



**Maynooth
University**

National University
of Ireland Maynooth

A Crowded Space:

The Policy Development Landscape in Early Childhood Education

Dr Thomas Walsh

Maynooth University

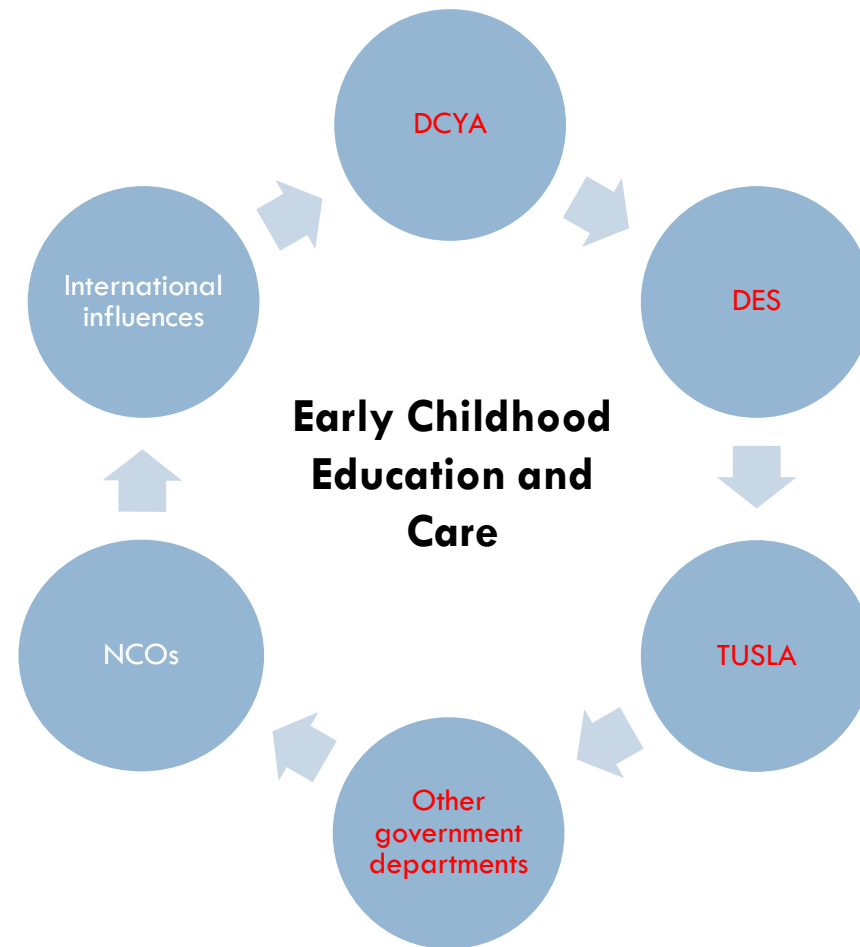
Thomas.walsh@nuim.ie



Outline of presentation

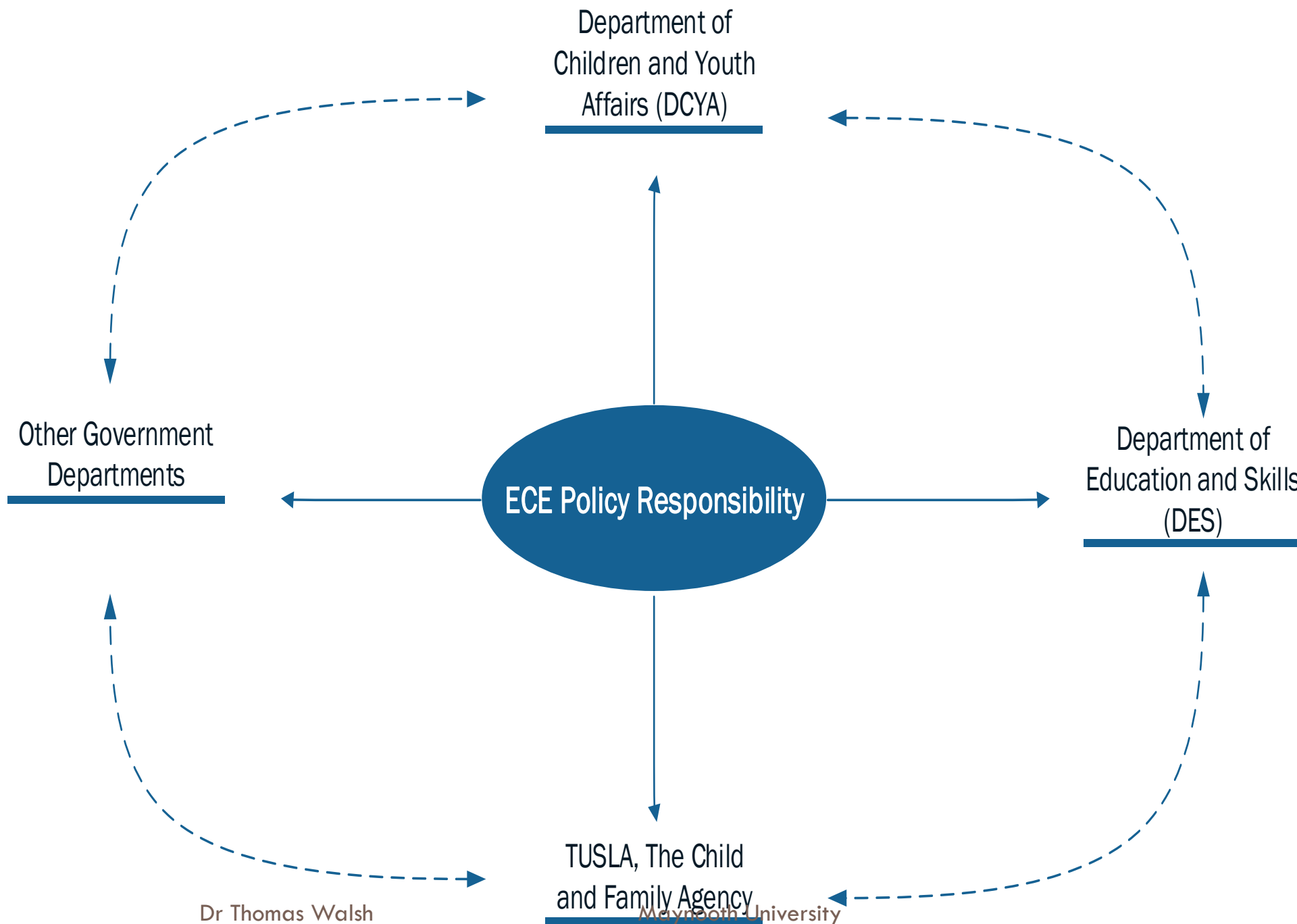
- Background and context
- Provide an overview of key departments and organisations with responsibility for ECE policy and practice
- Explore the roles and responsibilities of each of these departments/ agencies
- Propose implications and recommendations for the future

Key influences on ECE policy



Background and Context

- Historical state reluctance to intervene in family matters
 - ▣ Reliance on private, voluntary and community providers
- Split system between 'care' and 'education'
- White Paper recommended establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency
- Policy direction and interest driven by:
 - ▣ Recognition of value of ECE
 - ▣ Increased participation of women in workforce
- Rapid policy development, especially in last 10 years
 - ▣ Filled previous legislative and policy vacuum
- Varied locus of policy development
 - ▣ Responsibility transferred across a range of departments and agencies



Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)

Department of Education and Skills (DES)

