduates. In particular, the regulations provide for a mandatory minimum qualification for all early learning and care staff working with pre-school children of Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications. (That said, there is currently no entry qualification requirement for most childminders or school-age childcare staff.)

## Regulation

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory Regulator of early learning and childcare services in Ireland (it has a responsibility for regulating and inspecting all pre-school services and will soon introduce regulation and inspection of school-age services). While services are assumed to be compliant with the current regulations, and can be inspected against any of the regulations, the main focus of inspections has been within the four broad areas of: governance; health, welfare and development of the child; safety; and premises and facilities. The role of the Inspectorate is to promote the quality, safety and appropriate care of children by robust inspection of the sector in order to safeguard children against harmful

practices, ensure minimum standards are met, support the translation of quality standards into practice, provide parents and the public with an assurance that services are of a consistent quality, and set benchmarks against which service providers can develop, enhance and maintain services for children.<sup>68</sup>

At end-2017, 4,484 services were registered with Tusla. Over the last two years for which data is available, about 2,000 of these were inspected each year (45%); this is less than the 2,303 inspections that were carried out in 2015 (52% of registered Early Years Services), which may reflect reform of the structure of the inspectorate and the introduction of new regulations since 2015.<sup>69</sup>

The Department of Education & Skills inspectorate has responsibility for evaluating the quality of education provision of the ECCE programme (as well as evaluating the quality of education provision in primary school). By 1 November 2018, the Department had published, 1,043 Early Years Education-focussed Inspection reports. These inspections examine the quality of educational provision in early learning and childcare settings participating in the ECCE Programme and have a developmental focus looking at the quality of children's learning experiences and achievements and how this is supported in settings by management and leadership, curricular provision, the learning environment, adult-child interactions and the use of play based approaches.

*First 5* sets out a commitment to pilot education focused inspections in early learning and care settings for children under 3 years of age.

### Regulation of Childminders

As has been outlined above, private childminders represent an important source of provision, particularly for infants, but also for older children.<sup>70</sup> The IDG (2015: 52) report has noted that many of the children who are too young for the ECCE Programme are receiving care outside of formal centre-based settings and that this care is unregulated and not subject to any assessment as to quality, appropriateness or safety. The report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector (2018) ("the Working Group") has noted that evidence from other countries shows that there are thriving and growing childminding sectors in countries where there is a distinctive system for regulating and supporting childminders (e.g. France and Denmark). The key features of childminding that impact on the quality of the service to children and parents include the level of formal education of childminders, the availability of continuing relevant training for childminders, the adult/child ratio in the childminding setting and the existence of a government-sponsored registration / licensing regime.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Early Years Inspection service was introduced in 1997 (under Part VII of the Child Care Act 1991). The regulations were subsequently revised in 2006 placing a greater emphasis on the health, welfare and development of the child. In 2013, significant changes to the legislative basis for the supervision of early years services emerged from Part XII of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 and a revised set of regulations were introduced that placed a strong emphasis on the governance of early years services. (Tusla. 2016. *Tusla Annual Report 2016 of Tusla Child and Family Agency's Early Years Inspectorate*. Dublin: Tusla.)

<sup>69</sup> Tusla, 2016: 8; Tusla, 2018. *Quarterly Performance and Activity Data*.

<sup>70</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 8; Byrne and O'Toole, 2015; McGinnity, F., A. Murray and S. McNally. 2013. *Mothers' Return to Work and Childcare Choices for Infants in Ireland*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

<sup>71</sup> Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector. 2018. *Pathway to a quality support and assurance system for childminding*. Volume 1.

Both Russell et al. (2018: 8-9) and the Working Group (2018: 25) have noted that very few childminders in Ireland are registered<sup>72</sup>: by end-August 2017 there were 118 childminders registered with Tusla.<sup>73</sup> The Working Group has considered a number of options for sequencing the childminding sector to registration: a voluntary registration system with childminders' obligations relating primarily to Garda vetting and basic training with childminders being incentivised to register through access to public funding and quality supports; and a phased approach to registration and regulation to ensure that childminding services meet a tailored set of minimum regulatory standards.<sup>74</sup>

The Government has committed to extend regulation to all paid, non-relative childminders on a phased basis. A Childminding Action Plan that builds on the recommendations in the Working Group report is expected to be published shortly that will set out a pathway towards the wider regulation and support of childminders.

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<sup>72</sup> The Child Care Act 1991 exempted most childminders from regulation on the grounds that they care for three or fewer pre-school children, or for the children of only one family (in addition to their own).

<sup>73</sup> PQ41297/17 <http://www.parliamentary-questions.com/question/41294-17/>

<sup>74</sup> Working Group, 2018: 26-29.

## Goals and Achievements

In part, the increased emphasis on early learning and childcare policies is because these types of policies can contribute to improved outcomes for both children and their families. The purpose of this section is to set out the relevant available evidence. However, it is important to note that this section is simply setting out data for relevant metrics based on the literature; the “direction of travel”. This section should not be read as suggesting that any positive or negative developments are attributable to the programmes described in this report. To attribute causality to any one of these programmes would require a specific scientific study of the impact of each programme, a study that would be in a position to control for a wide range of other relevant factors.

## Children’s Outcomes

Participation in early learning and childcare has the potential to make a considerable difference to children’s futures. Such policy initiatives can complement the central role of the family in a child’s development.

## Cognitive Development

Language and non-verbal reasoning are core elements of cognitive development in children. The evidence suggests that being able to access high quality services is important in terms of achieving better cognitive and language development amongst young children aged three years and older.

In Ireland, Byrne and O’Toole (2015) have examined data from *Growing Up in Ireland* (Waves 1 and 2 of the infant cohort and Wave 1 of the child cohort). The cross-sectional data allowed them to examine separately for children aged nine months, three years and nine years the factors associated with the uptake of early learning and childcare and the influences on children’s physical, socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes. The longitudinal data from the infant cohort allowed them to examine the impact of early learning and childcare arrangements in infancy on outcomes for children as they progressed from nine months to age three years.

In Ireland, Byrne and O’Toole (2015: 46-52) have found that:

- At age three years:
  - *Children in relative care* had significantly greater naming vocabulary scores than children in other settings, and this association was found to persist into early childhood;
  - *Children who were in the care of a relative in infancy* performed better than their counterparts on naming vocabulary tests;
  - There was no association between type of arrangement in infancy and later cognitive development as measured through picture similarities tests.
- At age nine years:
  - No significant association between out-of-school childcare arrangements and math performance;
  - Amongst children who have the highest attainment in reading, children who attend centre based out-of school childcare were less likely to achieve higher scores in reading than children attending other out-of-school settings.

McGinnity et al. (2015) have examined three waves of data from *Growing Up in Ireland* (data collected on the same children in infancy in 2008/09, at age three in 2011 and age five in 2013). This longitudinal data allowed them to investigate the experience of non-parental care in early life and its associations with children's cognitive development at age five years.

