Pathways to Better Prospects:

Delivering Proper Terms and Conditions for the Early Years Workforce in Ireland

A Literature Review

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We were delighted to appoint the research team from the Department of Work and Employment Studies, Kemmy Business School at the University of Limerick, led by Dr Michelle O'Sullivan to deliver this research. They brought their collective expertise to bear and given the impact of the Covid pandemic in mid-2020, did so with great fortitude, for which we are grateful.

Foreword

Early Childhood Ireland has always recognised the important contribution of the thousands of staff who work in the Irish early learning & care and school-age care sector in delivering quality care and education to babies and children. The backdrop to their vital work however is one of low rates of pay and the absence of a clearly defined career path. In this context, the issues of both recruitment and retention remain hugely challenging, notwithstanding some additional investment in the sector from 2017-2020. Despite this, many staff participate in higher and further education options in their own time but still see little reward through improved terms and conditions.

To contribute to public policy in this area, in 2019 we submitted a request for support to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission under the 'Decent Work' strand of its grants scheme. Our project proposed to examine pathways to professionalisation and improving terms and conditions for our sector's workforce, by comparison with other sectors, as well as with international models of good practice. The researchers have also provided us with strategies that can be applied to or adapted for our sector in the context of the First 5 strategy. Early Childhood Ireland believes that this is an important and timely review of available evidence and information in Ireland and internationally on issues relating to professionalisation and pay and conditions of our workforce. We hope that it will make a significant and impactful contribution to the ongoing policy debates in Ireland about workforce development and related areas. Through our engagement with policy makers and other stakeholders, we intend to ensure that this happens.

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Section 1
Introduction

There have been significant policy developments relating to the early years education and care (ECEC) workforce over the last ten years including the introduction of mandatory minimum qualification requirements for staff, the linking of state funding to staff qualifications, the qualification targets in *First 5* and its commitment to a workforce development plan. This report examines issues relating to professionalisation and pay and conditions of the early years workforce on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland. The issue of professionalising the early years workforce is not a new one and has received attention internationally since the 1970s. Numerous international reports have identified professionalisation as a key issue for the early years sector and this concern has emerged in the context of:

- The expansion in the provision of early years education and care outside the home.
- Greater involvement by the state in expenditure, regulation and standard setting in the early years sector.
- The identified links between the quality of the workforce and the quality of early years education and care.
- The challenges of recruiting and retaining people in the workforce with labour turnover in the sector Ireland at over 23 per cent[1].
- An ongoing concern amongst public policy makers and the early years community for a high-quality system that is also affordable and accessible.
- Growing academic and community debates over the nature and characteristics of early years education and care and the identity of an early years professional.

The recruitment and retention challenges in the early years sector have been recognised by the government. This commitment is articulated in *First 5*, Ireland's first ever whole-of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028). The *First 5* strategy expresses concern over the high turnover among the early years workforce and the unattractiveness of employment in the sector given low pay rates and part-time work. These challenges are not unique to Ireland and the OECD notes that problems of recruitment in early years are common. Factors which have been associated with high turnover rates include unfavourable working conditions, limited career opportunities or progression, poor training, low pay and demanding workload, limited career progression, high staff to child ratios, and inadequate training to match job demands[2]. Ensuring that early years workers have decent pay and conditions is of obvious concern to employees but also has implications for the sector and for society, as international research has shown (Table 1).

Table 1 Impact of Low Pay and Conditions Amongst the Early Years Workforce

Impact on employees
• Poor pay and conditions have a negative impact on workers' financial security, emotional well-being, morale, and motivation to stay in the sector[3]. Financial insecurity is likely to have long-term consequences given that most workers in the sector in Ireland do not have private pensions.
Impact on the sector
• Inadequate pay and conditions are a key factor influencing the turnover of early childhood educators, the reduced supply of workers into the sector, and the casualisation of work[4].
Impact on the quality of ECEC
• There is evidence of links between staff working conditions and learning environments[5] and pay and conditions have been used as measures to assess ECEC quality[6]. • There are associations between the pay and economic well-being of staff and children's development and higher quality interactions between staff and children[7]. Low wages and high staff turnover are associated with lower quality early years services and constrains the effectiveness of the remaining staff[8]. • Unsurprisingly, a wide variety of national and international reports emphasise the importance of a higher quality workforce which has decent pay and conditions. The OECD[9] has noted that working conditions of staff are a fundamental part of ECEC quality. The European Commission[10] has recommended that 'good training, good pay and good working conditions of staff and the support they are given are key factors for ensuring quality in ECEC provision'.
Impact on society
• In addition to the association between pay and conditions and the quality of ECEC provision, other societal impacts of low pay include rising public expenditure as the state needs to support the incomes of early years workers with low/no working hours and low wages[11]. Low pay and conditions in ECEC contribute to gender inequality as women are overrepresented in the sector and 'at the heart of the phenomenon of low pay in female-dominated professions lies the cultural undervaluation of female work. This refers to insufficient recognition, appreciation and remuneration of the skills and tasks related to the work performed in female-dominated occupations'[12]. • Advocates for a 'Child Union' approach within the EU to address inequalities among children recommend they have equal access to quality and inclusive ECEC services with staff that have adequate salaries and working conditions[13].

Terms of reference of the report

Early Childhood Ireland commissioned a literature review of issues relating to the professionalisation and pay and conditions of the early years workforce.

The terms of reference for the study were to:

1. Research the various pathways to professionalisation of other sectors in Ireland which have had success.
2. Analyse and document models of good practice, including internationally, to promote and advance the right to decent work within the early years sector.
3. Taking account of the *First 5* strategy and other relevant developments, identify what

strategies can be applied to, or adapted for, the early years sector.

Approach of the report

The report is based on a review of available evidence and information in Ireland and internationally on issues relating to professionalisation and pay and conditions of the early years workforce. Professionalisation and pay and conditions are inextricably linked yet in the past, public policy has tended to treat professionalisation in isolation from pay and conditions. In countries where ECEC services are not wholly delivered and funded by the state, the responsibility for pay and conditions rests with all providers. In such systems, policy makers tend to encourage professionalisation through enhanced training and education and it is a much less complex policy choice than progressing policy on pay and conditions. Unfortunately, the effect of this policy separation is that the educational profile of the workforce can rise without an accompanying upward trend in pay and conditions, as would be normally expected with rising human capital. Indeed, it is a feature of policies internationally that efforts at improving ECEC have focused on the quality of services without addressing the issues of pay and conditions of staff[14].

The report aims to act as a discussion document for Early Childhood Ireland, providing some insights and highlighting the key issues and questions that might be considered by Early Childhood Ireland in furtherance of its desire to improve professionalisation and pay and conditions for the early years workforce.

Structure of the report

Section 2 summarises the Irish context including the key issues and developments in relation to professionalisation and pay and conditions. This section in particular highlights the key findings/recommendations of national policy documents in relation to workforce issues. In this regard, the early years sector is somewhat unusual relative to other low wage sectors in that workforce challenges have received significant public policy attention over the last decade with the problems recognised and discussed in numerous national reports and there has been a consensus in the reports about the need to address workforce issues. However, these policy discussions have not translated into discernible actions to address workforce challenges, leading to ongoing retention difficulties.

Section 3 explores minimum wage setting systems since two have been proposed for the early years sector - Sectoral Employment Orders and Employment Regulation Orders. The Section explains the legislative basis for each system and identifies the differences between them, along with a third system - Registered Employment Agreements – for the purposes of avoiding confusion between them.

Section 4 provides a synopsis of the extensive literature on the professionalisation of occupations generally, including the pathways that other occupations have pursued to 'professionalise', and it reviews the key issues raised by professionalisation literature that are specific to early years occupations.

Section 5 examines a selection of other occupations in Ireland some of which can be described as well-established professions (teaching, nursing, social care) and some where there have been efforts to improve the conditions of a historically low paid and low qualified workforce (health care support assistants and special needs assistants). The aim of the Section is to consider the key features of these occupations that might define them as professions as well as

the methods used by representative groups to improve their labour market position.

Section 6 reviews a selection of ECEC systems in other countries with particular reference to developments relating to professionalisation and pay and conditions. As Cleveland and Krashinsky[15] note, 'there is not a universally best design of early childhood education and care policy for all countries' but 'different policies can have dramatically different effects on the quality and use of ECEC services and on family employment decisions'. The systems included in the report are Australia, New Zealand, Ontario, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Finland. In reviewing the features of ECEC systems, both similar and dissimilar to the Irish early years system, they offer an opportunity to assess the key considerations and issues that arose in their efforts to professionalise the early years workforce.

Section 7 concludes the report with a summation of the key themes and questions on professionalisation and pay and conditions arising from consideration of the previous sections. It also includes an outline of strategies that are typically employed in other low paid sectors nationally and internationally to improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Section 2
The ECEC Workforce in Ireland: A Contextual Review

Detailed analysis of the profile of the workforce and employment characteristics are available elsewhere, so this section provides an abridged outline of the employment landscape for context. This section sketches the key features regarding pay and conditions before reviewing the recommendations of national public policy documents over the last decade on professionalising the early years workforce and then outlines the significant developments in government policy during Covid-19. It begins by noting how the early yeas workforce is classified in national statistics relative to other occupations with similar interests.

