



Early Childhood Ireland's

Strategic Plan 2015-2020

Playing Our Part Together

Revised October 2017



OUR VISION

Every young child is thriving and learning in quality early childhood settings.

Our role in achieving this vision is to be effective champions for quality in practice, putting children and their rights at the core of our work and advocating strongly for them, their families and all early childhood professionals.



Preamble

This ambitious strategic plan sets out our goals and priorities over the next five years. In this strategy Early Childhood Ireland is committed to supporting members and collaborating with others in the context of a professionalising sector and a changing social, policy and economic environment. Together with members we will strive to ensure that all our work is of high quality, that we are inclusive in all we do, that we act ethically and respectfully in our dealings with everyone, that we are effective and efficient with our resources and that we hold an image of the competent child at the centre of all that we do. The Strategic Plan will guide operations and form the basis of reporting throughout the organisation. Progress against the plan will be monitored systematically by the Board and shared with members at our AGM and Conference.

Background to the Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is developed at a specific point in time when early childhood care and education is at a tipping point. The sector has grown over the past two decades on the national agenda.

Our Mission

Our mission is to inspire and enable members to provide quality experiences for young children and their families in their settings.

We do this by:

- Working closely with members, peer organisations, parents, policy makers, partners, funders and researchers
- Advocating on behalf of our members and the children and families they work with on matters that are important to them
- Progressing thinking and research to help inform and shape the quality of practice and policy



Our Values


As a membership based organisation we value:

- Children as competent learners and as citizens with rights
- Parents as champions and as the most important people in the lives of children
- Early childhood professionals, their commitment, dedication and professionalism in working with young children and their families
- Play as a right and as a key learning pathway in the lives of children
- Collaborative working to achieve our aims and bring about change
- Knowledge building and sharing to inform, enrich and empower
- Integrity, respect and ethical behaviour at the heart of how we work

Our Goals

The Early Childhood Ireland Strategic Plan 2015-2020 sets out our broad direction and priorities over the next five years, which centres on 5 goals:

Goal 1:	ECI is the first port of call for supports to early childhood providers, enabling members to deliver quality experiences and outcomes for children and their families
Goal 2:	ECI mobilises its members, parents and others to drive change, as the most prominent and effective advocate for the early years sector and for young children and their families.
Goal 3:	ECI is the recognised expert in relation to quality early years practice, sharing learning throughout the sector, among parents and in wider society. With our members and partners, we are a leader of innovation and quality in early years practice, working collaboratively to create and share new knowledge in order to remain at the leading edge of early years practice.
Goal 4:	ECI is a strategic, effective and sustainable organisation, firmly rooted in its membership, with the capacity to achieve the above goals.



Developing the Plan

The strategic plan has been **influenced by** our deep-rooted knowledge of and connection with members, our understanding of the changing policy and economic context; and by a strong confidence in the expertise and competencies of our staff.

The strategic plan has been **informed by** our Board who has overseen its progress, by our staff who have contributed to and shaped the plan and by our members who have guided its development.

The strategic plan has been **inspired by** examples of wonderful practice that have been shared by the sector, by the dedication and potential that exists within settings, and by the knowledge that the work of our members makes a significant difference to the lives of children and their families.

Goal 1: ECI is the first port of call for supports to early childhood providers, enabling members to deliver quality experiences and outcomes for children and their families

Objectives
Members' settings are well governed and meet national standards.
Members are informed and supported with all relevant developments - legislative, policy and practice.
Members value and provide for play in the daily lives of young children.
Members deliver curricula that are reflective, emergent and support the learning, development and wellbeing of all children.
Early childhood professionals have access to and gain from high quality and relevant learning opportunities provided by qualified and experienced educators, enhancing their work with young children and their families.
Early Childhood Ireland members are connected and learn with and from others.



Goal 2: ECI mobilises its members, parents and others to drive change, as the most prominent and effective advocate for the early years sector and for young children and their families.

Objectives
Children's rights and wellbeing underpin policy making on matters affecting young children.
Policy makers are informed on and equipped to respond to matters that affect young children, early childhood professionals and the sector.
Investment in the early years sector is increased towards the target of 1% of GDP so that it provides the best quality education and care for young children, it is sustainable for providers and staff, and affordable for parents.
The early years sector and parents are actively involved as agents in driving policy change on matters affecting young children and the sector.
Early childhood educators are recognised as professionals.
The early years sector is better understood, recognised and valued across society for the contribution it makes to children's education and development.



Goal 3: ECI is the recognised expert in relation to quality early years practice, sharing learning throughout the sector, among parents and in wider society. With our members and partners, we are a leader of innovation and quality in early years practice, working collaboratively to create and share new knowledge in order to remain at the leading edge of early years practice.

Objective

Early Childhood Ireland is at the cutting edge of early childhood education and care, gaining from and contributing to building expertise through strong partnerships with members, other thought leaders and change agents at home and abroad.

Early Childhood Ireland learns from and contributes to a growing expertise in the early years, based on focused and relevant research and best practice.

Early Childhood Ireland contributes to the dissemination of good practice and works to ensure a bedding in of good practice in all Early Years settings.

Ireland's early years sector has easy access to and is informed by relevant and meaningful developments and thinking.

Members of Early Childhood Ireland can generate, share and celebrate their own best practice and contribute to a growing expertise in the sector.

Parents are better aware of and value play inside and outside the home, and recognise and appreciate quality in early childhood care and education.



Goal 4 ECI is a strategic, effective and sustainable organisation, firmly rooted in its membership, with the capacity to achieve the above goals.

Objective
Is a well-governed, strong, sustainable and financially secure organisation.
Has a dynamic and effective Board to oversee and regularly review and strengthen its governance actively seeking out examples of best practice and ensuring it meets its statutory obligations.
Has an engaged, growing and diverse membership base who share our Goals.
Is a learning organisation, continuously generating and creating knowledge and disseminating that knowledge in the Early Years sector.
Is an employer of choice that values and invests in its people and provides a stimulating environment for growth and development.
Early Childhood Ireland invests in its future through continuous review of processes, technological advances and skills requirements.



Being Transparent and Accountable

This is our strategic plan, one that we will strive to realise over the next 5 years, but we cannot achieve the outcomes alone. Together with our members we will seek collaborators who share our aims and core values to achieve our ambitious goals. From this strategy we will build annual operational plans that will draw on the skills and competencies of partners and staff colleagues. We will evaluate and hold ourselves accountable, using our resources wisely and investing them in what is important.

We will share our stories, successes, shortcomings and learning with our members; our Board and our funders through:

- Board Reports
- Annual Reports
- Performance Management System
- Annual Work Plans
- Charity Regulator Reports
- Audited/SORP Accounts
- Pobal and HSE Reports
- Bi-annual report to members on the Strategic Plan

Glossary & Abbreviations

Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) We use the term CPL (instead of CPD) to describe the ongoing training that is undertaken by an educator

Educator We use the term 'Early Childhood Educator' to describe those who work with young children birth to six years of age

Parents We use the term 'Parent' to include the significant others, specifically guardians, who care for and act as champions for children

Settings We predominantly use the term 'Settings' to describe the out of home environments where children are cared for

DECET Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training

NPC National Parents Council

VBJK Centre for Innovation in the Early Years



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