

Introducing Education Inspection in the Early Learning and Care sector in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities

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Overview

- The Early Learning and Care Sector in Ireland
 - Provision and practice
 - Governance and the history of evaluation and monitoring
 - Participation
- Early Years Education Inspection – meeting challenge with innovation
 - The role of the inspector as ‘knowledge broker’
 - The inspection model
- Progress to date – the impact
 - Response from the ELC sector
 - Insights from Inspection

Nature of ECEC Provision

- Predominantly private sector provision – (principle of subsidiarity)
 - 70/30 for profit/not for profit split
- Diversity of service offer – duration, philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy
 - Majority of settings (approx. 67%) cater for less than 20 children
- Centrally funded and regulated – national registration system introduced in 2016
- Diverse workforce – qualifications, experience and terms and conditions of employment – 26% Bachelor Degree holders (diverse qualifications)
- High level of enrolment for 3-6 years, low level for 0-3 years
- Significant use of informal childcare arrangements (Childminding)

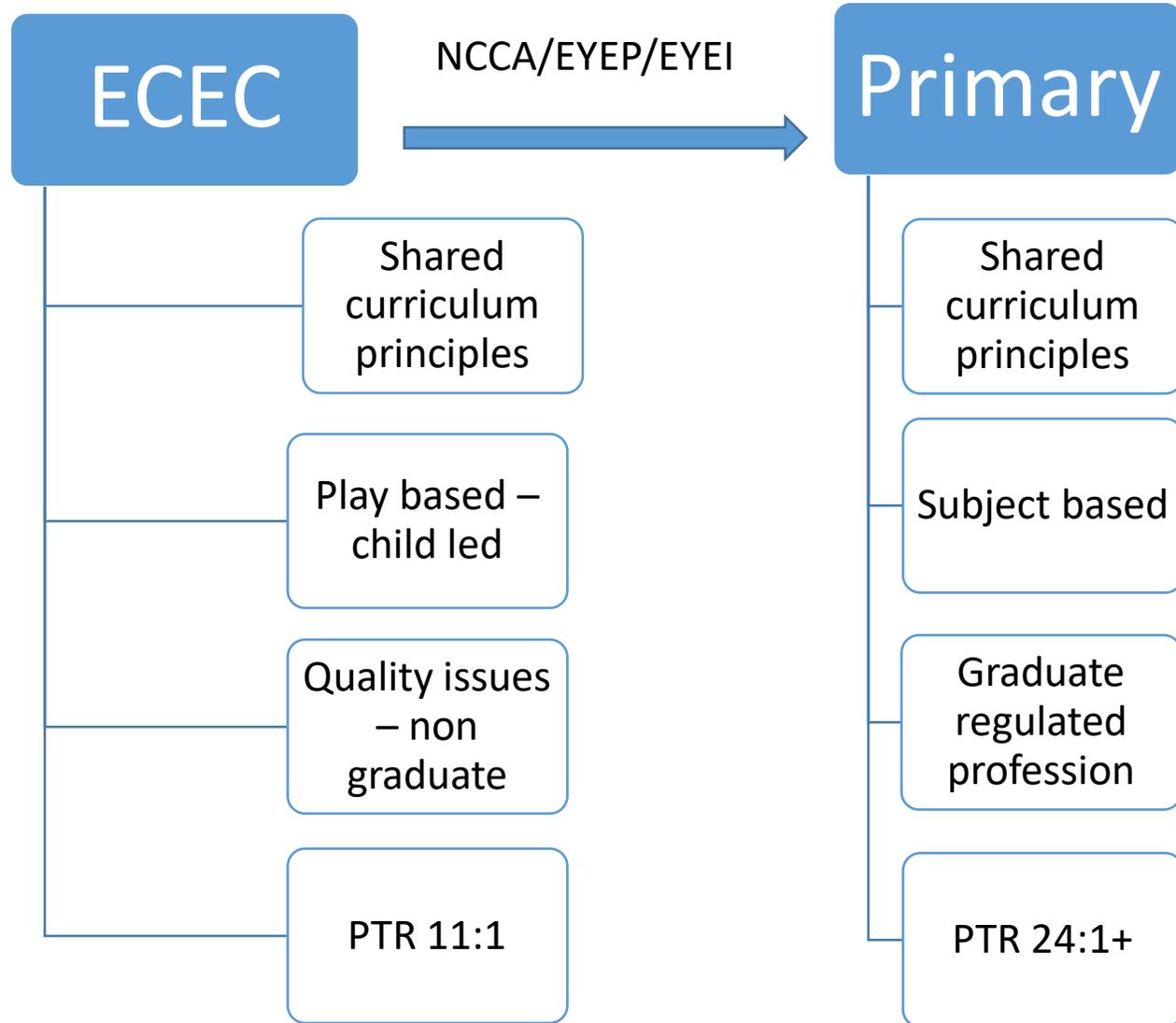


Split Governance



Department of Children and Youth Affairs 0-6 years	Department of Education and Skills 0-6 years
Funding and regulation of pre-primary provision in ECEC (0-6 years) including Universal pre-school provision from age 3 to school starting age	Funding and regulation of primary provision from school starting age (4-6 years) to 12 years
Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations 2016	National quality and curriculum frameworks, Síolta and Aistear for all children to age 6 years Education Inspection Framework 2015
