



Forbairt Cáilíocht  
Luathbhlianta Náisiúnta  
National Early Years  
Quality Development

# Working together for Children

# What is it?

- **Better Start** is a new initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), collaborating with the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills and Pobal to establish a single, cohesive approach to quality across the ECEC sector in Ireland
- The programme is jointly managed by Pobal and DCYA
- The primary service focus of the initiative will be to provide quality early years mentoring support to ECEC settings

# Department of Children and Youth Affairs

## Early Years Programmes

Pobal – Funding / Data  
Better Start

City/Co. Childcare  
Committees  
VCOs

## Tusla

Child and Family  
Agency  
Education Welfare  
Services

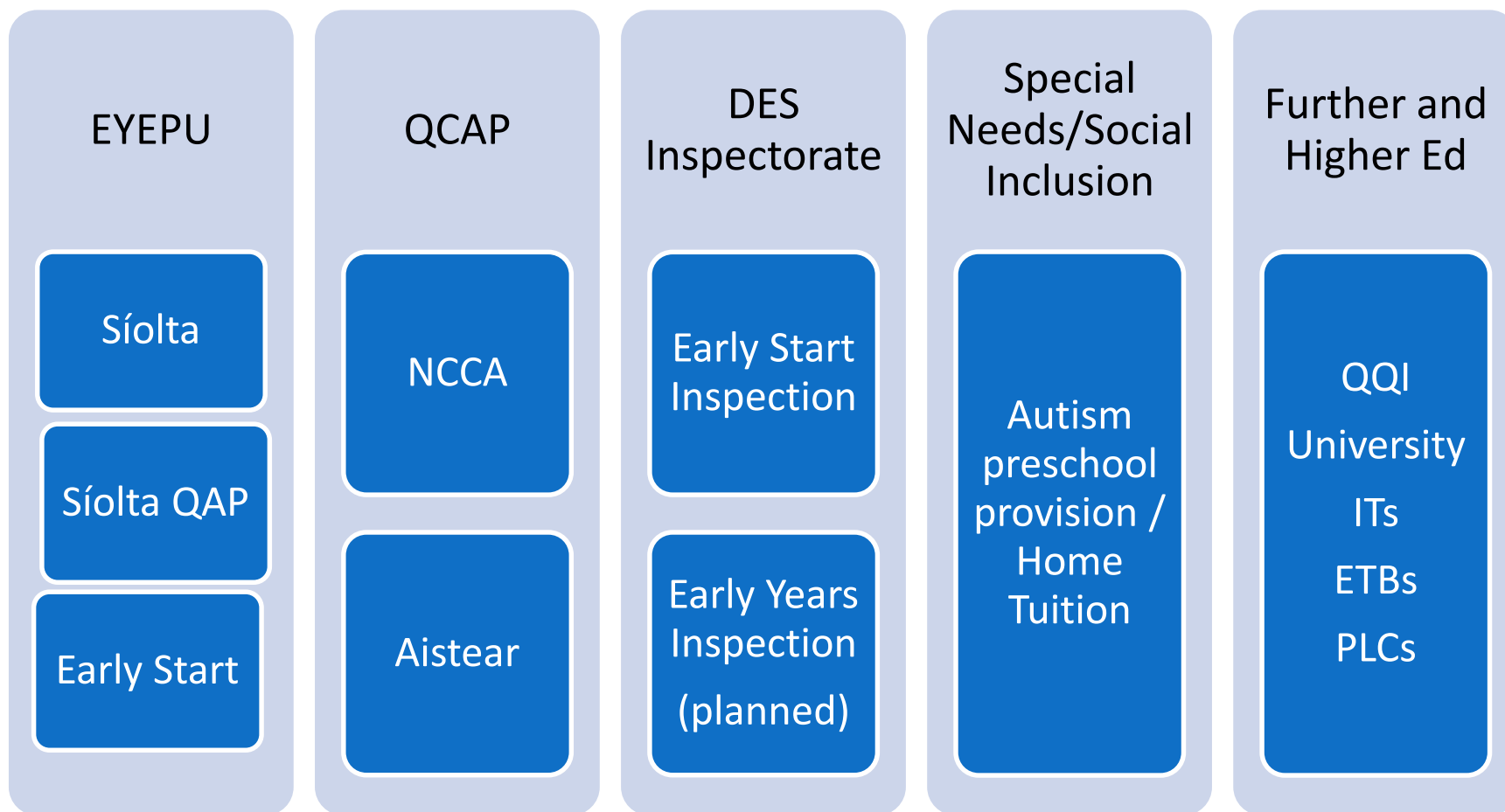
Preschool Inspectorate

## Policy and Research

ABC  
CSC  
Better Outcomes  
Brighter Futures

Growing up in Ireland

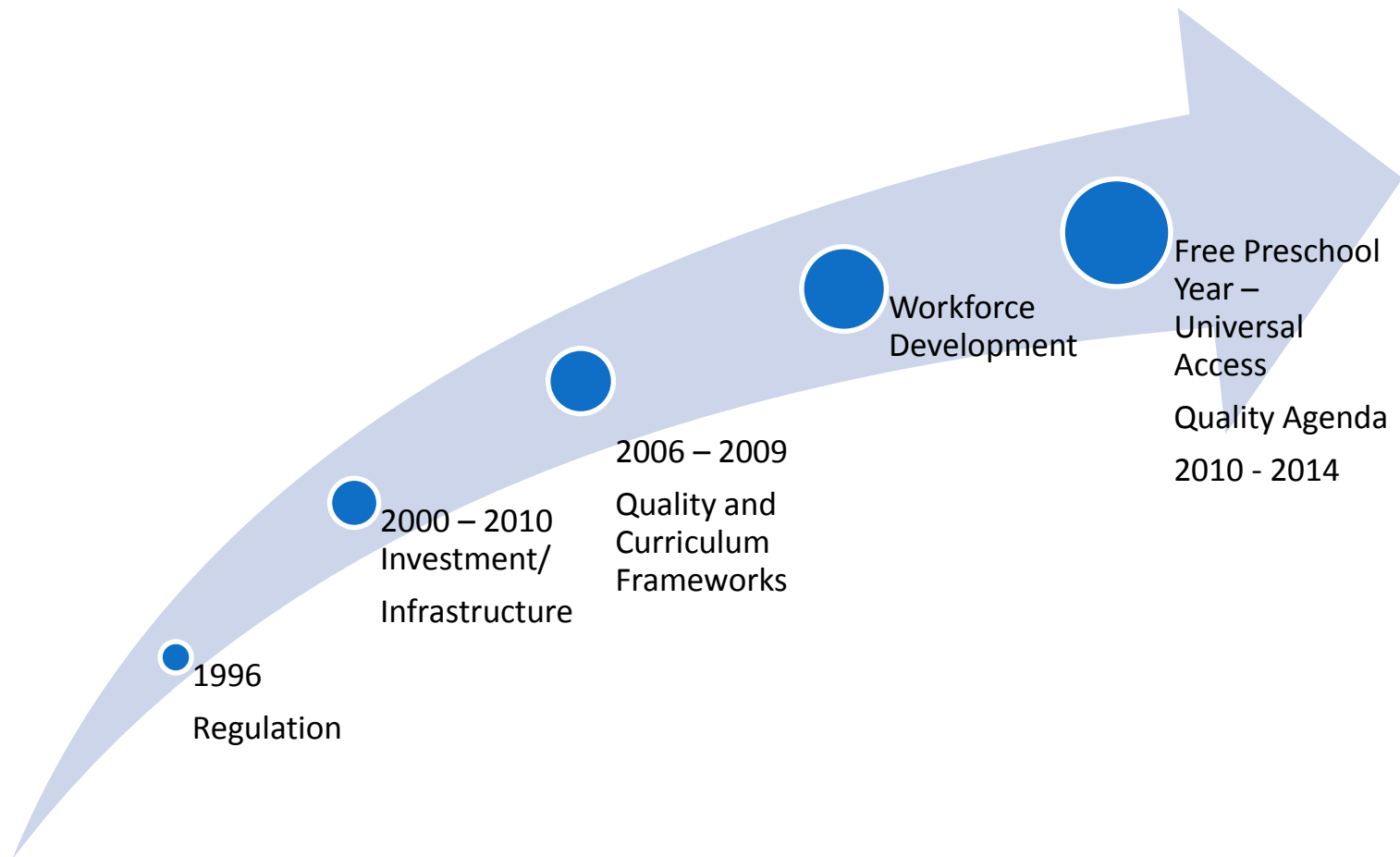
# Department of Education and Skills



# The Policy Context – Quality Development

- Quality Agenda – a range of measures to improve and assure quality in Early Years Provision in Ireland:
  - Registration rather than notification
  - Revised regulations, standards and inspection process
  - Increased sanctions for non-compliance