Employment

The variety of terminology and classification groupings used in national statistics related to the ECEC sector complicates analysis of employment numbers (Appendix 1). According to census data, there were 22,977 people in the labour force in the 'pre-primary education' sector in 2016, an increase of 38 per cent since the 2011 Census (Appendix 1, Table 14). In terms of occupational groups, there were 20,146 people in the labour force categorised as 'childminders and related occupations', 4,926 'nursery nurses and assistants' and more than 42,000 as 'primary and nursery teaching education professionals', the vast majority of whom are likely to be primary teachers (Table 15). Pobal[16] estimates that almost 31,000 people worked in early learning and care and school-age childcare in 2018/19.

Working conditions

Pay and conditions in ECEC are generally not the subject of any national regulations or collective agreement but are matters between individual providers and employees. While the state is not a direct employer of staff working in ECEC, it has a significant indirect role in pay and staff qualification issues by (i) being a source of substantial income for providers through the ECCE programme, the national childcare scheme and other subsidised programmes (ii) by increasing funding to services with staff with higher level qualifications. Jobs in the sector can be described as precarious which is defined as jobs which involve 'uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements'[17].

In terms of pay:

- It is well-documented that ECEC is a low wage sector. Regarding pay, the average hourly wage of staff in the sector was €12.55 in 2018/19. As might be expected, staff in managerial roles had higher hourly wages while Early Years Assistants, who account for half of staff working with children, earned on average €11.46 per hour[18]. These pay rates compare with the national average hourly earnings (excluding irregular earnings) in Quarter 1 2019 of €22.20, with the highest sectoral average hourly wage being €35.54 in education and the lowest being €12.97 in accommodation and food[19].
- Over 70 per cent of early years workers in SIPTU's[20] survey work unpaid hours as part of the

job.

- In a survey of over 1,000 early years professionals in July 2020, 29 per cent of respondents stated that they are on less pay than before the lockdown. Of these, 40 per cent were on fewer hours than before the lockdown while a third were working more hours than before the lockdown. Almost two thirds of respondents indicated they had difficulty or great difficulty in making ends meet[21].
- It is notable that in Pobal's 2019 analysis, the level of qualification was only the fifth most influential factor influencing wage rates while other more influential factors included job title, job tenure, and county. If we take the hourly wage rates by level of qualification that were identified by Pobal and calculate them as annual salaries on the basis of working 36 hours per week, they would amount to salaries of between €23,600 for a Level 6 qualification up to almost €28,500 for a Level 9/10 qualification (these are based on year-long working hours however many workers work on a seasonal basis). Moloney's[22] survey of degree graduates in the sector found that substantial numbers were on salaries below €20,000 and over half earned above €20,000 while 11 per cent had salaries above €30,000. A crude comparison with graduate salaries nationally would strongly suggest remuneration in the early years sector lags well behind. The Higher Education Authority (HEA)[23] estimates that nationally in 2018, graduates with a Level 6, 7, or 8 qualification earned on average between €34,000 and €35,000 while graduates with a level 9 or 10 qualification earned on average between €38,300 and €44,300.

In terms of working hours:

- The early years sector can be described as a 'low hours' sector in comparison to others. Over half (54%) work 30 hours or less per week; another 10 per cent work 31-35 hours while one third of staff working with children work 36+ hours[24]. This compares with the national average working hours of 32 paid hours per week[25]. The operation of the ECCE scheme for 38 weeks means many settings close in the summer resulting in unemployment for workers.
- Early years workers can lack 'living hours'.
- 'Living hours' refers to the number of paid hours per week and the scheduling of working hours that allow workers to raise a family and 'they are an important precondition for workers to stay in the same job for a longer period of time'[406]. Living hours highlights that discussions on 'living wages' are insufficient if they do not take into account working hours.

In terms of contracts:

- The majority of staff are on fixed-term contracts for the academic year[26] and there has been a growth of casualisation[27].

In terms of other aspects of terms of employment and working conditions:

- Almost 80 per cent of workers do not have sick pay, 90 per cent do not have a private pension and approximately 65 per cent do not have paid maternity leave[28].
- Other key problems experienced by the workforce are excessive administration, stress, burnout, limited opportunity for professional development, and a lack of recognition[29].

Qualifications:

- In regard to qualifications, there is no entry qualification requirement for childcare staff working with school-age children. However, the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, requires all employees who work directly with children in pre-school services to have at least a Level 5 major qualification in early childhood care and education or a qualification deemed equivalent by Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Staff who sign a 'Grandfather Declaration' and who will retire or resign before September 2021 are excluded from the requirement for a Level 5 qualification and this group accounts for 5 per cent of staff[30]. The ECCE programme requires Room Leaders to have a minimum Level 6 qualification and provides for a higher capitation grant for services which employ individuals with at least a Level 7 qualification and three years' work experience. The stated rationale for the payment is to incentivise ECCE Programme service providers to recruit and retain graduate ECCE Room Leader staff so as to improve service quality[31]. The DYCA[32] notes that the higher capitation payment 'appears to have been effective in incentivising services to hire more graduate Room Leaders in ECCE Programme services'. However, it was suggested that 'services pass on a small proportion only of the ECCE [higher capitation] payment to individual graduate ECCE Room Leaders, though they may pass on a larger proportion of the payment to staff across the service'[33]. A higher capitation payment is also available to early years services which employ an Inclusion Coordinator from the LINC programme. A survey of employers found in 2017-2018 that over half of employers intended to use the payment to increase the salaries of Inclusion Coordinators while significant proportions also reported they would use the payment for new resources, for overheads, as well as increasing the salaries of other staff[34].
- Almost six per cent of staff working with children had no relevant qualification in 2018/19 while over a quarter (26.8%) had a Level 5 qualification, 42 per cent had a Level 6 qualification and almost another quarter (23.6%) had a Level 7 or 8 qualification[35]. Trend data show the workforce educational profile rising in recent years with a general decline in lower level qualifications and an increase in the proportion of staff with Level 6 qualifications and higher. It is notable that staff with Level 6 qualifications had the highest turnover rate in 2018/2019[36].
- It has been argued that the unregulated nature of practice in ECEC has led to an 'extremely diverse range of qualifications amongst practitioners', and 'predicated against a coherent system for CPD' which is usually undertaken by employees in their own time and there are few incentives for practitioners to undertake higher education qualifications[37].
- Learner Funds subsidise staff upskilling to NFQ Levels 5 and 6 ELC qualifications and there have been calls for these funds to subsidise higher level qualifications[38].
- Moloney's[39]survey of degree graduates found that significant numbers were undertaking postgraduate qualifications with a view to exiting the sector and gain employment elsewhere such as primary school teaching.

Public Policy Recognition of Workforce Challenges

There is no shortage of public policy reports which have highlighted the myriad of workforce challenges. Table 2 summarises the key findings and recommendations of these reports, which are in addition to the recommendations of bodies representing the views of groups in the ECEC community including Early Childhood Ireland. Some policy reports have highlighted that the funding of ECEC services in Ireland is significantly below the OECD average and that more

actions are needed to address workforce issues. In terms of recommendations, the reports lean heavily on actions that relate to CPD and increasing the educational profile of staff and generally limit discussions of professionalisation in these terms. However, the *First 5* strategy did include actions with a view to advancing professionalisation beyond qualifications to include the creation of a register of practitioners, a goal of establishing a professional standards body to promote and regulate professions, and it indicated that the forthcoming Workforce Development Plan will include measures relating to a career framework and leadership development opportunities.

A limited number of reports made explicit recommendations on pay. Two (The Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector) recommended the introduction of agreed salary scales and noted that they should be at similar levels to education professions. The latter report also recommended that non-contact time should be paid work. Other than the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report, which recommended increasing the number of paid weeks for ECCE staff in the year, policy reports have not included actions in relation to pay or other employment terms and conditions such as working hours, contracts, sick pay, pensions, workload, stress, leadership development, mentoring and so on. While the former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. Katherine Zappone, stated her support for the establishment of a Sectoral Employment Order for the sector, *First 5* does not contain specific immediate actions to improve pay or working conditions but commits to undertaking a review of types of favourable working conditions that could be supported.

More recently, the Programme for Government 2020 commits to:

- Introducing a long-term sustainable funding model that makes a career in childcare more attractive.
- Establishing an agency, Childcare Ireland, to develop leadership, best practice and innovation and professional development, and career paths.
- Supporting the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee and an Employment Regulation Order to determine minimum pay and conditions.
- Piloting a new apprenticeship model for early years professionals.

Developments during Covid-19

Covid-19 caused unprecedented disruption to the ECEC sector resulting in the closure of services. As part of measures to financially assist services and employees during this period, the government introduced the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) on 26th March which reimbursed employers for wages paid to employees and allowed employers to keep employees on the payroll. A Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (WSCS) was also introduced from 6th April for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) sector. Under the WSCS the government topped-up the wages of eligible staff to the maximum additional payment an employer can make to receive full TWSS subsidy to a limit of €586 per net weekly pay. If an employee's wages had previously been under €350 per week, the government provided funding to top-up their wages so that employees could remain employed with services rather than become laid-off. The government also provided additional payments to services for operational costs calculated at 15 per cent of eligible staff gross weekly pay with a minimum payment of €300 per week. While the WCSC was in operation,

providers could not receive any of the normal funding from the government such as for the ECCE programme, and parents could not be charged fees by providers. To facilitate the summer opening of ECEC services, the government provided a range of once-off grants and continued the TWSS to provide an 85 per cent (or 70% for higher incomes) contribution towards the cost of wages. The July Stimulus package provided ELC and SAC sector with access to the new Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme to cover a portion of the costs of services and a sustainability fund.