Continuing Professional Development (CPD), workforce development and professionalisation and quality development services across pre-primary sector	
Development of policy across pre-primary sector and transitions	
Rollout of education-focused inspections across universal pre-school scheme	

Early Years in Pre-primary and Primary



Department of
Children and
Youth Affairs
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Department of
Education and
Skills
Teaching Council
NCSE

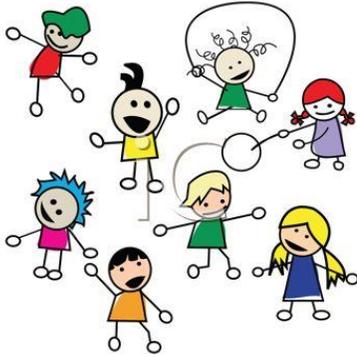
Evaluation and Monitoring – the context for introduction of Early Years Education Inspection

- 1997 – Introduction of Preschool Services Regulation – Regulator Department of Health (health and safety focus)
 - Inspected by Public Health Nurses and Environmental Health Officers
- 2006 – Revised Regulations - introduction of regulation of Learning and Development – Regulator - Department of Health and Children
 - Inspected by Public Health Nurses
- 2010 – introduction of universal free preschool programme – contractual obligation to deliver a programme adhering to educational practice frameworks and to have qualified staff
- 2013 – ‘A Breach of Trust’ – documentary on child abuse in Early Years settings
- 2014 – Funding for National Quality Agenda in Early Years sector
- 2015 – establishment of Early Years Education-focused Inspection
 - Inspected by Early Years Education and Care Professionals
- 2016 – Introduction of Registration system + regulation for staff qualifications (further education NFQ Level 5/ISCED 3) – Regulator TUSLA – Child and Family Agency
 - Inspected by majority PHN but few new recruits from wider professions e.g. Social Care/Early Years