  - Publication of inspection reports
  - Qualification requirements linked to funding
  - Quality Development Support for implementing Síolta and Aistear - **Better Start**

# Sector Development



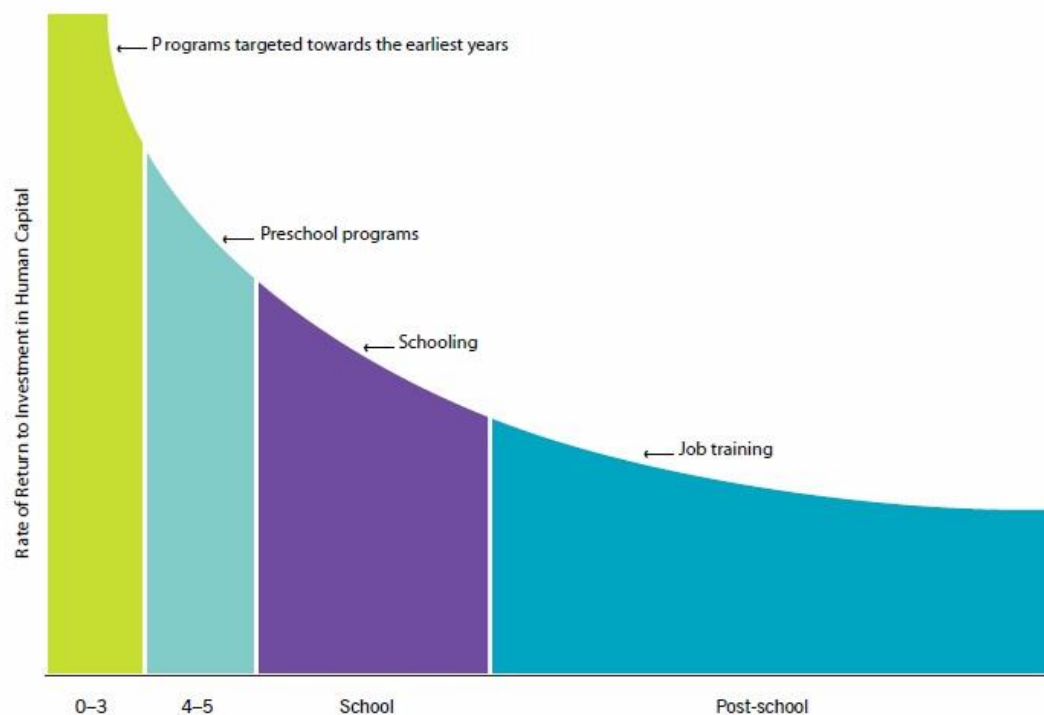
# The Evidence



- Quality Early Years services bring a wide range of benefits to children in terms of their overall development, learning and outcomes across all domains
- High quality early years experience yields social and economic dividends repaying multiples of investment made
- Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children.
- Poor quality services can lead to "long-term detrimental effects".

(Starting Strong III, OECD, 2012)