In Ireland, McGinnity et al. (2015: 53-60, 65-66) have found that:

- At age five years:
  - The effects of early learning and childcare on cognitive outcomes were very small or not statistically significant after controlling for other factors;<sup>75</sup>
  - Instead, the evidence shows that economic and social disadvantage has a consistently negative influence on children's cognitive outcomes in early childhood.

Since 2007, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) has conducted evaluations of the School Support Programme (SSP) under DEIS on behalf of the Department of Education & Skills. The evaluation has involved four large-scale assessments of the reading and mathematics achievement of pupils at multiple grade levels in a representative sample of urban SSP primary schools. In the most recent evaluation, parents of pupils in Second and Third class were asked to indicate whether their children had attended pre-school and, if so, for how long. Over 90% of children in these classes had attended pre-school with around 37% having done so for two years. Children who attended pre-school for two years on average had higher scores in reading and mathematics and, even when controlling for other factors, pre-school attendance remained significantly associated with reading achievement.<sup>76</sup>

### Gross and Fine Motor Skill Development

Fine and gross motor skills develop during infancy and early childhood. The quality of the early learning and childcare environment can influence the development of these skills. The *Growing Up in Ireland* Survey included a number of measures of motor skills at age three years:

- Gross motor skills:
  - the primary caregiver was asked to report whether or not the child was able to cycle a tricycle or similar; and
  - interviewer observed whether or not the child was (a) able to stand on one leg and (b) throw a ball overhand;
- Fine motor skills:
  - manipulating jigsaw pieces;
  - holding a pencil in a pincer grip; and
  - copying a vertical line.

In Ireland, Byrne and O'Toole (2015: 36-40) have found that:

- At age three years:

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<sup>75</sup> McGinnity et al. (2015: 53-60) have found that a wide range of other child and family characteristics play a greater role in children's cognitive outcomes than non-parental childcare (e.g. children's birthweight, gender, number of older siblings, socio-emotional development, household income, interaction with grandparents, parenting practices and, in particular, the home learning environment (as measured by the number of books in the home and the learning activities the parents engage with)).

<sup>76</sup> Kavanagh and Weir, 2018: 69.

- There are positive but limited effects of *centre-based early learning and childcare in infancy* compared to other settings in the development of gross motor skills (throw a ball) and fine motor skills (vertical line test).

## Social, Emotional and Behavioural Development

While children's socio-emotional development is influenced by the home, both the quality and the quantity of early learning and childcare factors can also influence how children develop.

Russell et al. (2016) have examined three waves of data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* infant cohort (at age nine months, three years and five years) to examine the effects of experiencing non-parental care on children's socio-emotional development at age five years.

In Ireland, Russell et al. (2016: 45-63) have found that the type of early learning and childcare and the number of hours a child spends in early learning and childcare has some influence on the development of socio-emotional skills:

- At age five years, compared to children in full-time parental care at age three years,
  - *Children who were in either relative or non-relative care at age three years* were associated with lower total difficulties scores and higher pro-social behaviour skills;
  - *Children who attended centred-based settings at age three years* were rated by teachers as having higher total difficulties in particular higher hyperactivity and conduct problems; in particular, those who spent 30 hours or more in centre based settings had higher teacher rated difficulties scores and lower pro-social behaviour skills.

However, Russell et al. (2016) have noted that after controlling for a range of child, parent, family and neighbourhood level characteristics, compared to children in parental only care at age three the overall effect of early learning and childcare type at age three on socio-emotional development at age five years was small. Instead, the evidence shows that economic and social disadvantage has a consistently negative influence on children's socio-emotional outcomes in early childhood. While acknowledging that it is unlikely that early learning and childcare arrangements can entirely mitigate the effects of social inequality throughout childhood, Byrne and O'Toole (2015: vii) have argued that the evidence they present indicates that access and participation can go some way to levelling the playing field, particularly in early childhood.

## Quality of Early Learning and Childcare

It is clear from international research that quality matters most in determining whether or not early learning and childcare has a beneficial and persistent impact on children's development.

Over a decade ago, an international report on early learning and childcare placed Ireland joint bottom of 25 OECD countries as it achieved only one of ten proposed internationally applicable minimum standard benchmarks.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> UNICEF. 2008. *Report Card 8: The Child Care Transition – A League Table of Early Childhood Education and Care in Economically Advanced Countries*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Since then the main focus of attention has been on developing early learning and care for pre-school children and up until the publication of the *Action Plan on School Age Childcare* there has been no clear vision or strategy for school-age childcare services covering their purpose (e.g. play and recreation), content (e.g. sports, art, free-time), staff qualifications (e.g. childcare, youth work, education) or physical environment.<sup>78</sup> A comparative European study of school-age childcare rated the quality of care being offered in Ireland as second from bottom (only Spain performed worse) because of the lack of qualification requirements for staff working in school-age childcare, as well as the absence of regulation that would limit child-to-staff ratios and group sizes.<sup>79</sup> In order to address the challenges that exist, the *Action Plan on School Age Childcare* has set out a range of measures guided by a children's rights based approach that focus on access, affordability and quality.

### Early Childhood Care & Education Programme

The role of the adult working in early learning and care settings is the key factor in ensuring positive experiences and outcomes for children's learning, well-being and development. The Department of Children & Youth Affairs has introduced a range of initiatives to improve the skills and qualifications of those working in the sector.

Since 2015, all room leaders in the ECCE programme have had to have a minimum Level 6 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications of Ireland (NQF) or an equivalent nationally recognised qualification or a higher award in the childcare / early education field and all assistants were to have a minimum Level 5 qualification. Prior to that (since September 2012), ECCE pre-school year leaders were to have held a certification for a major award in childcare / early education at a minimum of Level 5.

McGinnity et al. (2015: 62-63) have examined the relationship between cognitive outcomes for children at age five years and the quality of settings delivering the ECCE Programme (a subsample of the full *Growing Up in Ireland* sample). In their analysis, settings are differentiated in terms of whether or not the centre received a higher capitation grant for having a graduate leader.<sup>80</sup> McGinnity et al. have found that children who did ECCE in services with a graduate leader recorded slightly higher non-verbal reasoning scores at age five than their counterparts; though the effect is only marginally statistically significant ( $p=0.06$ ). (On average, there was no such finding for vocabulary.)

As is evident from Table 1, there has been progress since 2011 in terms of increasing the levels of qualifications of those working in the sector. Almost all ECCE services have at least one staff member qualified to at least Level 6. Over a short period of time the number of ECCE services where the highest qualification was Level 5 has decreased from 1-in-5 to about 1-in-20. It is also notable that almost half of services have at least one staff member qualified to at least Level 7.

The data presented in Table 1 is not available in the most recent Pobal profiles of the early learning and childcare sector. Instead, Pobal have presented data on the qualifications of those who are working directly with children differentiated by the age of the children. In Table 2, the age range 3 – 5 years is associated with the eligible age range for ECCE ("ECCE cohort"). From this the evidence suggests the ECCE cohort are more likely to encounter adults who have higher qualifications, especially at the higher end (NFQ Level 7 and above), and are

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<sup>78</sup> IDG, 2015: 55-57.

<sup>79</sup> Plantenga and Remery, 2013.