TUSLA, The Child and Family Agency

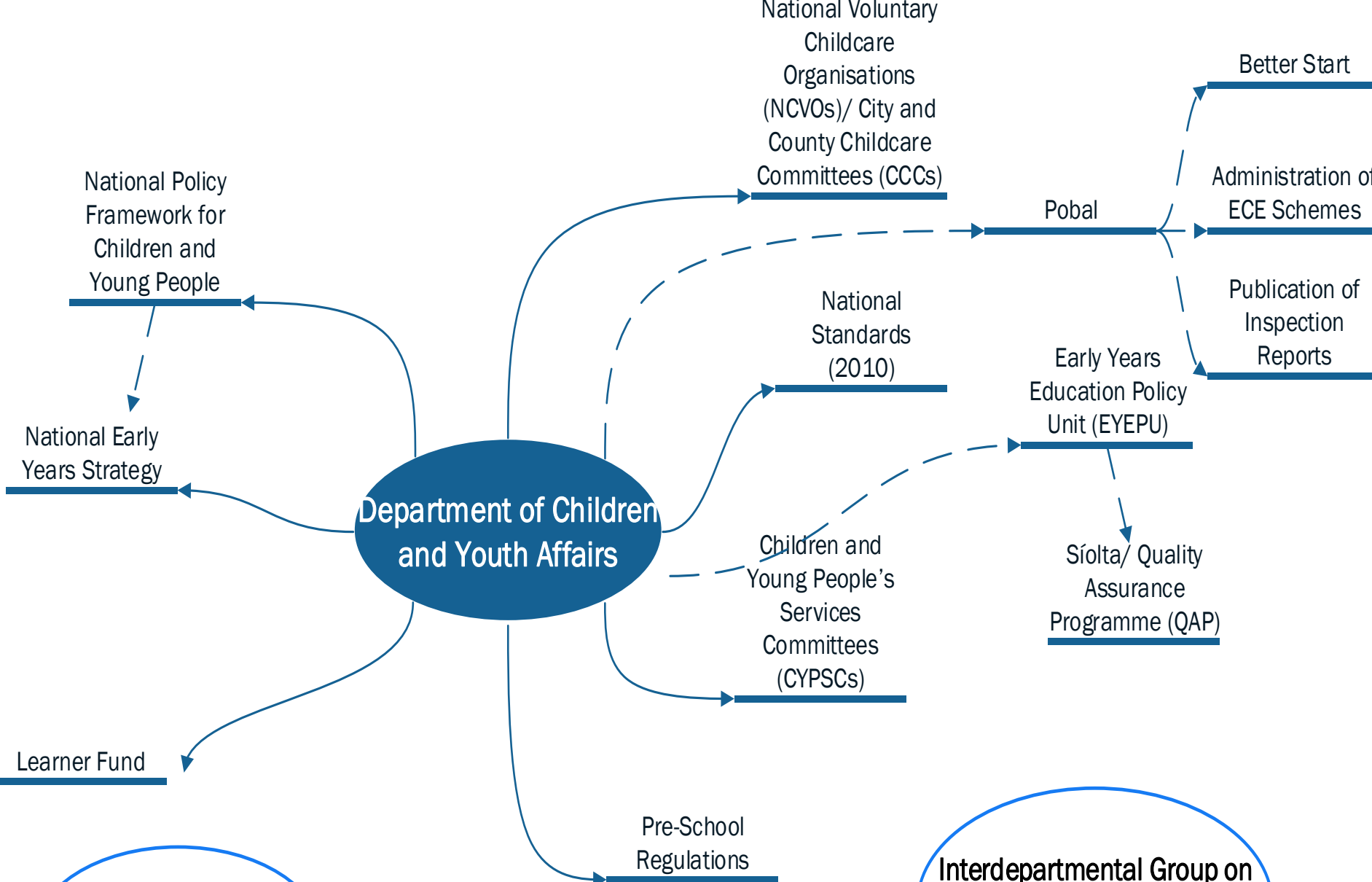
Other Government Departments

ECE Policy Responsibility

Dr Thomas Walsh