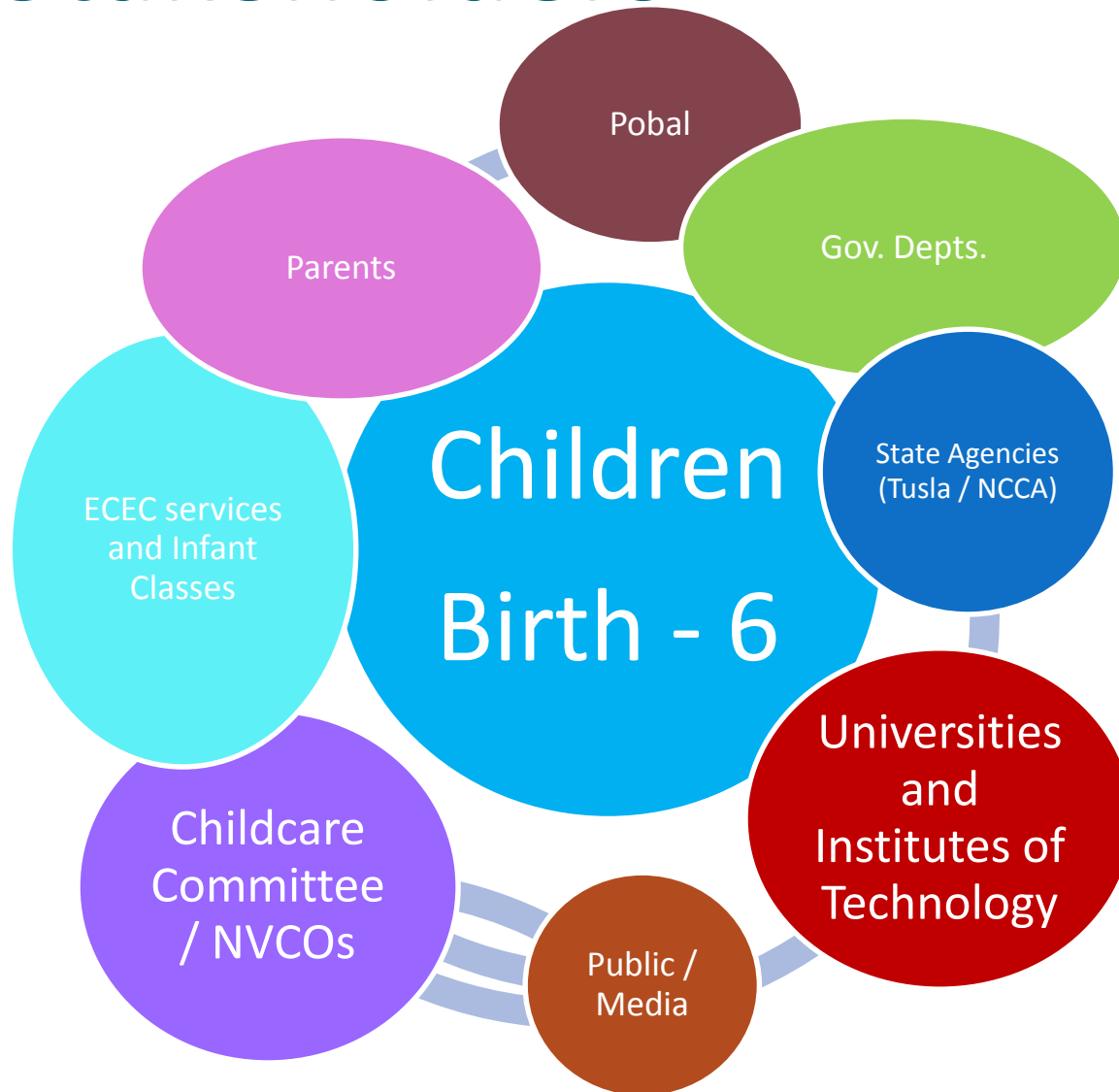
# Returns on Investment in Early Years



Returns per annum to a unit dollar invested




# Key Stakeholders

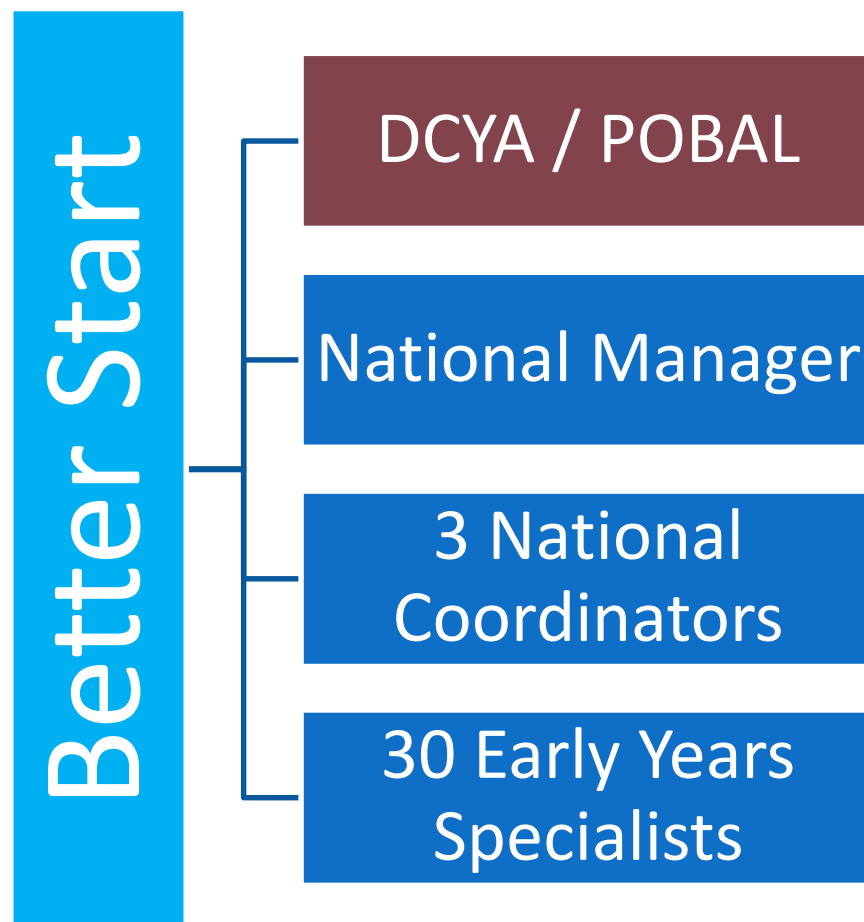


# Building a Profession



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- Education and Training
  - Quality Standards of Practice
  - Transference of Knowledge to Practice
  - Career Opportunities and Security
  - Progression Routes
  - Continuing Professional Development
  - Quality Assurance
  - Professional Recognition and esteem

# Quality Support Service Structure

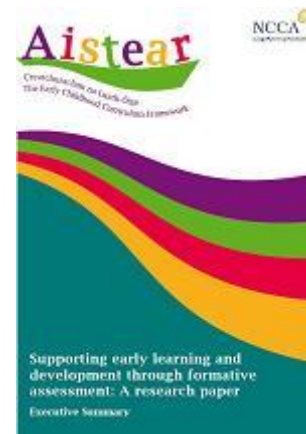


# Government Commitment

- Start up and operational funding to December 2016
- National Initiative with centralised management and coordination brief
- Mandate to work with and coordinate all state funded quality support
- Close working relationships within and across depts.

# Better Start Vision

A national service which delivers State-aided supports based on the Síolta and Aistear Frameworks, to Early Years services in a coherent and consistent way, so that those services are of high quality and deliver positive outcomes for children