<sup>80</sup> The capitation rates are structured in a way that incentivises higher qualifications. A higher rate of capitation is payable to pre-school service providers where pre-school leaders delivering the pre-school service have a minimum of Level 7 on the NFQ or equivalent in childhood / early education and have 3 years' experience working in the sector, and where all pre-school assistants in the service hold a relevant major award in childcare / early education at Level 5 on the NFQ or its equivalent.

less likely to encounter adults who have no qualification or lower level qualifications. Children in the pre-ECCE cohort are more likely to interact with staff who have lower levels of qualification while children who are of school going age are more than three times as likely than any of the other cohorts to encounter staff who have no childcare qualification, which reflects the absence of a qualification requirement for school-age childcare.

*Table 1 - Qualification levels of staff working in ECCE services from 2011 – 2015/16*

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015/ 16
No member of staff qualified to NFQ Level 5 (%)	4	4	1	1	0.3
NFQ Level 5 as the highest level of qualification in the service (%)	21	22	13	10	4
At least 1 staff member qualified to NFQ Level 6 or above (%)	75	74	86	89	96
At least 1 staff member qualified to NFQ Level 7 or above (%)	34	20	40	41	49

Source: Pobal. 2016. *Early Years Sector Profile 2015-2016*: 82.

*Table 2 – Staff Working Directly with Children (% by highest level of qualification)*

	Total	3-5 years	Up to 1 year	1-3 years	Over 5 years
No childcare qualification (%)	6	4	7	6	22
NFQ Level 5 as the highest level of qualification (%)	29	22	41	41	31
NFQ Level 6 (%)	43	46	40	41	31
NFQ Level 7 or above (%)	22	28	13	12	16
Total No. of Staff	22,132	13,265	1,285	5,620	1,962

Sources: Pobal. 2018. *Early Years Sector Profile 2017/2018*: 104.

While there has been a reasonably quick change in the distribution of highest level of qualification within ECCE settings (Table 1), the distribution of qualifications across the sector as a whole, while improving, is changing at a much slower pace. (See Table 3.) Up until recently, there was an increasing trend in the share of staff working directly with children who had no childcare qualification. The evidence suggests that the share of staff with a Level 7 or higher qualification has increased year-on-year but it is only in the last couple of years that there has been an increase in the share of staff with a Level 6 qualification.

*Table 3 – Staff Working Directly with Children (% by highest level of qualification)*

	2012	2013	2014	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
No childcare qualification (%)	7	8	9	11	7	6
NFQ Level 5 as the highest level of qualification (%)	42	42	38	33	30	29
NFQ Level 6 (%)	35	34	35	38	43	43
NFQ Level 7 or above (%)	12	13	15	18	20	22
<b>Total No. of Staff</b>	<b>12,838</b>	<b>11,260</b>	<b>10,700</b>	<b>17,841</b>	<b>20,110</b>	<b>22,132</b>

Sources: Pobal. Various Years. *Early Years Sector Profile, Annual Early Years Sector Survey Report and Annual Survey of Early Years Sector.*

### Formal Inspection Reports

Regular and accessible inspection reports on quality of early learning and childcare settings can be of benefit to parents and to service providers if they measure key aspects of process quality such as the learning opportunities available and the nature of the interactions between staff and children.<sup>81</sup>

Tusla’s Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of Early Learning and Childcare Services in Ireland. Tusla inspects service providers against a range of regulations (not all regulations are assessed at each inspection). For 2017, Tusla has reported that about one-third of inspection reports did not record any non-compliant regulation and a further third of inspection reports recorded either one non-compliant regulation (17%) or two non-compliant regulations (15%). About a eighth of services inspected were reported to have five or more non-compliant regulations. The regulations against which services were most likely to be in compliance were those relating to staffing levels (94%) and first aid (91%) while the regulation they were least likely to be in compliance with was safeguarding health safety and welfare of child (55%).<sup>82</sup>

In addition to the Early Years Inspections, Tusla (2016: 16-17) has noted that complaints are also a useful mechanism for monitoring quality in Early Learning and Childcare Services. For instance, in 2017, 277 complaints were received by the Early Years Inspectorate. The main focus of these complaints was with regard to the health, welfare and development of the child (36%), governance (33%) with 19% relating to safety issues and 9% regarding facilities. Of the 196 complaints for which information is available, 38 were upheld and 40 were partially upheld.<sup>83</sup>

In terms of assessing the quality of the educational provision in these settings, the Department of Education & Skills conducts Early-Years Education-focused Inspections (EYEIs) in services

<sup>81</sup> McGinnity et al., 2015: 11.

<sup>82</sup> Tusla. 2018. *Tusla Annual Report 2017 of Tusla Child and Family Agency’s Early Years Inspectorate.* Dublin: Tusla: 21-22.

<sup>83</sup> Tusla. 2018: 27-30.

participating in the ECCE Programme.<sup>84</sup> The purpose of these inspections is to evaluate the quality of the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children participating in the ECCE Programme. (See Box 4.) These inspections are based on a quality framework that is informed by the principles of *Aistear* and *Síolta* as well as national and international research related to early childhood education and inspection. The main activity of an EYEI is the observation, by the inspector, of the processes and practices relating to children’s learning in one or more learning rooms or areas in the setting.<sup>85</sup>

Both national and international research is clear about the need for high quality services if early learning and care is to have the intended benefits. Figure 5 sets out the percentages of ECCE services who have been evaluated as providing educational services that are either “excellent”<sup>86</sup> or “very good”<sup>87</sup>. While in this case it is not obvious whether “excellent” or “very good” is the standard of high quality required by research findings, it seems reasonable that service provision should at the very least be evaluated as “very good”.

In terms of achieving this standard, the EYEIs found that over the two years:

- In about three-quarters of ECCE services, the context of the learning environment in terms of its atmosphere and organisation, the relationships and the children’s sense of identity and belonging was either excellent or very good.
- In about two-thirds of settings learning experiences and outcomes (e.g., children were engaged and enjoying their learning, communicating their experiences and ideas, making sense of the world around them) and management and leadership of learning (e.g., work was informed by *Síolta*, communication between the early years settings and the young children and their families and effective transitions between stages) were evaluated as either excellent or very good.
- Just less than half of ECCE settings had excellent or very good processes to support children’s learning and development (e.g. provision is informed by *Aistear*, information about the child’s development informs the next steps in learning, emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered).