Maynooth University

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

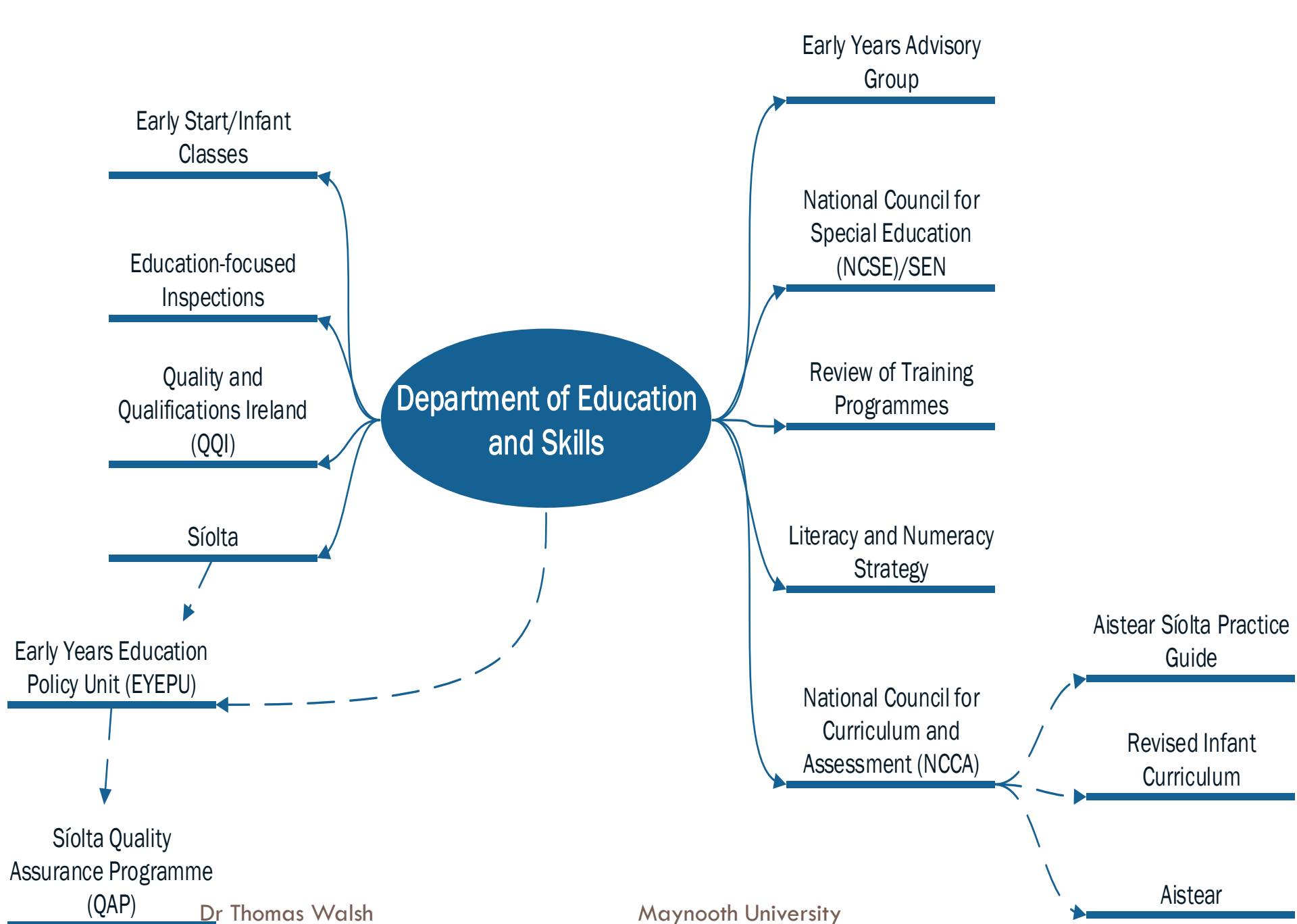


Interdepartmental Group on Childcare (2015)