The interventions by the government to support ECEC highlight its importance as a public good. As the Department of Children and Youth Affairs[40] noted, part of the rationale for the WSCS was to address a concern that ECEC services might not reopen following the crisis and this would deny 'children access to early education and have a significant detrimental effect on the economy as parents could be prevented from returning to the workplace'. Similarly, when announcing additional financial supports in July, Minister Roderic O'Gorman noted that 'parents need childcare to help them get back to work. Children need access to early learning and care to support their development and wellbeing'.

Table 2 Summary of Recommendations on Workforce Development/Professionalisation in Policy Reports, 2009-2018

Public policy report	Year	Key findings/recommendations
First 5 Strategy	2018	• By 2028 all regulated school-age childcare staff and childminders will hold a minimum qualification. Half of certain categories of staff will have a degree-level qualification. • Skills forecasting to be undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs • Introduce a redeveloped national subsidised fund for education • Develop a national programme of CPD opportunities • Consider quality levers like higher capitation payments to help attract and retain staff • Undertake a review of the types of favourable working conditions that could be supported so that employers can attract and retain staff. • Commits to a Workforce Development Plan • Develop an Early Childhood Workforce Initiative • Create a register of the workforce • Work towards establishing a professional standards body

Public policy report	Year	Key findings/recommendations
Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector	2017	• There should be an independent cost and sustainability review of the sector which should address remuneration levels of staff, training & CPD. • Introduce working terms and conditions on a par with the rest of the education system; • Consider agreed pay scales and administration funds. Funds would need to be tied to increased government investment and ring-fenced. • Commission the development of a nationally agreed pay scale for the early years workforce linked to the Occupational Role Profiles. • Ensure Non-Contact time is a contractual and paid condition of work; • Increase the number of paid weeks for ECCE staff in the year and introduce an agreed length of paid summer leave. • Allow self-employed providers to sign-onto the Live Register during summer months, while working towards the implementation of 52-weeks working contracts, allow self-employed providers to sign-onto the Live Register during summer months; • A Learner Fund should support higher level qualifications (NFQ 7 and above) • Ensure that there are sufficient places available on part-time courses & introduce a system of Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL) • Support the introduction of a panel of relief staff
Joint Committee on Health and Children Report on Affordable and Quality Childcare	2016	• Childcare in Ireland needs significant medium and long-term investment. • There should be no separation, as far as possible, between treatment of private and community services in delivery of childcare services. • There is a long-term need to move towards greater state subsidisation of childcare. • Consideration should be given to providing a minimum of five CPD days per year. • The Learner Fund should be extended to also provide access to Level 7 and Level 8 training.
Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland	2015	• The Learner Fund could be extended to support CPD and to enable a proportion of the existing (formal and non-formal) workforce to up-skill. • Professionalisation though investment in increasing qualification profile.

Public policy report	Year	Key findings/recommendations
Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy	2013	• Introduce a training fund and provide for regular, funded non-contact time. • Support professionalisation through higher wages by requiring adherence to an agreed salary scale as a condition of public funding. The salary scale should encompass all levels of practitioner, with graduate salaries comparable to those for related professionals, including primary school teachers. • Ensure that training specific to early childhood and to the management and supervision of staff working with young children is available. • Require and financially support staff to undertake regular CPD continuing professional development
Dept. of Education & Skills A workforce development plan for the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland	2010	• All staff should be appropriately qualified • Occupational profiles should be reviewed every 5 years • Develop ECCE award standards • Education providers should have 5 years plans to respond to flexible learning needs of the workforce • Agencies which fund ECCE education should prioritise flexible delivery • RPL should be considered in education programme design & develop RPL programmes • There should be quality assurance of ECCE education programmes • Education providers should provide for learner supports • There should be a range of education programmes at Level 7 and above
Dept. of Education & Science Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector Background discussion paper	2009	• More attention needs to be paid to the development of the ECCE workforce including the challenge of raising the qualification profile • Measures to address retention of qualified staff in the ECCE workforce are essential to the future development of the ECCE sector.

Section 3
Wage Setting Mechanisms

Introduction

There are three mechanisms provided for in legislation in Ireland which involve the setting of legally binding pay and conditions for groups of workers – Sectoral Employment Orders, Employment Regulation Orders and Registered Employment Agreements. The issue of proposed pay setting in the early years sector is in a period of some uncertainty given developments over the last year. The former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. Katherine Zappone, had proposed that a Sectoral Employment Order should be introduced in the early years sector. She stated that "a Labour Court Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) is the most viable mechanism to improve pay and conditions. I have repeatedly expressed support for an SEO and my Department is ready to co-operate with such a process when it is under way"[41]. However, the legislation that governs SEOs was struck down by the High Court on 23rd June 2020. This means that at present, an SEO for the early years sector cannot be introduced under the current legislation though this situation may change in the future. In another development, and prior to the High Court decision, the Programme for Government[42] made several commitments in relation to the early years sector including the following related to wage setting:

> "....the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for childcare workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment".

This section outlines three wage setting mechanisms provided for under the Industrial Relations Acts 2012-2105 and the differences between them as there can often be confusion around them. This section is structured as follows. First, we examine the meaning of an employer organisation as this arises in the context of the wage setting mechanisms. We then briefly outline the functions of the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court as they are responsible for enforcing the outcomes of the wage setting systems. The wage setting systems are then reviewed, with in-depth explanations of the legislative rules governing their processes and outputs.

Employer organisations

Employer organisations are cited in each piece of legislation on wage setting mechanisms but there are some differences in terms of the bodies the law refers to. Legally, employer organisations which engage in negotiations for the fixing of wages and conditions of employment are required to follow rules under the Trade Union Acts 1941-1990. Such employer organisations are defined as trade unions and under the 1941 Act, it is illegal for any body (other than 'excepted' bodies) to carry on negotiations for the fixing of wages or other conditions of employment unless it holds a negotiation licence. A trade union (of workers or employers) wishing to apply for a negotiation licence must satisfy the conditions of being an

authorised trade union, which is a different and separate process to applying for a negotiation licence. There are 11 employer bodies registered as trade unions including IBEC within which Childhood Services Ireland is an affiliated trade association. Authorised trade unions must submit an annual return on membership figures to the Registry of Friendly Societies. If a trade union wishes to apply for a negotiation licence, they make an application to the relevant Minister within the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. There is a specific procedure for applying for a negotiation licence and criteria which must be satisfied such as that the organisation deposits a sum of money to the High Court, the amount of which depends on membership numbers.

Wage setting and employers

1. The legislation establishing SEOs, facilitates either a trade union(s) or 'trade union or organisation of employers' indicating that an employer organisation involved can either be a registered trade union or not an authorised trade union. For example, in 2019, the electrical contracting SEO was jointly requested by employer organisations which are not registered trade unions.
2. The legislation establishing Registered Employment Agreements (REAs) does not require the participation of an employer organisation – REAs can involve one or more employers but if an employer organisation is involved, it must be a trade union of employers.
3. The legislation establishing Employment Regulation Orders (EROs) states that proposals of EROs are not from a trade union or employer organisation specifically, but they come from Joint Labour Committees.
4. It is worth clarifying the term 'excepted body' referred to above. An excepted body refers to a specific set of bodies listed in the Trade Union Act 1941 and includes bodies which negotiate the fixing of wages and conditions of employment for employees of a particular employer and not a wider group of employees.

The Labour Court and Workplace Relations Commission

It is worth briefly mentioning the functions of the Labour Court and Workplace Relations Commission given their roles in wage setting mechanisms such as SEOs. The Labour Court is not a court of law, but a quasi-judicial forum. Most of its cases are of two types: industrial relations disputes, which seek a non-legally binding recommendation from the Labour Court, and employment law cases, which are appealed from the Workplace Relations Commission and these require a legally binding decision from the Court. It has also specific functions in relation to SEOs, REAs and EROs which are outlined below. It is the Labour Court which recommends whether a group of workers in a sector should have remuneration and conditions set through an SEO and there is oversight from the Oireachtas. An application for an SEO involves a Labour Court hearing, generally held in public, and the Court conducts each hearing with three members – a chairman or deputy chairman, and two other members. These two members are known as the employer member and the worker member as they were appointed by the Minster following their nomination by IBEC and ICTU, respectively. The Labour Court members are not required to have legal qualifications, but they generally have extensive industrial relations and legal expertise. The Labour Court has historically been termed a 'court of last resort' and there are limited circumstances in which decisions of the Court in regard to an SEO or other wage setting mechanism can be appealed to a civil court such as judicial reviews.

The Workplace Relations Commission has no role in the process of establishing an SEO or other wage setting mechanism, but it is responsible for their enforcement through two

of its functions: adjudication and labour inspection. Adjudication is conducted by a single adjudication officer to hear complaints of workers and both sides' arguments are heard by the adjudication officer, usually in a private hearing. Labour inspection is a proactive form of enforcement, where inspectors visit workplaces and examine organisations' compliance with employment legislation and SEOs. Inspectors generally have extensive powers to examine organisation documents, interview employees, liaise with other government agencies and undertake surveillance of workplaces to investigate if the movements of employees match company records. Their specific role in relation to SEOs is outlined below.