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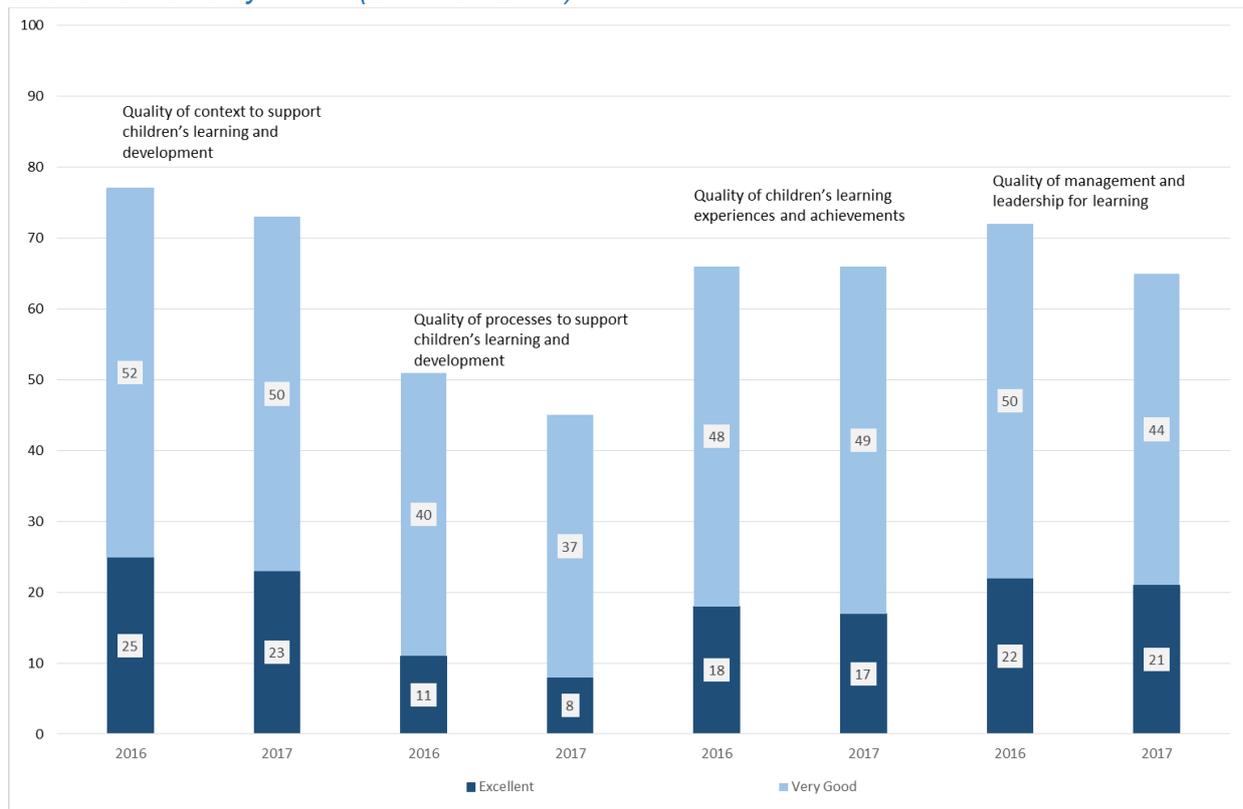
<sup>84</sup> Department of Education & Skills. 2016. *A Guide to Early-years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) in Early-years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme*.

<sup>85</sup> At the end of each inspection the early-years practitioners and the owners/managers are provided with feedback on the quality of educational provision in the setting. A written report is subsequently sent to the pre-school inspected outlining the inspection findings and providing advice as to how educational provision in the setting can be developed further or improved. These inspection report are published on the Department’s website and on the website of the Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

<sup>86</sup> Provision that is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.

<sup>87</sup> Provision that is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.

Figure 5 – Percentage of ECCE Providers Quality of Education Provision Evaluated as “Excellent” or “Very Good” (2016 and 2017)



Source: Data compiled from published *Early-Years Education-focused Inspection Reports* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Early-Years-Education-Reports/> Accessed: 1 November 2018.

#### Box 4 – Quality Framework for the Early-Years Education-focused Inspections

The quality framework incorporates the key elements of best practice in early learning and categorises provision under four broad areas:

- The quality of the *context to support children’s learning and development* includes the following three outcomes:
  - The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurture children’s learning and development and support the inclusion of all children
  - Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal
  - Children’s sense of identity and belonging is nurtured.
- The quality of *processes to support children’s learning and development* includes eight key outcomes:
  - Provision is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*
  - Information about the child’s development informs the next steps in learning
  - High quality interactions with children are facilitated
  - The environment and resources support children’s learning and development
  - Play is central to children’s learning and development
  - Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered
  - Provision for children’s learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities
  - Children learn in an inclusive environment.
- The quality of *children’s learning experiences and achievements* includes five key outcomes:
  - Children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of well-being
  - Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences
  - Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development
  - Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways
  - Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and their environment through playing, investigating and questioning.
- The quality of *management and leadership for learning* in the early learning and care setting includes four key outcomes:
  - Planning, review and evaluation are informed by *Síolta; the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*
  - Management within the setting provides for a high quality learning and development experience for children
  - Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early learning and care setting, parents, families and children
  - Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development.

## Parents Assessments of Early Learning and Childcare

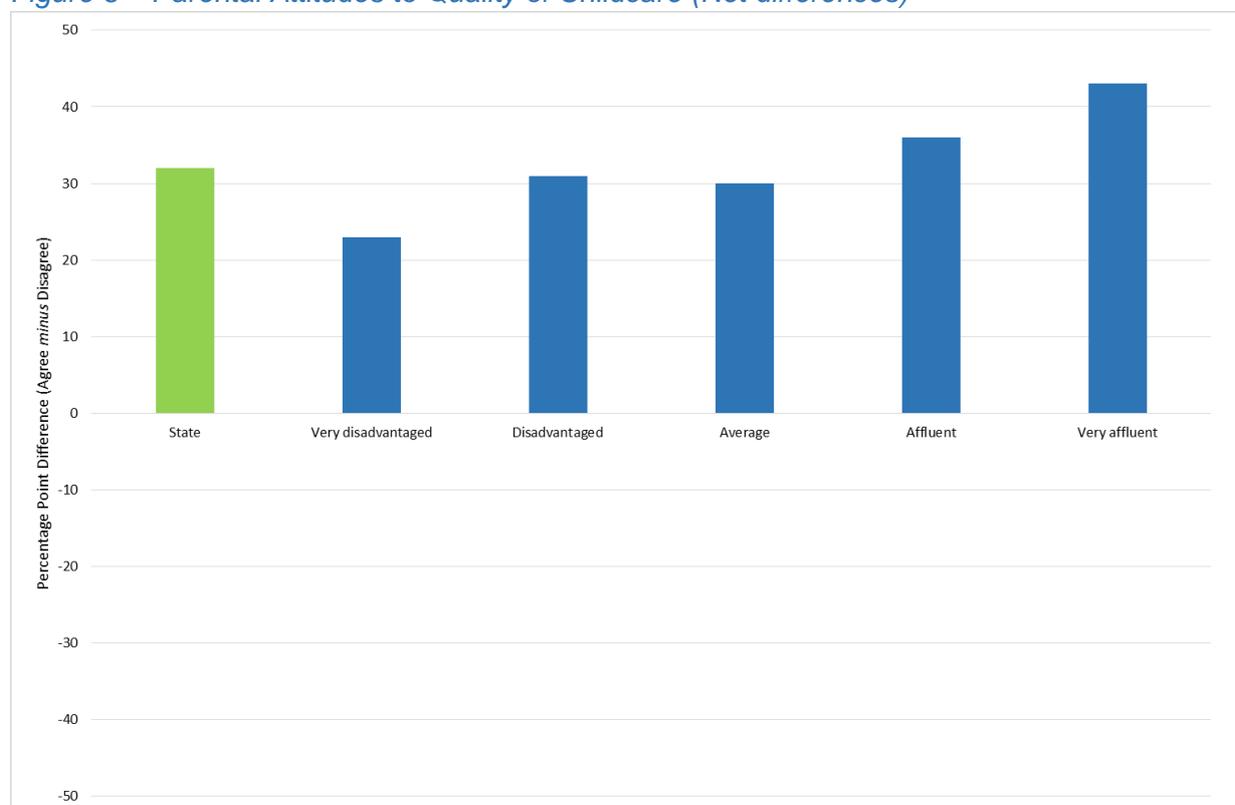
The *Quarterly National Household Survey Module on Childcare* asks respondents to agree or disagree with the statement:

I have access to high quality childcare in my community.<sup>88</sup>

The evidence presented in Figure 6 suggests that, on balance, people agree that they have access to high quality early learning and childcare. It is notable that those from more affluent areas are more likely to feel that they have access to such services than those from less affluent areas.

McGinnity et al. (2015: 11) have noted that the international literature on parental assessments of early learning and childcare highlights that parents may not always be good judges of quality, in particularly they may not be in a position to observe important aspects of quality such as sensitivity of staff to children's needs.<sup>89</sup>

Figure 6 – Parental Attitudes to Quality of Childcare (Net differences)



Source: CSO. 2017. *QNHS Childcare Quarter 3 2016*: Tables 7 and 11.

## Children's Views on School-Age Childcare

As part of developing the *Action Plan of School Age Childcare*, the Department of Children & Youth Affairs undertook a detailed consultation with 177 children aged between 5 and 12 years. Amongst this group of children there was a strong preference for after school care at

<sup>88</sup> This item is limited in that it is not clear if those who disagree with the statement are referring to the *quality* of the childcare or to the *availability* of childcare in their community or both.

<sup>89</sup> Cryer, D., W. Tietze, and H. Wessels, H. 2002. 'Parents' perceptions of their children's child care: a cross national comparison'. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Vol.17: 259-277.

home or in a home environment because it was a place where they could eat, cook food, relax and play. These preferences point to a need to separate school activity from after-school activity.<sup>90</sup>

## Transitions

The transition to primary school is a particular milestone for children and can be a time of potential challenge and stress for children and their families. Early learning and childcare provides an opportunity to prepare a child for moving on to more formal education.

A range of factors are known to ease transitions including the age at which a child starts school, positive professional connections between early learning and childcare settings and local schools, the exchange of information between the sectors and continuity of curriculum and teaching style.

In Ireland, the age profile of Junior Infant pupils is increasing. (See Figure 7.) In 1999/2000 the cohort of junior infant students was more or less evenly divided between those who were aged five years at the start of the calendar year and those who were aged four years. Over the intervening years, this distribution has shifted such that by 2017/18 three-quarters of students in junior infants were aged 5 years of age at the start of the calendar year. While these diverging trends were evident prior to the introduction of the ECCE Programme (a change of above eight percentage points between 1999/2000 and 2009/10), it is clear that there has been a substantial increase in the rate of change following its introduction (a change of about 16 percentage points over the shorter period between 2010/11 and 2017/18).

To support transitions, the majority of teachers receive advance information on whether children have Special Educational Needs (96%) and on children's family circumstances (73%). However, less common is the provision of advance information on children's individual strengths, interests and challenges (27%) and on skills developed in early learning and childcare (13%).<sup>91</sup>

While the Aistear curriculum framework has the potential to achieve curriculum continuity, there are differences in familiarity with Aistear between primary school and early learning and childcare settings. Furthermore, primary teachers reported that they have less time for play than early learning and childcare practitioners and facilitated play more often outside class. The study also found that early learning and childcare practitioners often felt under pressure to get everything done before children started school.<sup>92</sup>

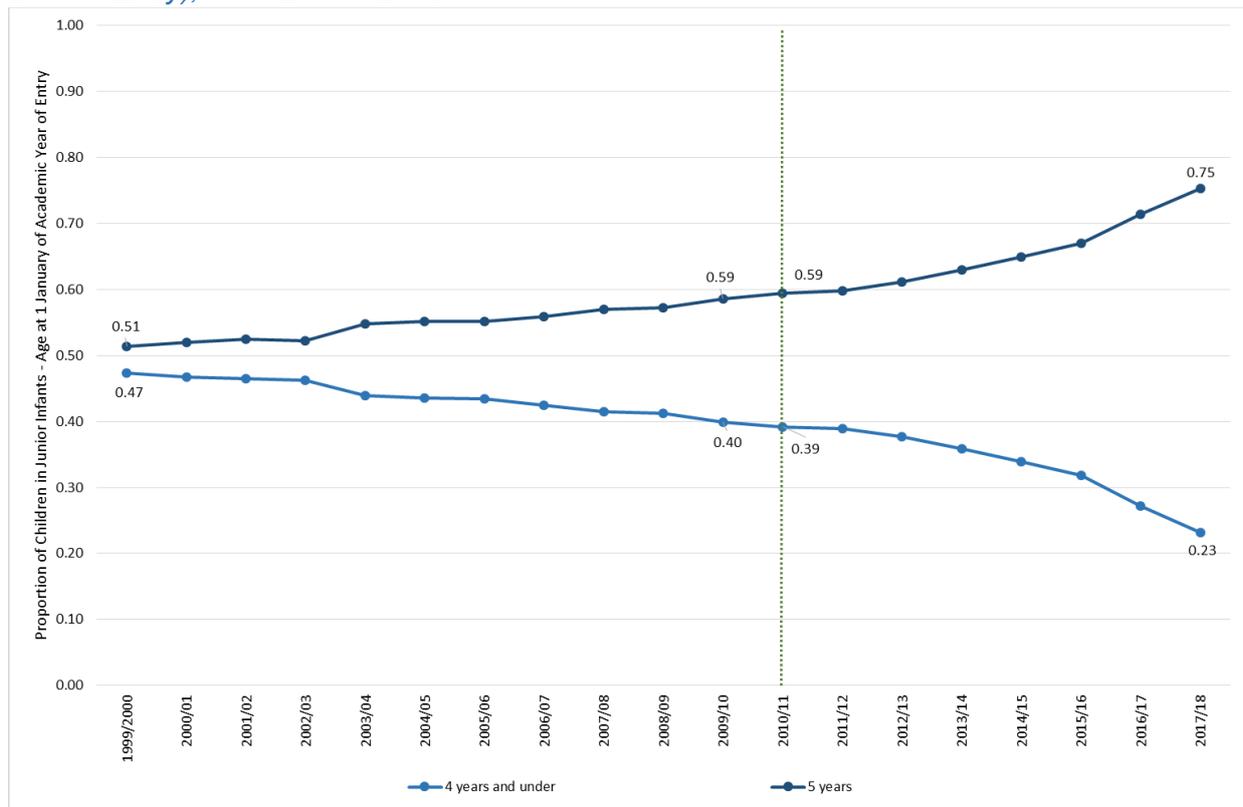
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<sup>90</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs and Department of Education & Skills. 2017. *Action Plan on School Age Childcare*. Dublin: Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

<sup>91</sup> Department of Children & Youth Affairs. 2018: 97. The National Council for Curriculum & Assessment has developed reporting templates for sharing information about children's learning as they move from pre-school to primary school (to be published in December 2018).