Dr Thomas Walsh

Maynooth University

Interdepartmental Group on Supporting Access for Children with a Disability



Child
Protection
Training



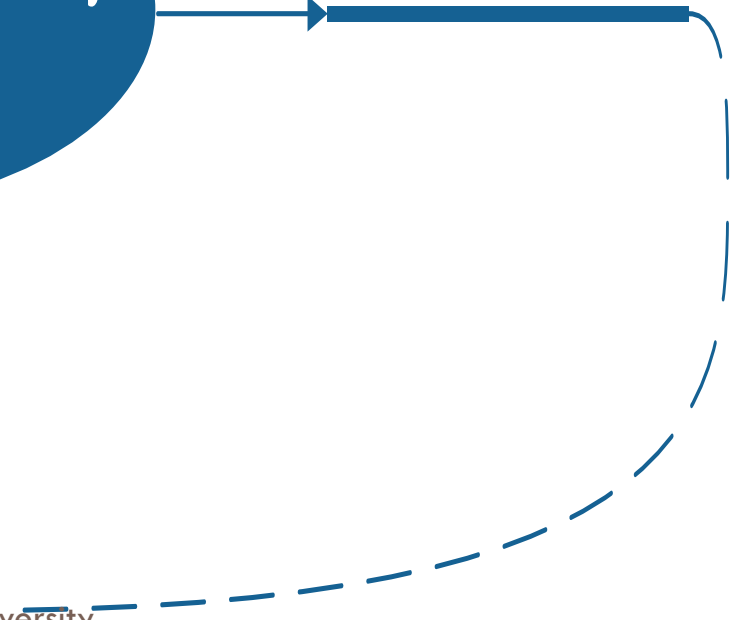
Pre-School
Inspectorate



Registration System



Publication of
Inspection Reports



Wider Government Departments and Agencies

Department of Finance

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Department of Health

Department of Justice and Equality

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Health Service Executive (HSE)