Sectoral Employment Orders (SEOs)

SEOs were introduced in the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015. SEOs essentially perform the same role as the previous system of Registered Employment Agreements (REAs) but there are substantial differences to the process by which SEOs are created in comparison to the previous REA system. Essentially SEOs involve standardising pay and some conditions for large groups of workers in a sector with the goal of:

i. promoting harmonious relations between workers and their employers and assist in avoiding industrial unrest
ii. promoting high standards of training and qualification
iii. ensuring fair and sustainable rates of remuneration

SEOs do not involve the setting of a wide range of terms and conditions of employment but a specific number. These are:

i. Remuneration.
   - A minimum hourly basic pay which is higher than the national minimum wage (NMW).
   - Two minimum hourly rates of basic pay which are higher than the NMW which are based on length of service in the sector and recognised standards/skills.
   - Additional pay in excess of basic pay in respect of shift work, piecework, overtime, unsocial hours worked, Sunday work, or travelling time (when working away from base).
   - Minimum hourly basic pay for apprentices.
   - Minimum hourly basic pay for groups of younger workers specified in the legislation.

ii. The requirements of a pension scheme, including minimum contributions by a worker and an employer.
iii. The requirements of a sick pay scheme.

Process of SEO setting

An SEO process can be initiated by a trade union or an employers' organisation or by a joint application of a trade union and employers' organisation. Trade unions and employer organisations may request the Labour Court to examine the terms and conditions relating to the remuneration and any sick pay scheme or pension scheme, of the workers of a particular class, type or group in the economic sector in respect of which the request is expressed to apply. The Minister also has the power to request the Labour Court to review a previous SEO, but it must be in place for three years before such as request.

An economic sector is defined as a sector of the economy concerned with a specific economic activity requiring specific qualifications, skills or knowledge.

Whichever body(ies) has submitted the application, they must satisfy the Court that they are substantially representative of either the group of workers the application is in reference to, or the group of employers that employ those workers. The legislation does not define the term 'substantially representative'. It only says that the Court in examining the representativeness of the trade union/employer organisations will take into consideration the number of relevant workers represented by the trade union of workers and the number of relevant workers employed by employers who are represented by the employer organisation.

The application to the Labour Court is not an extensive one. It requires the applicant to:

i. Identify the class, type or group of workers to which the request relates
ii. Details about any arrangements by which terms and conditions of the workers in question are determined
iii. The names of other trade unions or employer organisations that are representative of workers or employers

The Court must publicise its intention to undertake an examination and invite interested parties to make representations to it within 28 days after the notice. Such notices are usually on the Labour Court and Workplace Relations Commission websites.

The Labour Court then considers the views of representative bodies in a hearing as well as written submissions and makes a recommendation to the Minister. In making its recommendation, the Labour Court must take into consideration several factors:

i. The potential impact of its recommendation on levels of employment and unemployment.
ii. The terms of any relevant national agreement relating to pay and conditions in existence.
iii. The potential impact on competitiveness in the sector.
iv. The general level of remuneration in other sectors which workers of the same class, type or group are employed.
v. That the SEO will be binding on all workers and employers in the sector.

The Labour Court cannot make a recommendation for an SEO to the Minister unless it is satisfied an SEO would:

- would promote harmonious relations between workers and employers and assist in the avoidance of industrial unrest, and is reasonably necessary to
- promote and preserve high standards of training and qualification, and
- ensure fair and sustainable rates of remuneration

Notably then, trade unions and employer organisations together do not have to agree to an SEO, but it does help if the most significant players on both sides support it. If the Minister is satisfied that the Labour Court has acted according to the legislation, they will confirm the terms of the Court's recommendation in a draft SEO within 6 weeks of receiving it and this draft must then be approved by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Inability to pay

The legislation provides for an 'inability to pay' clause. The Labour Court can grant a temporary exemption of between 3 and 24 months to an employer and this only relates to the remuneration elements of the ERO. If an employer makes an application to the Labour Court for an exemption, they must meet a number of criteria based on whether or not the majority

of workers or their trade union have agreed to the employer's application. In deciding whether to grant an exemption, the Labour Court must consider the implications of the exemption for the long-term sustainability of the business, on employment levels, and whether the exemption would distort competition in the sector in terms of undermining other employers.

Records

Employers must keep records at the place where their employees work for at least 3 years to show that they are abiding by the SEO's provisions. An employer who, without reasonable cause, fails to comply with this requirement is liable on summary conviction to a fine of €2,500.

Dispute resolution and enforcement of SEOs

Industrial relations legislation provides a mechanism for the enforcement of SEOs. The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 and Workplace Relations Act 2015 provide that a worker has a right to make a complaint to the WRC in two instances:

i. if they believe their employer has contravened an SEO or
ii. where they believe they have been penalised by their employer. The legislation prohibits an employer from penalising or threatening to penalise a worker for invoking their rights in an SEO, for making a complaint to the WRC, or indicating their intention to make a complaint.

If a WRC adjudication officer decides that a breach of an SEO, or penalisation, has taken place, they can order the employer to comply with the SEO or to pay compensation to the worker, to an amount not exceeding 104 weeks remuneration. Either the worker or employer can appeal the adjudication officer's decision to the Labour Court. The failure of an employer to comply with a decision can result in enforcement though the District Court.

As it stands, the power of labour inspectors in relation to SEOs is confined to ensuring that employers are complying with the legal requirement to keep records and they have no powers to enforce the minimum pay and conditions in SEOs. A typical issue that arises in labour inspection activity is where an employer argues that they are not covered by the remit of an SEO. Each SEO defines the type of workers and type of employments covered but employers might argue that the definitions are not applicable to them. In such situations, the WRC might seek clarification from the Labour Court about the scope of the SEO.

In addition to the legislative provisions, it is worth noting that the SEOs currently in place contain a dispute resolution procedure where disputes arise between workers and employers. The procedures do not specify that the disputes have to be about alleged breaches of SEOs; they just refer to grievances and disputes, which may be individual or collective disputes. In both types of dispute, the worker is required to raise their grievance with their employer, who in turn is required to respond within five days. If the issue remains unresolved, the dispute is referred to the WRC – the adjudication service in individual disputes and the conciliation service in collective disputes. In the case of individual disputes, decisions of an adjudication officer can be appealed to the Labour Court. In the case of collective disputes, those that remain unresolved after conciliation can seek the assistance of the Labour Court to provide a recommendation. The disputes procedures also stipulate that where disputes occur, no strike or lockout, or other form of industrial action shall take place until the procedures have been complied with.

Contents of SEOs

Three SEOs were in place prior to the High Court decision in June 2020: for the electrical contracting sector, the construction sector, and the mechanical engineering and building

services contracting sector. The SEOs do not cover every type of worker in the sector but specify particular groups, for example the construction SEO only refers to craftspersons, operatives and apprentices. Each of the three SEOs contain minimum hourly rates for four groups of workers. These include a basic minimum wage and then higher rates for workers with increasing levels of skills or experience. By way of example, the wage rates in the construction SEO are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Minimum hourly rates, Construction SEO, 2019

Worker	Minimum rate	Requirements
Craftsperson	€19.44	Specific jobs of skilled craftspersons such as carpenters
Category A	€19.96	Specific jobs some of which require a minimum 4 years' experience
Category B	€19.37	Skilled general operatives with a minimum 2 years' experience
Apprentices	Scale from €7.05-€18.80	Scale correlates with years 1-4 in training

Employer organisation attitudes to SEOs

In general, larger employer organisations in these sectors support SEOs for a number of reasons. In general, it can be argued that SEOs suit some employers because they set wage rates at a level the organisations can afford. Additional reasons for employer support of SEOs is encapsulated in a submission made by a trade association (MEBSCA) within the Construction Industry Federation, on an SEO for mechanical engineering in 2019. MEBSCA[43] notes that an SEO:

- Contributes to harmonious relations between employers and workers
- Provides a procedure for the resolution of disputes in an orderly manner without recourse to industrial action
- Provides certainty and stability for employers
- The pension and sick pay schemes are beneficial to workers in a transient industry
- Eliminates the erosion of employment conditions as a means of undercutting and requires employers to look for competitive advantage in other ways
- Attracts new workers into the industry through sustainable and reasonable pay rates.

While employer organisations such as MEBSCA support SEOs, they have opposed certain parts of an SEO application, for example, MEBSCA disputed the inclusion of travel allowances in 2019. Some employers have opposed SEOs in their entirety such as the National Electrical Contractors of Ireland (NECI) which instigated a judicial review of the most recent electrical contracting SEO. In general, such employer organisations argue that trade unions or employer organisations involved in an SEO are not substantially representative of workers/employers in the sector and/or they argue that SEO terms are anti-competitive. The effective operation of an SEO requires the support of employer bodies, as they are involved in informing and educating

employers on SEO terms and help to ensure compliance.