Context- Parental Choice at age 4



Home

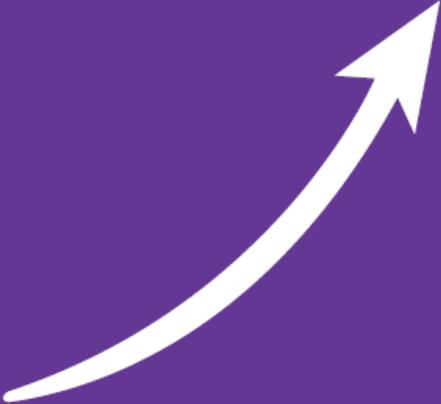


Early Learning and Care



Primary School

Early Education funded for 2 years since 2018



186,190

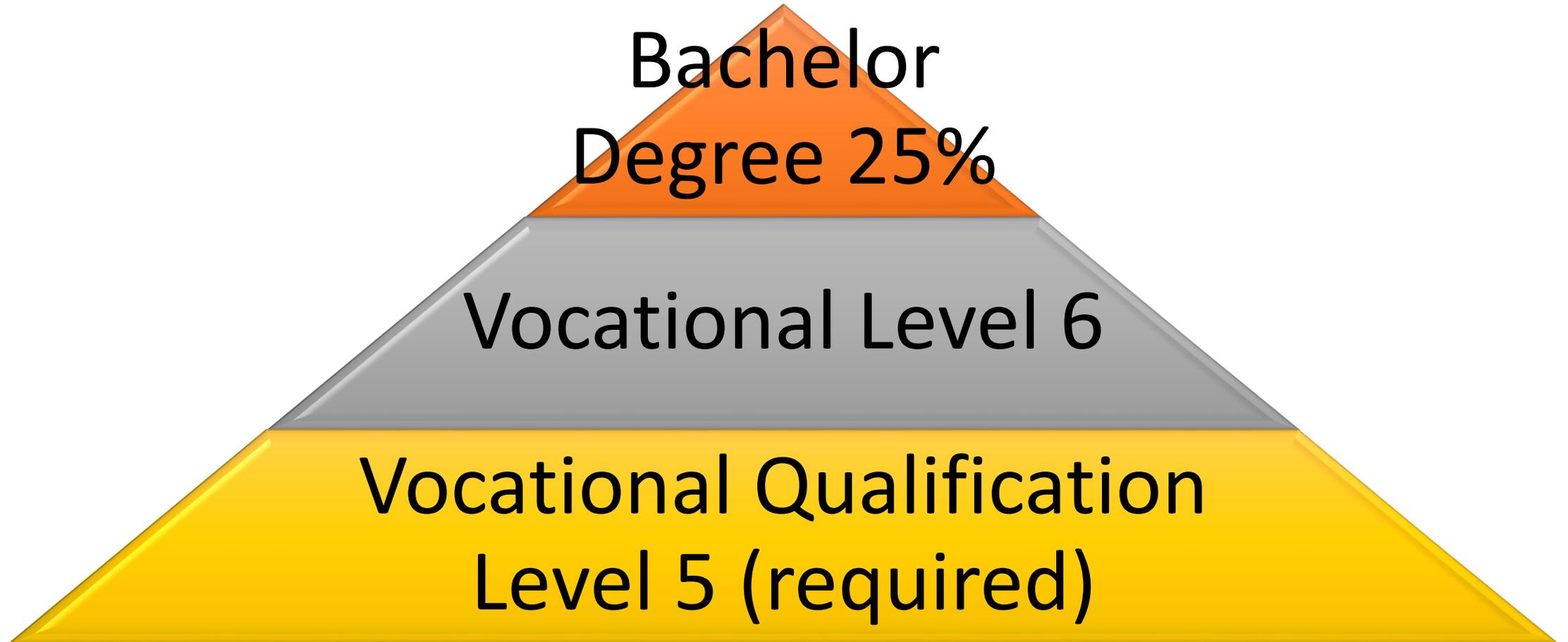
The estimated number of children enrolled across early years services, 9% increase on the previous year



2 in 3 children enrolled are aged between **3** and **6** years

Capacity?