<sup>92</sup> Ring, E. et al. 2016. *An Examination of Concepts of School Readiness among Parents and Educators in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Children & Youth Affairs.

Figure 7 – Proportion of Children in Junior Infants Aged 4 or 5 years (1 January of Academic Year of Entry), 1999/2000 – 2017/18



Source: Central Statistics Office

<https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Staire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?MainTable=EDA42&TabStrip=Select&PLanguage=0&FF=1> Accessed: 17 October 2018.

## Family Outcomes

As noted earlier, in terms of children's families, early learning and childcare policies, including those that support school-age childcare, can have beneficial impacts on both the level and extent of labour market participation and consequently on household income and the affordability of early learning and childcare.

## Employment

Female employment can have important impacts in terms of supporting family incomes and protecting children and their families from poverty.

In very general terms, over the last number of decades there has been a notable increase in female employment: from just over 36% in 1990 to 56% by 2004 and 60% at the onset of the economic and financial crisis in 2008 before declining to around 55% in 2011 and then recovering to 60% by 2016.<sup>93</sup>

The evidence suggests that female employment varies in line with the age of the youngest child and family size. Figures 8 and 9 present trends in female employment rates<sup>94</sup> by family composition based on the age of the youngest child and the number of children. Also included for comparison purposes are trends in employment rates for all persons. The overall trend across each of these cohorts is of an increase in employment rates. For all persons, the average employment rate has increased from 59.3% at the depth of the economic and financial crisis (2010-2012) to 64.5% as the economy began to recover (2015-2017); an increase of 5.2 percentage points.

The employment rates of females in a couple without children are not only greater than the employment rates of females with children but are also greater than the employment rates of all persons. Within this cohort employment rates averaged 65% at the depth of the economic crisis to 67.3% as the economy began to recover.

It is also worth noting that females in a couple where the youngest child is a teenager are also more likely to be in employment than is the case for all persons (employment rates averaged 63.5% at the depth of the economic crisis and 65.2% as the economy began to recover).

Over the period, females in a couple with a pre-school child experienced a strong increase in employment rates; increasing from an average of 58.6% at the depth of the economic crisis to 66.1% as the economy began to recover (an increase of 7.6 percentage points).

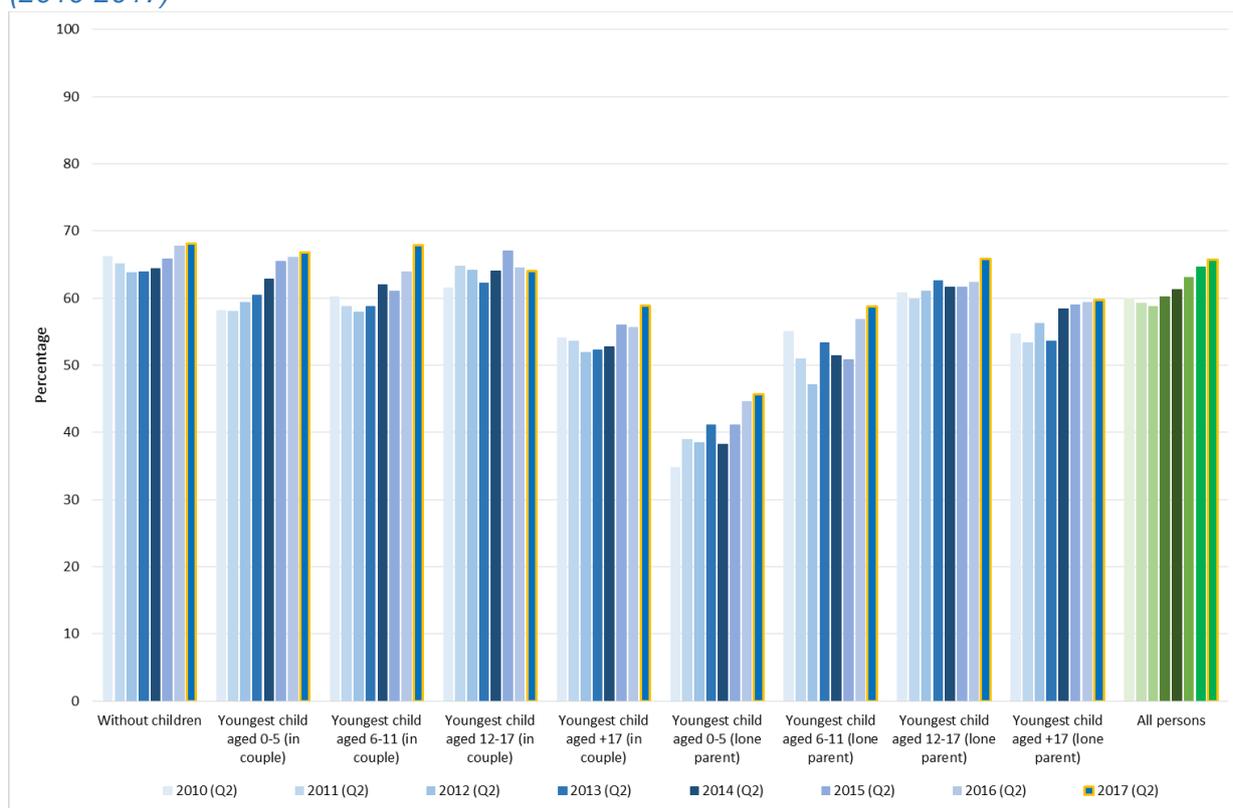
Female lone parents with a pre-school child are a lot less likely to be in employment than other females and all persons. The likelihood of female lone parent being in employment increases as the youngest child progresses through primary school and into secondary school.

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<sup>93</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 11; Central Statistics Office. 2017. *QNHS Households and Family Units Quarter 2 2011 – Quarter 2 2017*.

<sup>94</sup> The Employment Rate is the number of employed persons aged 15 to 64 years expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 to 64 years.

