

Reflections – where have we come  
from, to go where

*the next six years: the first six years*

National Children's Strategy and children's early  
years

Start Strong Conference

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# Reflecting

- Context:
  - Government commitments
  - Preparations for a National Children's Strategy
  - Financial constraints
  - Array of research evidence available and coming on stream, nationally and internationally
- Time points 2006 – 2012 - 2018

# Government commitment

- -- will maintain the free pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education *to promote the best outcomes* for children and families.
- -- will improve the quality of the pre-school year by *implementing standards* and *reviewing training options*.
- As resources allow, this Government will invest in a *targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children*, building on existing targeted pre-school supports for families .....
- Prepare and present a new National Children's Strategy

# A Changing Landscape

1996 – 2006 . . . A decade of reflection:

•2006

- Focus on women in work – led to a conflict between the traditional ideology of the family and the economic necessity to attract women into the workforce
  - **And in 2012?**
- Targeted versus universal approach – sectoral collaboration has created a momentum across diverse settings that is universal --- and may provide the path towards a more holistic approach to developing services for young children and their families
  - **And in 2012?**

# A Changing Landscape

2006

Centre-based institutional childcare – strong investment focus on spaces rather than quality of those spaces

–And in 2012?

Parental funding rather than sectoral support – the Early Years Supplement does nothing to address the sustainability of quality early childhood care and education services

–And in 2012?

# A Changing Landscape

2006

Childcare versus early education – co-location alone does not integration make! Need for the units developing and implementing early childhood policies to be merged

- And in 2012?

And what had the National Children's Strategy [2000-2010] to say?

# NCS [2000] – Objective A

- Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures
  - The aim will be to provide a childcare sector comparable with the best of our EU partners . . . .

Verdict?

- Many positive developments from 2000 – 2010. However, some key aspects of policy still to be addressed if potential of ECEC is to be met.

# Some observations about quality in early years services

- Know your sector
  - 0 – 6 years
  - From home to primary school inclusive
- Take account of the evidence
  - Integrated education and care
  - Duration
  - Quality

# Know your Sector

- 0 – 6 years
  - Don't lose sight of the under 3s and don't forget the 5 and 6 year olds
- From home through to primary school
  - Early childhood supports include family supports in a wide variety of early years services including part-time, fulltime and after school in many different types of settings. All varieties need consideration and support

# Quality – taking account of the evidence

- Integrate care and education
  - Structurally
  - Conceptually
  - Strategically
- Duration
  - Influence of quality early years services evident from age 2
  - Amount of quality service matters
- Quality
  - Developmental and protective impacts

# Common features of high quality ECEC

- Positive adult-child interactions
- Adult understanding of early years curriculum
- Adult knowledge of how young children learn
- Skills in supporting children, particularly in their conflicts
- Adults supporting parents and the home learning environment

# A striking point about quality

- All five recurrent features relate to the quality of
  - Staff, Staff, Staff, Staff and Staff
- And so to the importance of
  - Investment in training through creative approaches
  - Supportive regulatory environment

# Resources at 2012

- Síolta – national quality framework
- Aistear – national curriculum framework
- Workforce Development Plan +
- Free Preschool Year
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- Various subsidies and implementation tools
- Strategic investments
- The active NGO/NVCO sector

# The challenge

- Maintain and consolidate the gains [structural and resource]
- Utilise the frameworks available [quality and curricular] more holistically and creatively
- Focus on the integrated nature of early childhood and the supports needed
- Provide for enhanced training towards a graduate led workforce across all the services
- Strive for high quality learning environments in all settings
- Raise the vision and aim high
- Watch out for unintended consequences

# Rethinking the focus of government commitments

- -- will maintain the free pre-school year in **the context of a broader** Early Childhood Care and Education **strategy** *to promote the best outcomes* for children and families.
- -- will improve the quality of the **[pre-school year] ECEC sector** by *implementing standards and reviewing training options.*
- As resources allow, this Government will invest in **additional** *targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children*, building on existing **[targeted pre-school] ECEC** supports for families .....

# It's about vision as much as investment

## *The next six years*

- Structurally integrate education and care strands of ECEC policy within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Produce a comprehensive, integrated National Early Childhood Education and Care Strategy within two year
- Bed the above strategy into the overall National Children's Strategy



**Thank You 😊**

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