High Court Decision

The High Court decision on 23rd June 2020 was the outcome of a judicial review taken by a limited company claiming to represent employers in electrical contracting, NECI, against the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Labour Court and the Attorney General. NECI sought to have the SEO for electrical contracting declared invalid and for the legislation governing SEOs, the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015, declared unconstitutional. The High Court found in favour of NECI on both issues. The High Court concluded that the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation acted *ultra vires* in making the SEO and that the requirements of the legislation in terms of making SEOs had not been complied with. In addition, J. Simmons concluded that the part of the legislation regulating SEOs was unconstitutional because it "does not contain sufficient principles and policies to guide the very broad discretion conferred upon the Minister (and, indirectly, upon the Labour Court)" (*Náisiúnta Leictreach Contraitheoir Eireann Cuideachta Faoi Theorainn Rathaiochta Applicant And The Labour Court The Minister For Business Enterprise And Innovation Ireland The Attorney General, [2020 IEHC303]*). This is not the first time such a decision has been issued. The reason SEOs were established in the 2015 Act was because of a similar court decision in 2013, which declared that the legislation governing the former system of Registered Employment Agreements was unconstitutional (and for similar reasons as the most recent High Court decision). After the 2013 case, the government believed that the introduction of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 would satisfy the constitutionality issues raised previously. This turned out not to be the case. However, the current situation regarding the unconstitutionality of the legislation regulating SEOs may change in the following circumstances:

- if the decision is overturned on appeal to the Supreme Court and/or
- the government introduces amendments to legislation providing for the re-introduction of the SEO system and addresses the points raised by the High Court. This is likely to take some time.

Joint Labour Committees and Employment Regulation Orders (EROs)

An ERO is similar to an SEO in that they both involve the setting of legally binding pay and conditions across large groups of workers in a sector. However, the systems differ in terms of the types of employments covered, the issues that can be regulated, and the enforcement processes.

An ERO is a statutory instrument setting out minimum remuneration and conditions of employment applying to specified grades or categories of workers in a particular sector. Proposals for an ERO are submitted to the Labour Court by a Joint Labour Committee (JLC). A JLC is a committee composed of representatives of trade unions and employer organisations and an independent chairperson. A JLC is established for a group of workers where:

i. There is substantial agreement between workers and employers about the establishment of a JLC or
ii. The regulation or remuneration and conditions of workers is inadequate or
iii. Pay and conditions of workers are considered relatively low

This means that in practice, JLCs and EROs are targeted to cover low wage employments while

SEOs covered workers who would not generally be in low paid jobs. Seven JLCs currently exist: Agricultural Workers; Catering; Contract Cleaning; Hairdressing; Hotels; Retail; Grocery and Allied Trades; Security. However, only two of these JLCs are very active and have current EROs – contract cleaning and security. Other JLCs are inactive primarily because employer organisations in other sectors are opposed to the setting of minimum pay and conditions above the national minimum wage and other employment legislation and therefore they are not participating in JLCs.

Under legislation, a JLC can submit proposals which would promote harmonious relations between workers and employers and avoid industrial unrest. In making proposals for an ERO, the JLC must consider a range of factors such as

- the financial interests of employers
- the desirability of maintaining fair and sustainable minimum rates of remuneration
- competitiveness
- levels of employment and unemployment.

The proposed ERO has to be considered by the Labour Court and if it adopts the proposals, these must be approved by the Minister and the Oireachtas. EROs are wider in scope than SEOs and can include any aspect of remuneration and conditions of employment. For example, the EROs that exist cover issues like minimum pay rates, working hours, rosters, facilities, death in service benefit, certificates of service, training, uniforms, and sick pay. In relation to remuneration, EROs can set the same categories of remuneration as SEOs. The minimum hourly pay rates are higher than the NMW, for example, the rate for security workers since June 2019 is €11.65. In addition, the minimum conditions also cover areas not legislated for elsewhere, giving additional protections to workers. For example, the ERO for the security industry provides that workers who enter the industry have the right to a contract of employment with a minimum of 24 hours per week after six months' service, making security workers the only group in the country which are legally entitled to a minimum number of hours work.

As with SEOs, there is an 'inability to pay provision' for EROs which allows an employer who is in financial difficulty to apply to the Labour Court for a temporary exemption from the remuneration terms of an ERO.

Registered Employment Agreements (REAs)

An REA is an agreement on the remuneration or the conditions of employment of workers made between a trade union(s) and employer(s) or a trade union of employers and which is registered with the Labour Court. Historically REAs were sector-wide agreements set by Joint Industrial Councils (JICs), but the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 changed their focus. An REA is now only binding on the parties to the agreement, meaning it does not automatically extend to cover workers across an entire sector. The legislation does not dictate what items can or cannot be included in an REA – this is a matter for the parties. In essence then, an REA is a collective agreement between one or more employers and trade union(s) who choose to make it legally binding.

Either party can apply to register an agreement with the Labour Court and it must be satisfied of a number of issues including that:

- All parties agree that the agreement should be registered.
- The trade union involved is substantially representative of the relevant workers.
- The agreement provides that if a trade dispute occurs between workers to whom the agreement relates and their employers, industrial action or a lock-out shall not take place until the dispute has been submitted for settlement by negotiation.
- That registering the agreement would promote harmonious relations between workers and employers and avoid industrial unrest.

Once registered, the Labour Court forwards the agreement to the Minister who makes a Statutory Instrument.

Similar to the enforcement of SEOs, a worker can make a complaint alleging a breach of an REA to the WRC. If a WRC adjudication officer decides that a breach has occurred, they can order the employer to take a course of action or pay compensation to the worker. Table 4 summarises the key differences between the three wage setting systems.

Table 4 Differences between REAs, EROs and SEOs

Mechanism	Who do they cover?	What do they cover?	Who applies for one?	Enforcement
REAs	The parties to the agreement only in a particular enterprise	Any matter relating to remuneration & conditions	Any party to the agreement	Through WRC
EROs	Specified grades or categories of workers in a particular sector	Any matter relating to remuneration & conditions	A trade union or an employer organisation	Through WRC
SEOs	Particular class, type or group in an economic sector	Remuneration; sick pay; pension	A trade union or employer organisation or both	Through WRC

Section 4 Professionalisation - its Meaning and Key Issues

Introduction

Many occupations became identified as professions throughout the twentieth century. Some definitions of professionalisation have a narrow focus, emphasising the pursuit of qualifications, while others are much broader. This section provides a synopsis of the key issues that arise in regard to the professionalisation of occupations generally and specifically in relation to ECEC occupations. Before considering how occupations have evolved towards professionalisation, we review why occupations seek to become recognised as professions and what defines an occupation as a profession. The issues regarding professionalisation and professionalism have a long history in research and can be contentious, even more so in the case of ECEC occupations and especially in relation to professional identity. Further reading on these issues is available in the bibliography. The definitions of key terms are included in Table 5.

Table 5 Key Terms

Professions 'are regarded as essentially the knowledge-based category of service occupations that usually follow a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience'[44].
A *professional* is a term used 'to describe a skilful person, a person producing something of high quality'[45].
Professionalisation describes 'how occupations become recognised as professions and how they go about consolidating this status and improving their services'[46].
Professionalism refers to 'the manner of conduct within an occupation...'[47].

Why do occupations seek to become recognised as professions?

There can be a number of reasons for occupations seeking to professionalise[48]:

- To improve services or advance the public interest
- As a promotion tool to new entrants and to the public
- Out of self-interest

The self-interested rationale refers to the attempts by an occupation to enhance its power. Occupational power is about an occupation's ability to protect its interests and improve its labour market position i.e. improve their income and control over conditions of work by regulating the market in which they operate[49]. In other words, the more individuals in an occupation can collectively hold authority over their occupations, the greater likelihood of a favourable labour market position[50]. An occupation which has strong control over its profession can attract pres-

tige, which concerns 'collective beliefs about a job's worthiness'[51]. Prestige can be important because these social judgements in the labour market influence rewards of occupations[52]. The reasons for professionalising above are not necessarily competing, so for example, what may be good for the profession may also be good for the public interest[53]. In addition to efforts to professionalise from within a profession, external forces might also seek to professionalise an occupation as a way of bringing about occupational change[54].

What defines an occupation as a profession?

An extended body of research has sought to understand what a profession looks like. The elements used to define a profession usually refer to the individuals' actions and purpose, and to the groups' organisation of the occupation and its concern with governance[55]. Lists of profession attributes have been developed[56]. Freidson[57] defined a profession as involving:

- Specialised work grounded in a body of knowledge and skill that is given special status in the labour force.
- A division of labour that is controlled by occupational negotiation.
- A sheltered position in the labour market based on the qualifying credentials created by the occupation.
- Training programmes in higher education that are controlled by the occupation.
- An ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to financial gain and to the quality rather than the economic efficiency of work.

In discussing the nature of a profession, Evetts[58] distinguished between organisational professionalism which is about organisational control through, for example, standardised practices and accountability, and occupational professionalism which

> 'involves a discourse constructed within professional groups themselves that involves discretionary decision-making in complex cases, collegial authority, the occupational control of the work and is based on trust in the practitioner by both clients and employers. It is operationalised and controlled by practitioners themselves and is based on shared education and training, a strong socialization process, work culture and occupational identity, and codes of ethics that are monitored and operationalized by professional institutes and associations'.

Overall, a number of elements of a profession stand out in literature:

- That being a profession involves having a collective identity
- That the occupation holds a specialised body of knowledge requiring qualifications and experience
- That the occupation influences a range of issues of concern to the profession including the conduct of its members
- That the occupation requires individual autonomy in undertaking the work, where 'the worker makes independent evaluations and decisions, a job with the potential for innovation and creativity'[59].