Figure 8 – Female Employment Rates by Family Composition and Age of Youngest Child (2010-2017)



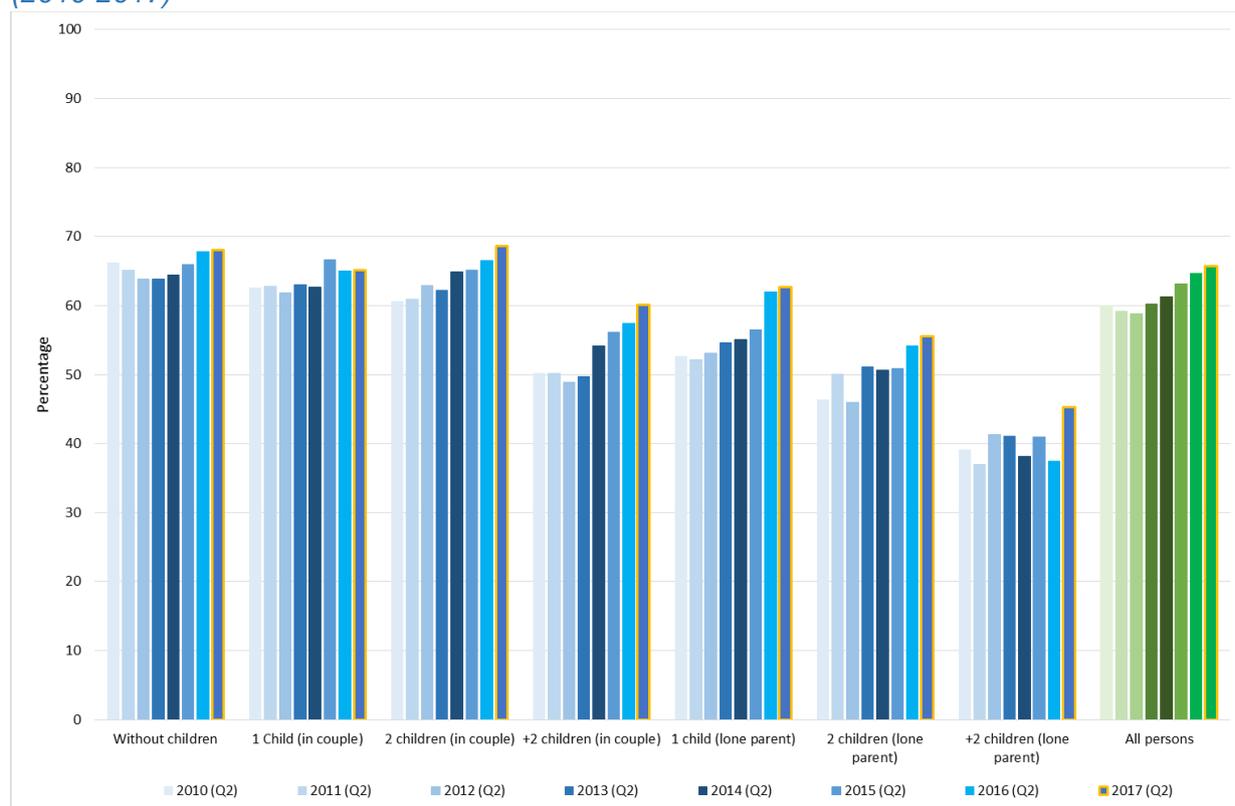
Source: CSO. 2017. QNHS Households and Family Units Quarter 2 2011 – Quarter 2 2017: Table 9. (2010 data from same table in CSO. 2016. QNHS Households and Family Units Quarter 2 2010 – Quarter 2 2016)

Female employment rates would appear to be more strongly associated with the number of children in a family than the age of the youngest child. Family units with three or more children have employment rates that are notably less than those with fewer children.

This pattern is especially obvious amongst females in a couple. The employment rates of females who have one or two children are greater than the employment rates of all persons. However, this is not the case amongst females in a couple with three or more children. (That said, it should be noted that this cohort experienced a strong increase in employment rates, from an average of 49.8% at the depth of the economic crisis to 57.9% as the economy began to recover; an increase of 8.1 percentage points.)

Amongst female lone parents the employment rate decreases as the number of children increases. It is also worth noting that amongst female lone parents with one child that employment rates increased by 7.8 percentage points from around 52% in 2010 and 2011 to 62% in 2016 and 2017 (greater than the employment rate for all females).

Figure 9 – Female Employment Rates by Family Composition and Number of Children (2010-2017)



Source: CSO. 2017. QNHS Households and Family Units Quarter 2 2010 – Quarter 2 2017: Table 10. (2010 data from same table in CSO. 2016. QNHS Households and Family Units Quarter 2 2010 – Quarter 2 2016)

The *Growing Up in Ireland* study highlights that female employment is more nuanced than one group of full-time carers permanently outside the labour market ('stay-at-home mothers') and another group of permanent fulltime workers ('working mothers'). The reality is more fluid. Russell et al. (2018: 49-50) have shown that with reference to the age of the study child:

- The majority of the women (78%) were employed before the birth of the study child;
- 46% of mothers were in paid work by the time the study child was nine months old;
- Over half (54%) of mothers were in employment when the study child was 36 months (28% working full-time (> 30 hours) and 26% working part-time); and
- 59% of women were in employment by the time the study child was aged five years.

Over the period between the study child being aged 9 months and 3 years, 17% of women entered employment, 8% exited employment and 7% changed between full and part-time hours.<sup>95</sup>

Over the period between the study child being aged 3 years and 5 years, 9% of women entered employment, 7% exited employment and 9% changed between full and part-time hours. Furthermore, almost half (48%) of women changed the number of hours they worked between

<sup>95</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 51.

the study child being aged 3 and 5 years: 26% increased their hours with 22% reducing their hours.<sup>96</sup>

## Cost of Early Learning and Childcare

The cost of early learning and childcare is often cited as a barrier to female labour market participation and can hinder efforts to reduce child poverty. Comparative analyses of costs for parents have shown such costs in Ireland to be amongst the highest in the developed world.<sup>97</sup> While child-related benefits are also higher than in a number of developed countries, they are not sufficient to offset the high cost of early learning and childcare.<sup>98</sup>

Russell et al. (2018: 30-44) have examined information from *Growing Up in Ireland*<sup>99</sup> to investigate early learning and childcare costs for children at ages three years (in 2011) and five years (in 2013). The evidence suggests that:

- A childminder in the child's home was the most expensive form of care, costing on average €5.70 per hour (€153.40 per week) for three year olds and €8.12 per hour (€111.86) for five year olds;
- For three year olds, the hourly costs of a childminder outside the home were close to those paid for centre-based early learning and childcare (just less than €4.50 per hour) but the average weekly costs for the former (€107.20) are somewhat higher than the latter (€100.10);
- For five year olds, the average hourly costs of a childminder outside the home were 16% greater than those paid for centre-based arrangements (€6.75 as compared with €5.83) as were average weekly costs (€74.57 and €64.83); and
- Of those children cared for by a relative (non-parent), that care was provided without charge to 55% of three year olds and 70% of five year olds. Where there was a charge, the average hourly rate for three year olds (€3.84) was less than that paid for five year olds (€5.90) but the average weekly cost was more expensive for the younger children (€89.75 as compared with €72.60) reflecting the greater number of hours they were in the care of a paid relative.

In terms of how the cost of centre-based early learning and childcare has changed over the last number of years, survey evidence published by Pobal suggests that average<sup>100</sup>:

- weekly full-time fees have increased from €165.54 in 2011 to €177.92 in 2017/18 (+7%);
- weekly part-time fees from €84.64 to €101.82 (+20%); and

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<sup>96</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 51-52.