# Components of Quality



# Better Start Team Profile

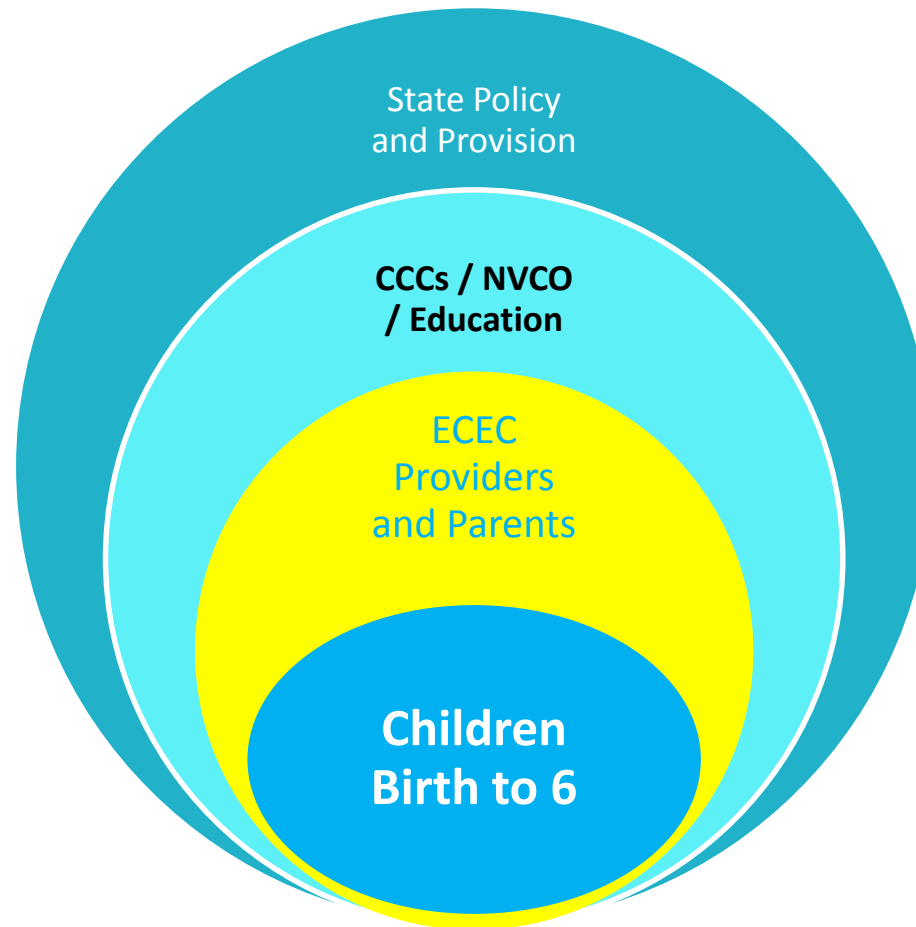
- High calibre ECEC graduate/post graduate workforce
- Breadth of experience across all aspects of early years education and care services
- Skills and experience in leadership, mentoring, professional practice and early years quality provision
- Continuing professional development



# Aistear and Síolta Practice Guide

- Resource being developed by NCCA
- 7 Pillars of Practice - Focus on Process Quality
  - Learning environment
  - Interactions
  - Planning, Assessing and Documenting
  - Play
  - Parents
  - Leadership and Ethos

# Children at the Centre



# Philosophy and Approach



- Children at the centre always
- Strengths based, working from where we are
- Respectful partnerships and collaborations
- Evidence based best practice
- Continuous quality improvement
- Continuous professional development
- Focused on outcomes and results

# Role of the Early Years Specialist

- To work directly with early years services to build their capacity to deliver high quality early childhood education and care experiences for children and families
- To support a range of diverse early years settings, working in partnership with management and staff to develop and implement quality improvement plans

# Why a mentoring model?

- Coaching and other on-site, individualized professional development strategies (consultation, mentoring, and technical assistance) have emerged as promising strategies to support the application of new teaching strategies and overall quality improvement among practitioners in early care and education settings.
- The degree to which professional development is individualised and emphasizes the application of knowledge to practice is emerging as a critical factor in professional development

# The mentoring process

- Enter into and build relationships,
- Conduct an initial assessment,
- Set goals, create a written action plan,
- Observe, model practices, co-teach, watch and reflect upon video tapes of practice,
- Obtain and review articles or other resources,
- Participate in communities of practice

# What makes a competent mentor

- Levels of experience and education that are higher than the average practitioner/educator in an early years program.
- Experience as a practitioner/educator, content knowledge, and
- Experience working with adult learners were valued characteristics of coaches in the studies reviewed.

*(Child Trends, 2011)*

# Key Tools and Resources

- Evidence Based quality frameworks
- Accessible Practice Guide
- Standardised validated instruments
- Observation and Feedback
- Specific goals and action plans
- Person to Person support and collaboration



# Considerations



- Maximising impact
- Social inclusion / children in areas of designated disadvantage
- Value for money / efficiencies
- Service readiness
- Support structures and resources
- Sustainability

# Re-Building Trust



- To ensure early years quality services support and nurture all children from birth to 6 years, and provide parents with the assurance and trust that their children are receiving the quality they need and deserve.

# Key Messages

- Quality is essential – not optional
- Quality is a professional obligation
- Children deserve the best we can provide
- We have the evidence, the knowledge and the tools
- **It is time to implement**







We are at a new beginning with the opportunity to really make a difference for **children** in Ireland



# Thank You