Caution should be exercised when basing decisions of professionalisation based on a 'checklist' of attributes. First, there is not a strict differentiation between professions and non-professions

and instead professionalism seems best viewed as a scale[60]. For example, journalism has been labelled a semi-profession[61]. Second, the contexts in which professions operate have changed a lot over time so some attributes which were originally seen as important parts of a profession are no longer relevant. For example, Greenwood[62] argued that one of the objectives of an occupation trying to gain professional status was to acquire powers and privileges and these included the ability to assess members' performance and to control entry into the profession. However, occupations that might routinely consider themselves professions today may not have this level of control.

How do occupations professionalise?

When we look at how occupations have traditionally been able to advance their economic interests, i.e. improve their income, they have done so through:

- having scarce skills
- holding very important roles – having 'centrality'
- having specialised knowledge which is socially valued which improves their bargaining position[63]
- social closure which involves regulating the access to an occupation such as through requirements for qualifications or licencing[64]
- collective strength through professional associations and trade unions.

Some of these mechanisms also overlap with the pathways occupations have engaged in towards professionalisation. Neal and Morgan's[65] review of 19 occupations noted how pathways to professionalisation included the following elements:

- That the occupations become full-time
- The formation of a professional association
- The introduction of qualifying exams
- Political lobbying for legal protection
- The introduction of an academic route to qualification
- Rules introduced for CPD
- Professional association's influence over education (differs across countries)
- Self-regulation by professions (differs across countries)[66]

Table 6 summarises common challenges that arise for occupations when professionalising.

Table 6 The Challenges of Professionalisation

1. It can be a natural development in professionalising that occupations develop strong views about the boundaries of their profession and their professional identity, and this can lead to competition with other groups[67].
2. Professionalisation can involve tensions: for example between the two groups of criteria of professions noted earlier, between 'the individual acting for 'what is best', and acting to comply with the regulatory frameworks arising from the self-regulatory demands on the profession'[68]. There can also be tensions between organisational demands of standards and an occupations' sense of professionalism[69].
3. Professionalisation is not a static end-goal but is ongoing and subject to change. A profession must be able to adapt to change to remain viable and should lead positive change[70]. There can also be the danger of de-professionalisation, for example when professional identity weakens when other groups enter the profession or when 'demands for economic efficiency and profits overrule professional values'[71].
4. Professionalisation can be promoted from within the profession and/or can be supported or imposed from external sources such as various arms of the state or the EU[72].

Professionalisation and early years occupations

It is acknowledged internationally that there is not one universal definition of what it means to be an ECEC professional. For example, Beker[73] queried the meaning of professionalisation for childcare workers: 'are we talking about a fledgling profession, pieces of other professions or, as many now perceive it, a variety of non-professional tasks?' Experts warn against imposed-definitions or conceptions of an early years professional and professionalism in ECEC as they may not conform to practitioners' perspectives. In addition, criteria used by governments or external bodies to identify a professional may lack 'professional traits that many in the workforce would deem essential to effective practice, such as passion and caring'[74]. Instead, experts have advocated in favour of an 'activist approach' or 'ground-up perspective' whereby ECEC practitioners themselves seek to define what it means to be a professional, to develop their own conception of professionalism rather than having externally imposed definitions[75].

The focus on qualifications

The idea of professionalisation of the early years workforce in policy documents in Ireland and abroad has tended to focus on increasing qualifications of the workforce. This to some extent reflects some connotations of professionalisation, a desire to upskill a workforce which has historically had a low qualification profile, as well as because of the evidenced links between qualifications/skills and higher quality of services. The CoRe Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care[76] noted that an international benchmark is to have 60 per cent of ECEC practitioners qualified to degree level while First 5 aspires to a graduate-led workforce. However, literature on early years education and care shows much deeper reflections on what professionalisation means, in particular on ECEC professional identity. Gibbons[77] summarises literature and notes that 'the idea of a profession of early childhood and care experts continues to be a challenge within the profession'. Cumming et al.[78] argue that while qualifications and credentials are important, the focus in policies on qualifications 'could also limit possibilities for conceptualising professionalism in early childhood practice'. That is to say, professionalisation should not be conflated with professionalism, and what it

means to be an early years professional is complex, which is unsurprising given that childhood practice has been described as uncertain, changing and messy[79]. Of course, public policy which encourages a qualified workforce will be unlikely to achieve its intended purpose if the issues of poor pay and conditions are not addressed. Indeed, it has been argued that 'retention problems can be exacerbated as university-qualified educators can be attracted away from the prior-to-school sector to alternative career options (especially teaching in schools) where pay and conditions are better'[80]. Research in Ireland and Australia has found that early years workers were undertaking higher education as a pathway to leaving the sector because of their dissatisfaction with the sector[81]. Lastly, studies emphasise that improving the competence of the ECEC workforce should not end with qualifications but should involve a continuous process of CPD, in-service training and on-the-job support, especially for staff with low or no qualifications[82].

Care and education

An ongoing part of the debate on the meaning of the ECEC profession and professional concerns the extent to which the nature of the work consists of education and/or care practices. This is not just about accurately describing the nature of ECEC work but also has been linked to status issues. Gibbons[83] notes that '…there are many perceived differentiations between professionals who are identified as teachers, and those who are identified as caregivers'. In some countries, public policy has promoted an education narrative and supported the ECEC workforce to have teaching qualifications, especially amongst staff in pre-school programmes (ISCED02). In addition, many policy documents in Ireland and internationally have recommended the alignment of ECEC pay scales with school teacher pay scales. In other countries, some have recommended that ECEC practitioners seeking to enhance their professional status should consider a shift in messaging from a 'care narrative' to an 'education narrative'[84]. This recommendation was made in the context that care work by a feminised workforce tends to be undervalued and low paid, especially where this is accompanied by low qualifications and where 'education professionals tend to be more highly valued than other types of childcare practitioners'[85]. In the case of ECEC assistants, their competences tend to be identified as involving technical or 'caring' tasks so that a division of labour between core practitioners and assistants can lead to a hierarchy between education and care, impeding a holistic approach to education and care[86]. Similarly, Urban[87] argues that the split in workforces between early childhood *teachers* and *childcare workers* reflects 'a deep institutional divide between early childhood education and care that – at the same time – is increasingly questioned by practitioners, researchers and policy makers alike'. The issues of the nature of ECEC work and types of competences are matters for consideration amongst practitioners and they are important because they have professional identity and economic implications.

The love of the work

A commonly cited reason for individuals moving into and staying in employment in the early years sector is because of their love of working with children. In Ireland, ECEC graduates 'who were working in the sector were kept buoyant by their love of children ('the children make it all worthwhile', 'you can make a huge difference to the children, it is great' and the 'job is so rewarding, the children are just great')'[88]. There are a number of potential implications about employees' emphasis on these intrinsic rewards of the job:

- It heightens employees' disappointment and exasperation over poor pay and conditions as employees consider that these do not match the importance of their work.
- Low pay and conditions necessitate workers to leave jobs they love.

- Dalli[89] argued that the '....the attendant discourses of love and care, have acted to disempower early childhood practitioners from claiming professional status' but she also acknowledged that 'discourses of love and care persist in early childhood teachers' talk about their work'.
- Employees' focus on their love of children and vocational aspects of the job can lead some to rationalise an acceptance of poor pay and conditions and to suppress their needs so as to accommodate those of children and parents[90].

Recognition and prestige

As noted earlier, prestige can be important in attaining better pay and conditions as it concerns societal perceptions of worthiness of a profession. Prestige also feeds into the development of professional identity and research has highlighted that ECEC practitioners' sense of identity is influenced not only by their perceptions of their occupation but also by how others view their work. For those working in ECEC, professionalisation can mean 'being valued' within the workforce[91]. A common theme in studies internationally is that early years workers do not always feel valued in society and this negatively impacts their morale and poor pay reinforces the undervaluation of early years work[92]. While ECEC graduates perceive themselves as professionals[93], Moloney and McKenna[94] argue that 'it is widely acknowledged that the sector in Ireland is not perceived as a profession at either a macro (government, society, other pedagogical professions) or micro (local, setting) level'. Part of the recognition of a profession means they must be visible in society. While there is a plethora of policy documents nationally (see Section 2) and internationally on the ECEC sector, many of these have not resulted in the actions required to rectify the workforce's perception of a lack of societal recognition as professionals.

Professional representation

Internationally, some have argued that barriers to developing the professional identity of early years workers include the diversity of roles, the lack of a professional registration body, the lack of formal pay structures and the lack of a common voice across professions with similar interests[95]. Beker[96] has emphasised the importance of cooperation amongst workers across settings because they have shared practices and similar objectives. He argued, in the US context, that the absence of a common voice led to fragmentation and difficulties in raising public awareness and exercising political power to improve the status of a profession. Similarly, others have pointed to the importance of a national professional group for early years professionals to provide a collective professional identity and a shared vision, to articulate professional behaviours and challenge policy[97].