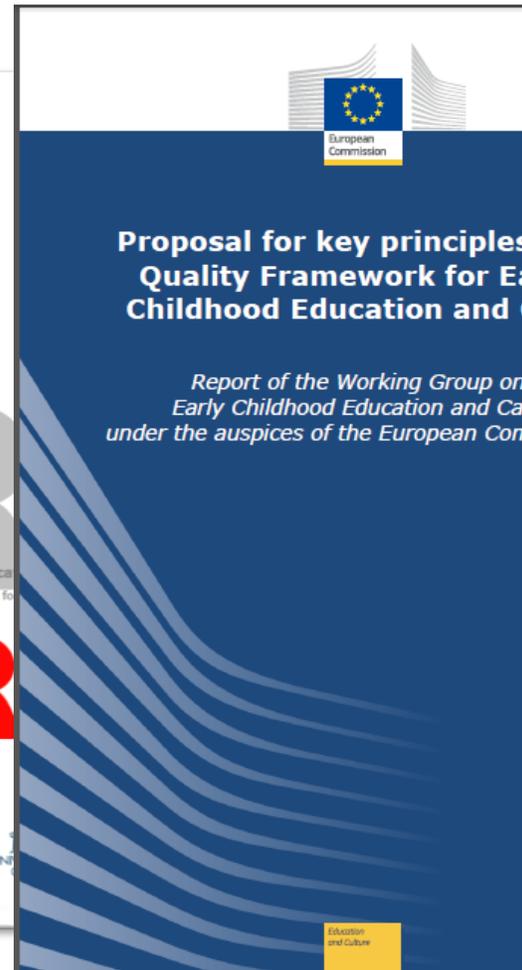
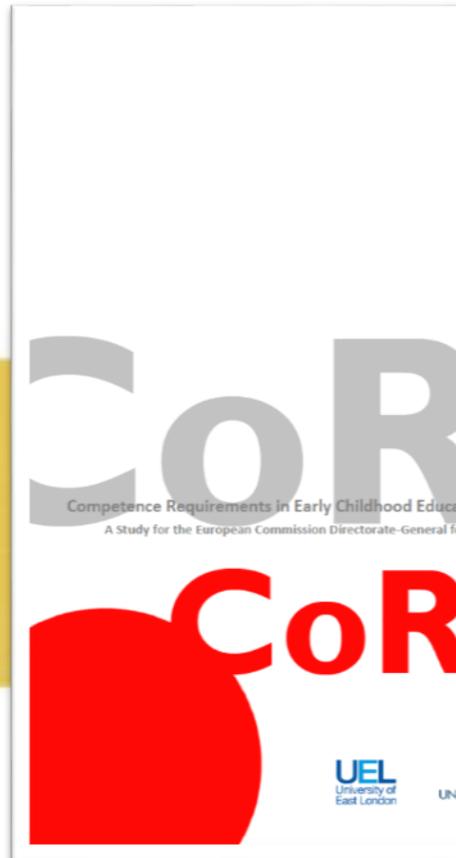
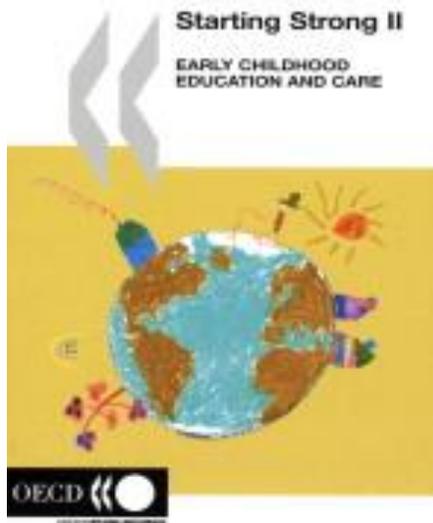
Workforce Qualification profile



EMERGING PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE



INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT



 Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 24 April 2019
(OR. en)

7976/19

Interinstitutional File:
2018/0127(NLE)

EDUC 182
JEUN 46
SOC 255

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
No. prev. doc.: 6465/19
No. Cion doc.: 9246/18 + ADD 1 - COM(2018) 271 final
Subject: Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on High Quality Early
Childhood Education and Care Systems
- Adoption

The Education Committee has examined the above proposal for a Council Recommendation with a view to its adoption at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 22 - 23 May 2019. The text now meets with the agreement of all delegations.

The Permanent Representatives Committee is accordingly invited to forward the text to the Council for adoption and subsequent publication in the Official Journal.