<sup>97</sup> OECD, 2004 and 2011. See also: [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Childcare\\_2015\\_EN\\_20170802.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Childcare_2015_EN_20170802.xlsx)

<sup>98</sup> IDG, 2015: 20. Analysis published by the OECD indicates that the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme will substantially reduce the net cost of childcare to parents. See: Browne, J., H. Immervoll, R. Fernandez, D. Neumann, D. Pacifico and C. Thévenot. 2018. *Faces of Joblessness in Ireland: A People-centred perspective on employment barriers and policies*. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers. No. 209. OECD Publishing: Paris.

<sup>99</sup> *Growing Up in Ireland* (a) Infant Cohort, Wave 2 (2011) and (b) Infant Cohort, Wave 3 (2013).

<sup>100</sup> Pobal. 2017. *Early Years Sector Profile 2016/2017*: 63; Pobal. 2018. *Early Years Sector Profile 2017/2018*: 78.

- sessional fees from €58.75 to €68.95 (+17%).

It is worth noting that the survey evidence suggests that the increase in average weekly full-time fees is a recent phenomenon in that it has mainly occurred between 2015/16 and 2017/18 (+6.5%). For the most part the increases in the other types of fees occurred between 2011 and 2012 (about +13%).

In addition to setting out average fees, Pobal (2018: 83) also examined the relationship between fees and the level of affluence or deprivation of the area in which an early learning and childcare settings is located. Using the Haase-Pratschke Index, the evidence suggests that the level of affluence or deprivation of the area where the service is located has a strong impact on fees: fees are higher in more affluent areas (€232.50 a week for full day care) and lower in disadvantaged areas (€167.30 a week for full day care).

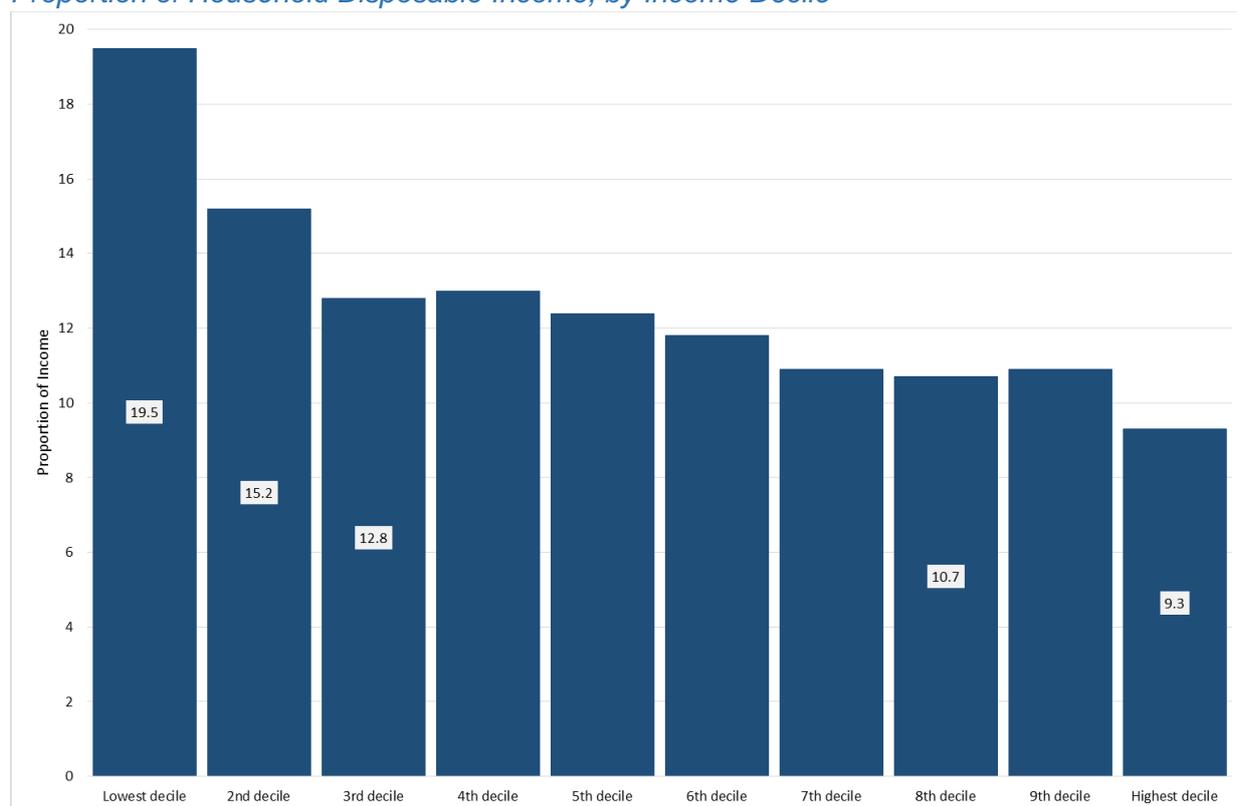
The qualifications of staff is an important element of the quality of early learning and childcare and it is likely that this would be reflected in the fees charged. Pobal (2018: 84) undertook an analysis of the relationship between the fees charged by early learning and childcare providers and staff qualifications. The analysis showed that there is a relationship between fees and staff qualifications but that this relationship is only present in respect of the 40% of services with the highest fees. In the two most recent programme years, the 20% of facilities with the highest fees had the most qualified staff and the 20% of facilities with the second highest tier of fees have the second most qualified staff. Among the remaining facilities there was no association between fees and staff qualifications.

## Proportion of Income Spent on Early Learning and Childcare

When children are young, the costs associated with early learning and childcare can have a considerable impact on household income.

Using data from *Growing Up in Ireland*, Russell et al. (2018: 38) have estimated the portion of household disposable income spent on early learning and childcare. (See Figure 10.) They have found that in Ireland parents who pay for care are spending, on average, 11.6% of household income on the early learning and childcare expenses for the three-year-old study child. (They have also noted that as this percentage relates to the study child, families with more than one child in early learning and childcare are likely to be paying multiples of this.)

Figure 10 – Early Learning and Childcare Cost for Study Child (at 3 years of age) as a Proportion of Household Disposable Income, by Income Decile



Source: Russell et al., 2018: 38 from *Growing Up in Ireland*, Infant Cohort, Wave 2 (2011).

Of those who are paying for early learning and childcare, the highest proportion of weekly income is being spent by those in the lowest decile of income. (The proportion of household income expended on early learning and childcare by lone parents is 16% of weekly household income.) At the other end of the scale, expenditure on early learning and childcare accounted for just less than a tenth of weekly income amongst households in the highest decile (for whom paid early learning and childcare is much more common). However, in between these deciles, the proportion of income spent on early learning and childcare changes little with income, ranging from 12.8 per cent to 10.9 per cent.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Russell et al., 2018: 38.

## Quality Assurance Process

To ensure accuracy and methodological rigour, the authors engaged in a quality assurance process that involved Department of Public Expenditure & Reform line management and taking account of observations received from the Department of Children & Youth Affairs and comments and insights from Dr Claire Hickey of the Centre for Effective Services. As ever, all errors and omissions are the authors' responsibility.