Role titles

It has been argued that the variety of job titles in ECEC leads to confusion and can make it difficult for the public to clearly identify the workforce which in turn impacts the discourses of professionalism in ECEC[98]. The issue of job titles is complex as it is influenced by issues of professional identity and also by concerns over occupational prestige. For example, some have considered whether education should be included in ECEC job titles as this reflects a view that education is highly valued[99]. While there are a multitude of job titles, it is worth considering how ECEC employees are collectively referred to in policy documents. Some refer to the workforce as *educators*[100] and early learning and care *teachers*[101]. In Australia, statistical sources use the term '*contact worker*'[102] and in New Zealand, the government uses the word '*educator*' to describe a leader, manager, teacher, parent or other adult who is responsible for the education and care of children at an early childhood service. Ireland's *First 5* strategy refers to 'ELC

practitioners' and 'school-age childcare *staff*' (on one page, there is a reference to the ELC and school-age childcare *profession*) while it frequently refers to '*health and social care professionals*'. '*Early childhood teacher*' is used in relation to the LINC programme while both Early Childhood Ireland and SIPTU use the titles '*early childhood educators*' and '*professionals*'.

Section 5
A Review of Selected Occupations in Ireland

Health Care Support Assistants

Context

Home care is funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE) but is administered by the HSE, non-profit organisations and the private sector. In 2018, half of public home care was provided by the HSE, almost a third by private providers and a fifth by non-profit providers[103]. Publicly funded home care is free though families can choose to pay private organisations directly for homecare services. Non-profit organisations and private providers are funded by the HSE through grants and competitive tenders. Many non-profit organisations receive a substantial amount of their funding from the state. While this protects non-profits to some extent from the uncertainty of fundraising, some organisations view their heavy dependence on the state for income as a strategic weakness because the government can cut funding during periods of economic downturns, such as during the last recession[104].

Pay and conditions

Home care work has historically been characterised by high levels of informality and ad hoc arrangements. Until 2000 publicly employed home helps, as they were then known, did not have written employment contracts nor were they entitled to the same pay and benefits as other public sector workers. Improvements in pay and conditions have been the result of sustained, lengthy campaigning by trade unions. Following union pressure, a national Home Helps Agreement 2000 established that publicly employed home helps would have a pay scale aligned to that of general health service attendants as well as providing for written contracts, pay increases, pay premiums, maternity leave, pension and a daily travel allowance. A subsequent Contract of Employment Agreement in 2004 entitled home helps to pay alignment with health board support staff, and provided for pay increases, an annual travel allowance, increased annual leave and sick pay. The HSE salary scale for home care workers ranges from almost €27,400 to over €33,000.

The working hours of home care workers have traditionally been part-time and insecure and trade unions have engaged in a long-running campaign to improve minimum hours. A union survey found that over a third of home helps worked on average four hours per week, and up to a third of workers in non-profit providers were estimated to have no guaranteed hours[105]. Zero hours work through so-called 'If and When' contracts and low hours work through 'Hybrid If and When' contracts are prevalent in the sector.

Collective agreements between the HSE and trade unions in 2007 and 2009 and a further agreement in 2013, arising from a Labour Court recommendation, introduced an annualised hours contract for home helps. This provided guaranteed minimum hours that would be

calculated as 80 per cent of the actual hours worked by home helps over a six-month reference period and a minimum floor of seven hours per week, with a commitment to increase the number of minimum hours to ten per week. Home helps also became entitled to pay for their travel time between clients, travel expenses, and wage premiums such as for weekend working. Further collective agreements in 2017 and 2018 committed the HSE to increase the recruitment of publicly employed home helps and the inclusion of travel time in pay and working hours of home helps. Home care workers employed by the HSE have terms and conditions arising from these collective agreements but there is no obligation on other service providers to align terms and conditions with publicly employed staff so there can be significant variation in terms of employment across providers. It has been argued that employment arrangements of home care workers can be characterised by low pay, low and fragmented hours, high staff turnover and unsociable hours[106].

Qualifications

Qualification requirements for home care workers have historically been non-existent and the issue of professionalising the roles has been challenging. The work, especially in private home settings, is invisible[107] and tensions at times have emerged between the 'volunteer' origins of home help services and the evolving standards expected of health care services. These tensions were evident in the 1990s when a proposal that home helps should have certified in-service training was resisted by some health officials who expressed unease that "over-professionalising the service could be detrimental to its good neighbour / semi-voluntary dimensions and could result in an escalation of costs, via wage claims…" and reduced home care services[108], arguments which were described as 'absurd' by the then National Association of Home Care Organisers[109]. Home care workers can be asked to perform functions for which they are not trained, and they lack opportunities for further training[110]. Proposals for accredited training twenty years ago did not lead to concerted moves towards qualifications and training has tended to be minimal. The recent union-HSE collective agreements noted above have provided for a requirement for all new home helps to have a minimum qualification of an approved Level 5 qualification or higher. In terms of non-public providers, there are training requirements included in HSE tendering contracts, but these are relatively low, requiring a minimum of 20 hours induction training and the completion of, or commitment to obtain, a certain number of Level 5 modules.

Job titles

The 2017 and 2018 collective agreements between unions and the HSE introduced a new job title of Health Care Support Assistant for home helps directly employed by the latter. Unions have since proposed another job title of Community Health Care Assistant because it feels the inclusion of the word 'support' refers to 'housekeeping' duties and detracts from the 'hands on patient care' tasks performed by homecare workers[111]. As the title was agreed under collective agreements, only the HSE have committed to the new title while other job titles may be used by other providers.

Special Needs Assistants

Overview

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established in 1998 to provide support to students with special educational needs. The SNA scheme is designed to provide schools with additional

adult support staff to assist teachers to support students with special educational needs and significant care needs[112]. This support aims to facilitate the attendance of students with special educational needs at school and to develop their independent living skills[113]. The role of the SNA is described by the Department of Education and Skills as a care role, including duties of a non-teaching nature only. The SNA scheme has traditionally operated on the basis that schools apply to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for SNA support and applications are considered by the NCSE's Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). The level of SNA support provided to schools is adjusted up or downwards by the SENO over time, in line with student needs at the school. There are approximately 16,000 SNAs with a commitment in the recent programme for government to increase investment in SNAs[114].

Qualifications

The qualification required for an SNA is not specific to their role. At present, the minimum qualification necessary for appointment as an SNA is a Level 3 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or a minimum of three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate or an equivalent award[115]. There are however a number of specialised SNA courses provided by a range of institutions at Levels 5 and 6 on the NFQ. In a recent Oireachtas report on the role of SNAs, it noted that whilst the training and level of qualification held by SNAs vary, a strong majority of survey respondents possessed qualifications well beyond the minimum criteria (Level 3 NFQ)[116].

Pay and conditions

There is a standard written national contract for SNAs outlining their terms and conditions, however, they are not considered public servants and therefore do not enjoy the same benefits as other public sector workers. SNA pay is covered by public sector collective agreements and they have access to sick leave and a pension scheme. Table 7 outlines the pay scales for SNAs as a result of the most recent agreement, the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2020 (Haddington Road Agreement/ Lansdowne Road Agreement)[117].

Table 7 SNA Salary Scales

Pre-1 January 2011 Entrants 1/1/2020	Post-1 January 2011 Entrants 1/1/2020
€ 26,094	€ 24,119
€ 26,887	€ 25,704
€ 28,042	€ 26,094
€ 29,201	€ 26,887
€ 30,362	€ 28,042
€ 31,202	€ 29,201
€ 32,156	€ 30,362
€ 33,261	€ 31,202
€ 34,045	€ 32,156
€ 35,142	€ 33,261
€ 36,244	€ 34,045
€ 38,320	€ 35,142
	€ 36,244
	€ 38,320
€ 39,794	€ 39,794

Professionalisation of SNAs

The role of SNAs has been the subject of much debate in recent years, with increasing attention on their professionalisation. In particular, the focus is on understanding and recognising the role of SNAs, qualifications, terms and conditions and continuing professional development (CPD). A key driver in the push for greater professionalisation of SNAs is the Fórsa trade union which represents the majority of SNAs in Ireland.

The first area of attention relates to the role of SNAs. Recent research by scholars, the Department of Education and Skills, and trade unions have all pointed towards the expansion of the role of SNA from its original care, non-teaching role[118]. For example, in addition to the care and support role, Butler outlined that the role also included pedagogy, administration and managing behaviour[119]. Furthermore, the Department of Education and Skills similarly noted that the role involves an administrative, therapeutic, teaching and behavioural function[120]. Research undertaken by a Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection captured the wide range of tasks that SNAs reported as part of their role – these include administrative tasks such as assisting with newsletters, book rental schemes, lockers, managing school trips, cleaning, gardening, banking and office work amongst others; teaching including teaching students in small groups, working with children on a one-to-one basis outside of the classroom, reading, being in charge of the classroom when the teacher is out; and working with students who have behavioural, mental health and social issues[121]. In summary, recognition of the much wider role performed by SNAs is required with a lack of respect for their role commonly reported by SNAs.

A second issue relates to the qualifications for the role of SNA. It is argued that the minimum level of qualification for an SNA is a barrier to respect and thus a barrier to professionalisation[122]. As noted above, the role of SNA has expanded to include a range of tasks, many of which exceed the minimum educational criteria currently set out for the role of SNA. In their 2018 Progress Report, the NCSE noted that the qualification for the SNA role should be set at either NFQ Level 5 or Level 6 with additional specialised training for students with particular needs e.g. specialist assistive technology[123]. Similarly, Fórsa have noted the inadequacy of the current minimum educational qualification level and have submitted a claim to the Department of Education and Skills requesting that the minimum educational qualification be revised to a Level 6 qualification[124].