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TREE.1.B

UM/sk

1
EN

13

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

- **Aistear**-National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA-2009)
 - ❑ Specific focus on curriculum
 - ❑ 4 themes: Exploring & Thinking, Well-Being, Communicating & Identity & Belonging
 - **Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide:**
 - ❑ Draws elements of both frameworks together
 - ❑ Develop the quality of your curriculum to better support children's learning & development
- *Both frameworks are interlinked and complement each other*



Accountability and improvement

- Identify and affirm good practice
- Support self-evaluation and review processes in the settings
- Provide advice and support to Early Years practitioners about how children's learning can be developed
- Complement other national measures to support improvement; work collaboratively with other groups and agencies in Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector to support practitioners in a cohesive, practical way
- Provide information to the public, including parents
- Publication - a catalyst for improvement (Di Maggio & Powell 1983)

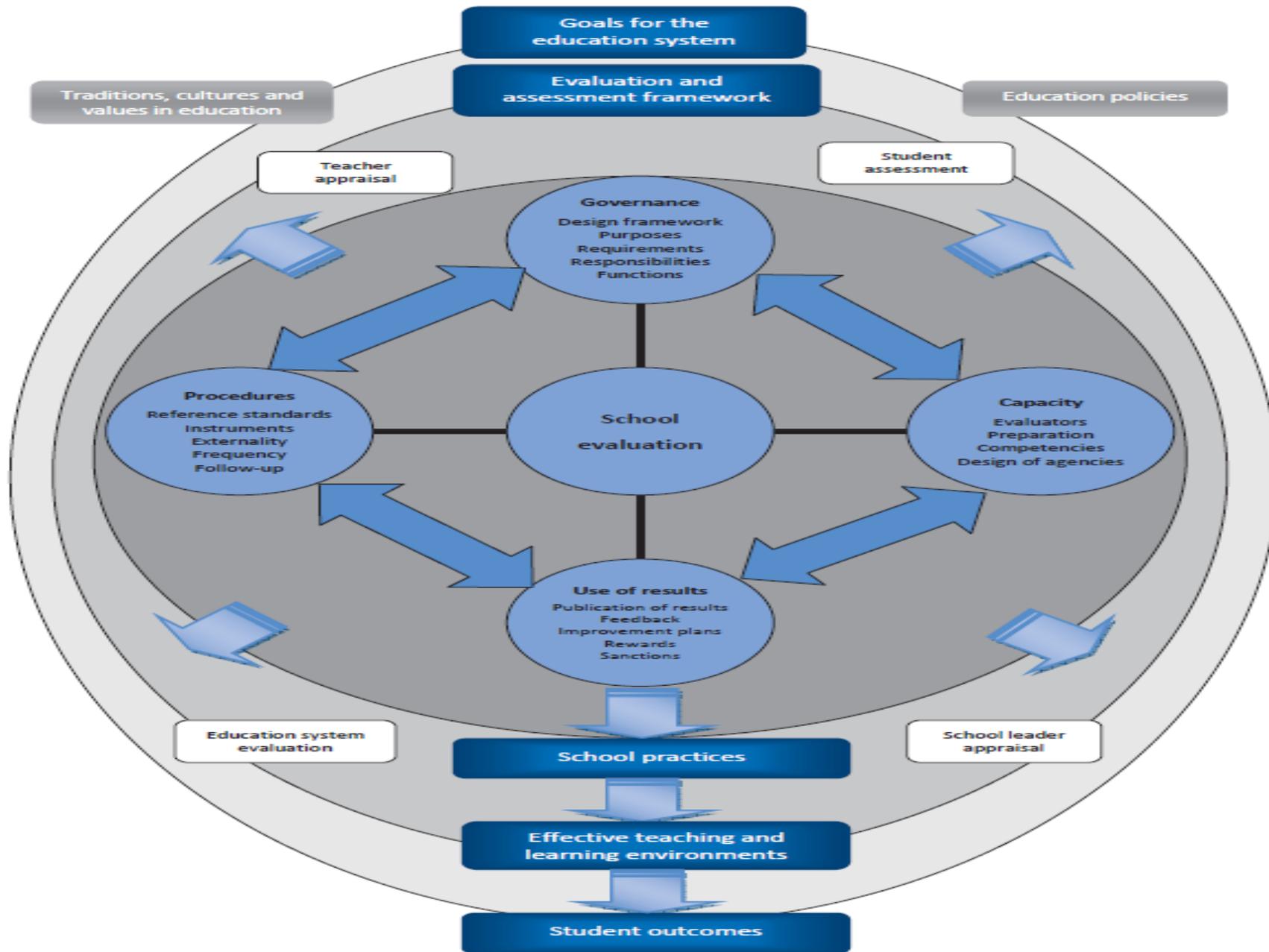


Progress to date

- Recruitment and training of Inspectors
- Implementation of EYEI in small scale ELC settings
- Composite report published January 2018 – to inform review of Guide to EYEI
- Revised Guide to EYEI published and updated inspection practices adopted from September 2018
- Consultation on extension of EYEI 0-6 launched May 2019



Innovative?



The quality framework



- Evidence informed, developed through consultation with all stakeholders and partners – high content validity
- A strong framework – clear and focused on practice
- Illustrates what effectiveness in Early Years education provision looks like
- Informs both internal review, reflection and developmental processes as well as the external inspection process
- *“Inspection systems that set clear expectations regarding what constitutes ‘effective provision’ for settings and their stakeholders are strong determinants of improvement actions” (Gustafsson et al 2013)*

A focus on process quality ...

- **Promoting children's well-being, learning and development** with special attention to:
 - Relationships – respectful and reciprocal (parents, staff and children)
 - Interactions – purposeful, varied and empowering
 - Creating a strong sense of identity and belonging for all
 - Pedagogy – curriculum, strategies, assessment and documentation
- **The role of the professional reflective adult**
 - Initial and continuing professional education and training
 - Mindful and reflective in practice
 - Valued, supported and rewarded



Improvement through professional engagement



- **Engage with practitioners in a spirit of trust and respect**

“Effective educational change requires a ‘hearts and minds’ approach” (McNab 2004)

- **Foster professional conversations that promote reflection and change**

“External inspection is most likely to be effective when based on collaboration, collegiality, and a sense of shared experience between the inspector and those inspected” (Whitby 2010)

Inspectorate Code of Practice (Dept of Education and Skills Inspectorate 2015)

- *A focus on learners*
- *Development and improvement*
- *Respectful Engagement*
- *Responsibility and accountability*

The Inspector as the Knowledge Broker.....

*"Knowledge brokers should be individuals with high credibility who are seen as impartial and trustworthy... They need extensive experience in the area of interest, **research credibility** and policy level experience, authority and presence, **skills in negotiation**, communication, networking and **relationship building** and the ability to know when to 'make a pitch'."*

The Knowledge Broker role in action

....requires translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives.

*It requires enough **legitimacy** to influence the development of a practice, mobilise attention, and address conflicting interests. It requires the **ability to link practices by facilitating transactions** between them, and **to cause learnings by introducing into a practice elements of another.***

*Toward this end, brokering provides **a participative connection** - not because reification is involved, but because what brokers press into service to connect practice is their experience of multi-membership and **the possibilities for negotiation inherent in their participation.**"*

