

Quality and Professionalism: towards a competent system in early childhood education and care

The next six years: the first six years

The National Children's Strategy and children's early years

Start Strong

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Outline

- ECEC in the EU policy context
- Competence requirements in early childhood education and care (CORE)
- Towards a competent system?
Some questions, challenges and possibilities in the Irish context

EU policy context 1990-2010

a quick reminder

Early Childhood has been on EU policy agendas for some time (for various reasons):

- Recommendation of the Council of Ministers on Childcare (1992)
- Quality targets in services for young children (1996)
- Barcelona targets (2002)
- Charter of Fundamental Rights
 - Art. 74 (right to education)
 - Art. 81 (non-discrimination)
 - Art. 84 (rights of the child)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Policy context 2011: Europe in crisis?

Europe faces a moment of transformation. The crisis has wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy. In the meantime, the world is moving fast and long-term challenges – globalisation, pressure on resources, ageing – intensify. The EU must now take charge of its future.

(Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth)



EU Policy context 2011 (cont.):

- There is ‘a need to increase participation in early childhood education and care’
- ‘... particularly acute in the case of those from a disadvantaged background, who statistically tend to perform significantly less well against each of the benchmarks. **Only by addressing the needs of those at risk of social exclusion can the objectives of the Strategic Framework be properly met.**’
- ‘Participation in high-quality early childhood education and care, with highly skilled staff and adequate child-to-staff ratios, produces positive results for all children and has highest benefits for the most disadvantaged.’

(Council of the European Union, 2010)

A key role for ECEC professionals

- Workforce is central for achieving policy goals of increasing both quantity and quality of provision (Oberhuemer 2000, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford 2002; OECD, 2001, 2006; Dalli 2003, 2005; Mac Naughton 2005, Urban, 2008, 2009; Dalli & Urban, 2010, 2011; Eurydice, 2009, CORE, 2011)
- Most countries face major workforce challenges: recruitment, retention, gender, qualification ... (CORE, 2011)

February 2011: EU Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care

- The benefits of high-quality ECEC are wide-ranging: social, economic and educational
- High quality ECEC enables parents better to reconcile family and work responsibilities, so boosting employability
- ECEC supports children, not only in their future education but also in their integration into society, generating well-being, and contributing to their employability when they become adults
- ECEC is particularly beneficial for the disadvantaged, including those from migrant and low-income backgrounds. It can help to lift children out of poverty and family dysfunction

Health warning ...

High quality early childhood education is important for many reasons

but ...

We have to be careful not to fall for a naive salvation narrative

We should not expect the least resourced (and often least qualified) sector to solve the '*complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet*' we are facing

(Edgar Morin)

EU Communication on ECEC:

Universal access – High quality,

Diversity and Equality – systemic professionalisation

- Access to **universally available, high-quality inclusive ECEC services** is beneficial for all
- **Systemic approaches to professionalisation** are needed
- The range of issues tackled by ECEC staff and the diversity of the children in their charge requires **continuous reflection on pedagogical practice**
- In many countries, training for working with children at risk is an integral part of initial training, but **many other aspects of diversity are not sufficiently covered**
- ECEC staff rarely have the same possibilities for induction, **in-service training and continuous professional development** as are available to school teachers

CORE (2010-2011)

A comprehensive study on competence requirements in early childhood education and care - grounded in international research on quality, competences and professionalism in early childhood

- Review European literature on 'competence', 'quality' and 'professionalism' – beyond the limited scope of English language literature and research
- Survey in 15 European countries
- In-depth case studies
- **Policy recommendations**

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University of Ghent



in collaboration with key
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CORE findings in a nutshell

- **Competence development is a process:**
Professional competence conceptualised as continuous learning process from entering the field (as students or untrained workers) to the end of their career
- **Professionalisation is systemic:**
Processes of professionalisation take place at different, interconnected levels:

Individual

Inter-institutional



Institutional

Systems of governance

Reconceptualising 'competence' - Competent systems needed

- 'Competence is not simply the result of 'training' individuals
- 'Competence' develops and unfolds in relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider context of community and society
- 'Competence' relates to working with children, families, and communities
- Developing competence requires joint learning and support systems

CORE findings in EU communication on ECEC (2011):
'Systemic approaches to professionalisation needed'

Focus on systemic conditions

- Working conditions
- Staff turnover
- Continuous pedagogical support
- Pedagogical documentation
- Critical reflection - being encouraged to ask critical questions
- Co-constructing practice as a 'conversation between theory and practice' (Deleuze)

This requires time, team collaboration and pedagogical support

Some questions in the Irish context

- **Leadership**: How can leadership capacity and professional identity be developed and strengthened in the sector? Can we re-think the role of Voluntary Organisations, Professional Associations, networks and Unions?
(‘A profession thinking and speaking for itself’, Urban&Dalli, 2011)
- **Advocacy**: How can the Irish ECEC sector become more articulate about the right of every child to high quality ECEC?
- **Research, evaluation and critical reflection**: What questions do we need to ask at all levels of the ECEC system? What kind of qualitative data do we need to gather with practitioners, children, families? How can critical reflection be encouraged at all levels of the ECEC system?
- **Coherent and coordinated policies**: How can children’s rights issues become a policy focus at inter-departmental level, nationally and locally?. Can we ‘child-proof’ policies in Education, Care, Health, Housing, Labour, Environment, Public Planning etc?

CORE report

CORE Final Report

- Project outline
- Definition of key terms
- Findings
- Policy recommendations

CORE Research Documents

- Literature review
- Detailed report on Survey
- Detailed report on Case studies
- Detailed appendices (data)

Can be downloaded here:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/cass/staff/mathiasurban/>



Thank you!

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