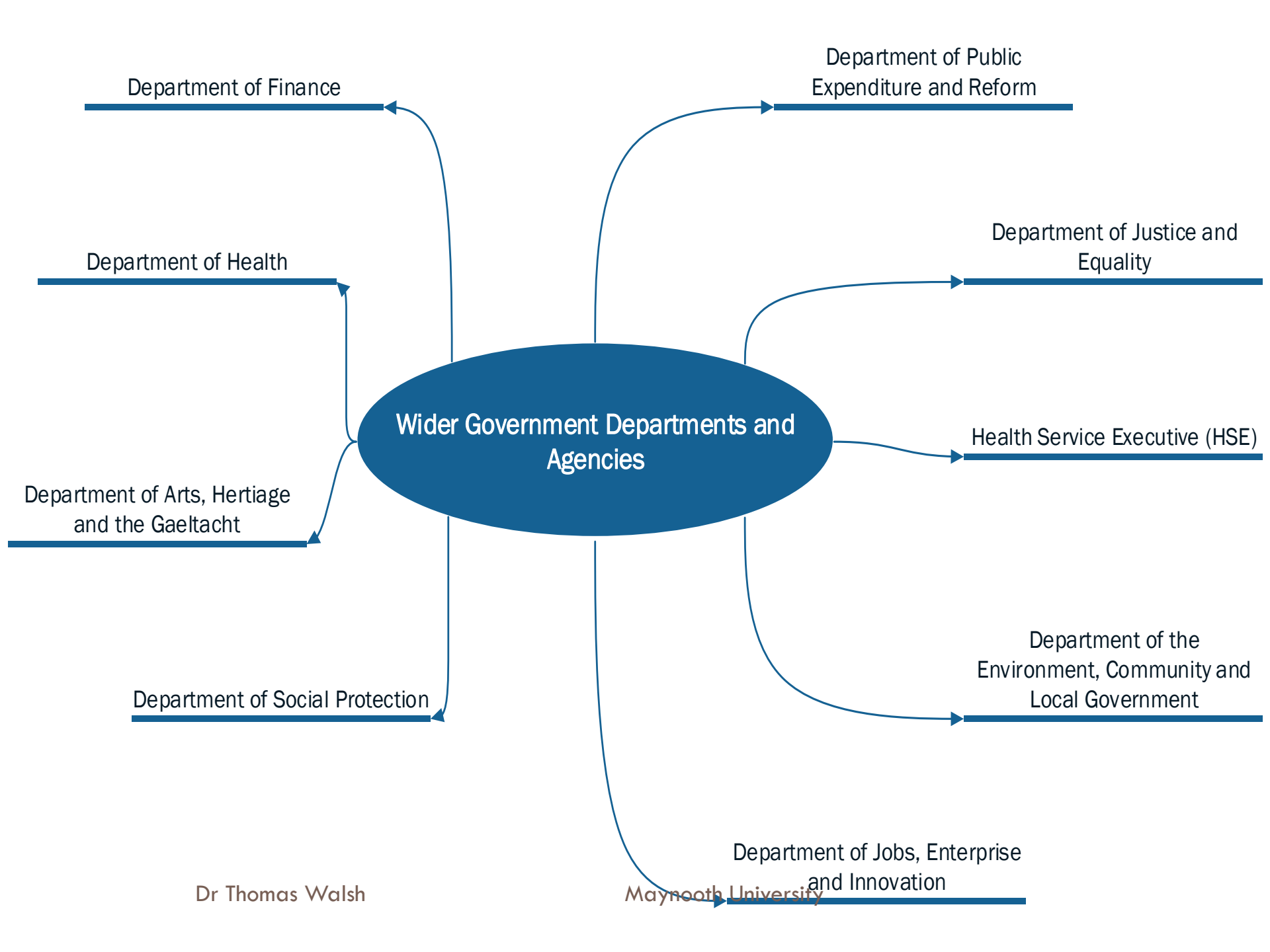
Department of Social Protection

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Dr Thomas Walsh

Maynooth University





Cohesion and integration

Period 1995 to 2012 “...rapid policy change without transformation.” (Hayes et al., 2013:4)

“These new schemes [education-focused inspections], coupled with the introduction of new standards and regulations are leading to **confusion** and will burden the system with extra administration and interaction with multiple agencies... It is essential that the full range of welcome Government initiatives in this sector are **strategically complementary**.”

Memo from TUSLA to DCYA, reported in Irish Times 8th April 2015, (<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/concern-about-inadequate-pre-school-inspections-1.2167861#.VSTU534oKIZ.twitter>)

“The scattered provisions for childcare support are **complicated** and **difficult to navigate**.”

(European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document – Country Report Ireland 2015*. Paris: OECD, p. 60)

Implications and recommendations

- Centralised responsibility for policy development within one department
 - ▣ Ensure ECE policy co-ordination across departments
 - ▣ Greater practice and policy flow between ECE and other sectors of education
- A strong, long-term vision for ECE articulated through a National Early Years Strategy
- One set of centralised requirements for the sector as opposed to settings responding to multiple initiatives
 - ▣ A cohesive inspection system that focuses on all aspects of quality in ECE provision – and complements settings' self-evaluation processes
- Policy audit followed by implementation plans for the range of the worthwhile existing policy initiatives in the sector
- A strategic investment for next 5 years to raise expenditure on ECE to 0.8% of GDP
- Move towards more progressive universalism – reduce complexity of targeting services
- Invest in people in sector
 - ▣ GDP, non-contact hours, salary structures, extend Learner Fund to higher qualification levels

Questions and Discussion



Thomas.walsh@nuim.ie