Etienne Wenger

The Quality Improvement spiral



Early Years Education Inspection Framework

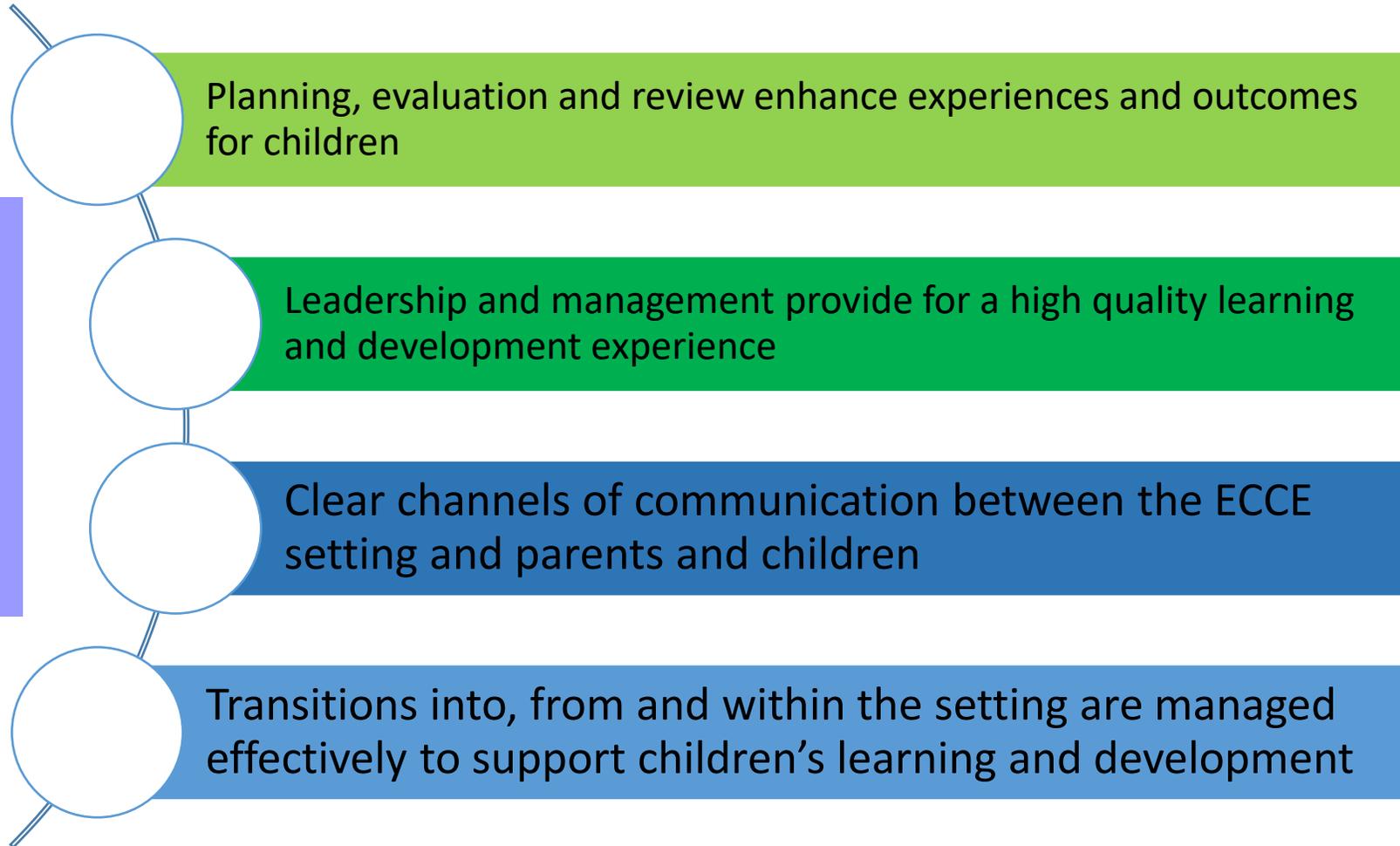
- Building on Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework (NCCA, 2009) and Síolta the national quality framework for early childhood education (DES, 2010)
- Four Areas of Practice
 - 20 Outcome statements
 - ‘Signposts for Practice’



Area 2
Quality of
process to
support
children's
learning and
development

- Provision is informed by *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*
- Information about the children'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 within an inclusive environment

Area 4
Quality of
management
and
leadership for
learning



Stages of Inspection

- **Before**

- Notification – 2 working days
- Information gathering – setting profile form
- Information sent to the Setting

- **During**

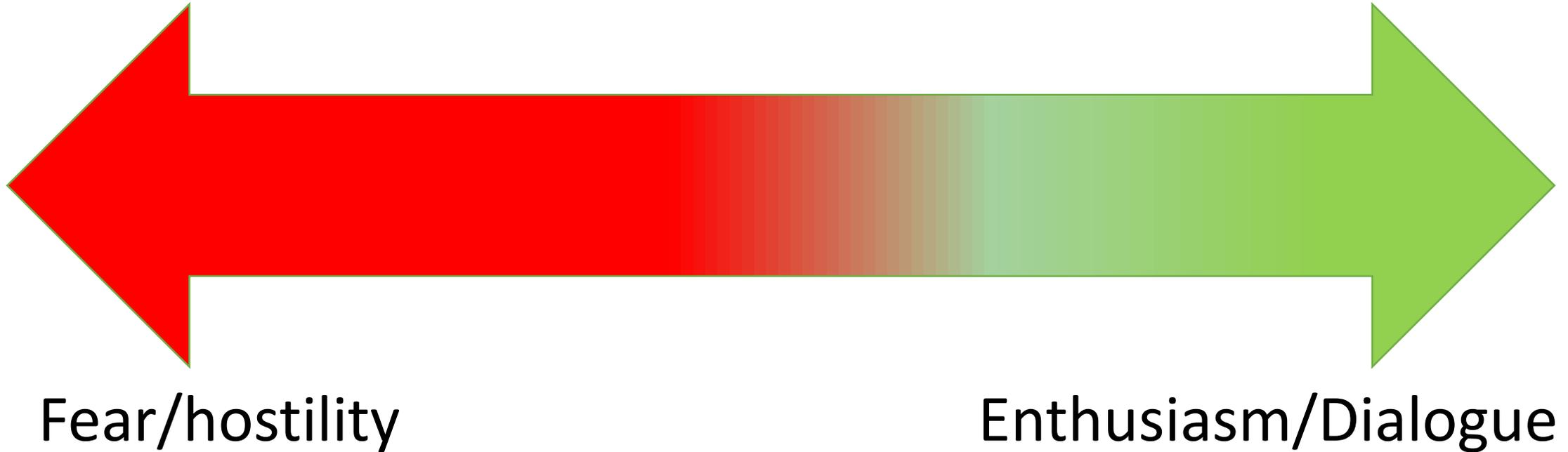
- Meetings - with management and staff
- Observation of practice – including where appropriate review of documentation
- Engagement with children
- Feedback session – open to all staff

- **After**

- Preparation of draft report
- Extensive editorial process – factual verification and setting response
- Publication of report.

Impact?

Engagement continuum 2016



Variables: Staff qualifications; pedagogy; date of establishment of setting; size; geographical location

Feedback from ELC sector 2017

Very positive:

Respectful engagement

Clarity and simplicity of Quality Framework

Validation of professional role of early years educator

Making practice visible – to parents and other professionals



Insights from Inspection – Area 1: Inclusion

Strengths (many)

- Diversity of participation
- Respectful relationships
- Presence of staff funded through AIM

Challenges (majority)

- Partnership with parents
- Mediating the programme for SEN
- Universal design – natural environments

Area 2 - Pedagogy

Strengths (many)

- Developing understanding of Aistear
- Innovative approaches to integrated pedagogy
- Greater confidence in engagement with education objectives

Challenges (majority)

- Planning for progressing learning – 2 year ECCE
- Formalisation of teaching and learning strategies
- Consistency of practice within setting

Area 3 – Learning dispositions and skills

Strengths (Majority)

- Children are generally happy, engaged and confident learners
- Children demonstrating creativity and competence across a range of learning dispositions and skills

Challenges (Many)

- Strategies to support self –regulation, independence, intrinsic motivation
- Support for language development/communication skills/ English/Irish as an additional language
- Support for creativity, early mathematical skills

Leadership, management and governance

Strengths (some)

- Presence of higher education ECCE graduates in leadership roles
- Internal evaluation and review processes

Challenges (many)

- Leadership capacity (especially accountability for quality improvement)
- Professional support and supervision for staff (including CPD)
- Engaging with external support services

Thank you.

Questions?

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References

- **Ozga, J., (2012) Governing knowledge: data, inspection and education policy in Europe** Pages 439-455 | Received 01 Nov 2010, Accepted 01 Nov 2011, Published online: 23 Nov 2012
- **Malin & Brown (2019) The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education: Connecting the Dots Between Research and Practice, 1st Edition**