A previous national research report on zero hours and low hours work outlined that a major concern for SNAs related to redundancy and the variability of hours[125]. SNAs are particularly susceptible to redundancy and low working hours meaning that job security is a key issue for them. However, the introduction of a redeployment and voluntary redundancy scheme has addressed some of the issues related to redundancy and availability of hours. The Government has also recently proposed reform in the model for the allocation of SNAs by moving away from the traditional diagnosis-based application system to what is referred to as a Front Loaded Model whereby schools will be now be automatically allocated SNA resources based on a school profile. It is suggested that this new model of allocation can help alleviate job security concerns of SNAs. Fórsa, whilst having some reservations about this model, have broadly welcomed the reform and suggest that it could provide greater job security and income security for SNAs. However, the current COVID-19 crisis has forced the delay of the introduction of this model until 2021.

The lack of professional development for SNAs has also been highlighted as a cause for concern, particularly with regard to students with particular needs – e.g. Autism Spectrum

Disorder[126]. Research by Kerins and colleagues identified the following barriers/challenges for CPD for SNAs - financial constraints, distance from the course venue, lack of information on courses and lack of time[127]. The NCSE also addressed the issue of the lack of CPD opportunities for SNAs noting in particular the problem that the responsibility of training for SNAs resides with schools Boards of Management with no dedicated funding to support CPD and the lack of CPD courses and substitution cover[128].

In order to address the issues noted above and support the push for greater professionalisation of the SNAs, Butler issued a number of recommendations including the renaming of the role of SNA to Education Assistants to better reflect their tasks and responsibilities; an increase in the minimum qualification from Level 3 for the role of SNA but to link this to increased job security and job progression (e.g. provide a route into teaching)[129].

The Social Care Workforce

Introduction

Professionalisation is often linked to the notion of valorisation and recognition of work as 'real work'. In this regard, social care and early years work share characteristics which leave them more susceptible to failing to meet this categorisation. The term 'profession' is contested within the literature, accepting that it is often not clear what separates a job from a profession, but it is largely accepted that the professionalisation process that has occurred over the last decade or so in Ireland has seen social care work transformed into a 'legitimate' profession[130] . Social care work involves the provision of professional care, protection and advocacy to individuals and groups who 'experience marginalisation, disadvantage or special needs'[131]. An interesting feature of social care work in Ireland is that the professions and educational programmes for *social work* and *social care work* have evolved separately[132]. According to Social Care Ireland, the primary difference between the roles is that social workers have statutory responsibility for case management and protection of vulnerable people, while the focus of social care relates more to meeting the physical, social and emotional needs of clients[133]. McSweeney and Williams[134] illustrate the differences in terms of approach to knowledge and training for each. Proficiencies for social care work, include knowledge of the role of relationships 'as a tool in the delivery of social care' and being able to 'respond appropriately to patterns of behaviours' and 'adapt environments to enhance participation and engagement in meaningful life experiences'. In contrast the standards of proficiency for social workers place greater emphasis on recognising the legal rights of individuals, 'the nature and severity' of problems; and initiating appropriate resolution of problems.

Context

Much like ECEC, social care services in Ireland are delivered by a variety of public, private and non-profit agencies, while the administrative and legal responsibility for most of the publicly delivered services rests with the relevant government department[135]. The largest employers of social workers are the Health Service Executive and The Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) set up since 2014[136]. Similarly to the early years sector, the social care sector workforce is overwhelmingly female dominated[137]. There is also a history of multiple representational bodies in the social care sector. In 2010 the three professional associations, the Irish Association of Social Care Workers, the Irish Association of Social Care Managers and the Irish Association of Social Care Educators, amalgamated under the umbrella title of Social Care Ireland (SCI)[138].

The rationale for doing so was to consolidate roles and provide consistent professional development for its membership.

There have been relatively recent efforts to explicitly regulate the social care field through legislation and regulation. The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 allowed for the registration and regulation of health and social care professions, including social care work[139]. The Act provides legal protection of the professional title, meaning that it will be an offence to use the title unless registered with the designated board[140]. Power and D'Arcy[141] point out that the inclusion of social care worker within the 2005 Act was pivotal, as recognition by the state is an essential component of legitimisation as a profession in Anglo-Saxon countries. However, it should be noted that issues around professionalisation were evident prior to the introduction of the 2005 Act. In April 1997, the Labour Court recommended the establishment of an Expert Review Group to examine and report on issues affecting ten professional groups in the health and social care sector including that of childcare worker (within social care). The Expert Review Group later recommended that childcare workers within social care be accorded formal professional status and the cessation of recruitment of non-qualified personnel.

Towards Professionalisation

In 2015 CORU became the first multi-professional health and social care regulator in Ireland, tasked with regulating fifteen professions[142]. Within CORU a Social Workers Registration Board and Social Care Workers Registration Board was established. The primary aim of CORU is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, professional education, training and competence amongst health and social care professionals. Part of the remit of CORU is to process complaints against registered health and social care professionals within their fitness-to-practise standards. CORU consists of both a council and a registration board. The registration board has four main functions: establishing and maintaining a register of members of its profession; approving and monitoring education and training programmes for entry to the profession; recognising qualifications gained outside the state; setting a code of professional conduct and ethics for registrants[143]. Fitness to practice is also addressed through establishing legal mechanisms by which professional accountability and poor or negligent practice can be dealt with. Byrne points out that there are significant implications from professional regulation such as professional indemnity insurance and legal protection for individual practice. This, she argues, can be particularly problematic in a profession where entry has typically been through relief or voluntary work, low-paid or no-paid experience and may have implications for attracting, recruiting and retaining new graduates to the profession. Perhaps one of the most important changes to the sector thus far is the introduction of the requirement for registrants to always use their CORU registration number when presenting as a registered professional, improving the visibility of CORU and helping all stakeholders ensure that only those entitled to practise using a protected title are doing so[144].

As Byrne[145] points out, self-governed professional structures also have a role to play in regulation through establishing minimum educational standards for entry to the profession and setting standards for practice, including engagement in CPD. The purpose of setting standards for CPD is to link registration with professional development and competence to practise. This aims to protect the public by ensuring high standards of practice[146]. Boud and Hager[147] emphasise that formal CPD activities are mandated in many professions and are often linked to regulation and continued competence to practise. In 2015 SCI launched a Continuing Professional Development Policy for members in order to introduce a structured approach to

CPD to prepare social care workers for registration requirements. SCI contends that meaningful engagement in CPD must be a shared responsibility between the individual practitioner and their organisation in order to support workers' learning needs, in line with organisation or service requirements[148]. In 2017 the Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes were released[149].

The drivers of professionalisation and regulation must also be considered when looking to other sectors as models. For example, in social care, it has been argued that expanded regulation occurred due to highly publicised cases of poor practice, which led to demands for increased professional accountability[150]. Another driver of professionalisation is to ensure minimum qualification standards are implemented. For instance, despite the 2005 legislation identifying minimum educational qualifications for registration in social care, individuals who do not meet the qualifications criteria continue to be employed as social care workers in some sectors[151]. The protection of professional titles is a further aspect worthy of consideration. Byrne argues that agencies that provide funding to a range of community, voluntary and private services could include a provision with regard to professional titles and registration for social care workers; steps which could ensure clarity of professional titles and assure effective regulation across the profession. Byrne[152] also highlights that it is within the remit of the Health Information and Quality Authority, which inspects organisational recruitment practices such as registration of nursing staff, to reinforce social care worker registration with CORU.

A statutory registration process for a profession presents both opportunities and challenges, for example, while the introduction of mandatory CPD can be beneficial, it has time and resource implications for individual practitioners and employers. Jones and Carston[153] draw attention to concerns that emerged in the sector regarding changes in the nature of the work and the extent to which social care workers have been overburdened with bureaucratic procedures that interfere with a 'relationship-based' practice model. A submission which was made to Fórsa by the union's social work professional committee within Tusla outlines the views directly held by social workers regarding reasons for difficulty in retention, which included issues such as the work having become increasingly complex and more demanding, which places increased levels of stress on individual social workers. It is argued that on entry into the workforce, a clear progression pathway could be developed whereby social workers can see the prospect of career progression as their levels of experience grow. One suggestion towards achieving this is the automatic advancement from basic grade to senior grade social worker based on protocols and checkpoints which would provide a clear vision of career development.

Pay and Professional Recognition

The achievement of professional status is associated with particular benefits of pay, prestige and status. In 2009 the salary scales of social care workers were similar (albeit slightly higher) to those of nurses and primary teachers[154]. As of 2020 a new entrant social worker's salary is on average €32,000 rising to €38,000 with five years' experience[155]. Pay and conditions for publicly employed social care workers are set as part of the HSE scales. The regulation and professionalisation efforts that have been put in place in the sector through CORU have really only been in place for less than five years. While changes may well have a positive impact on salaries and working conditions in the long term, it is relatively early to determine if significant changes have been achieved thus far.

According to Abbott and Meerabeau[156], professionalisation and status can be analysed in a

number of ways, including qualifications and competencies required to perform the work, the working conditions, and financial rewards. Social work has achieved the characteristics and attributes which confer professional status[157].

Physical Therapists

Overview

This section outlines the efforts made by physical therapists to enhance the reputation and professionalism of their occupation. Physical therapists are generally self-employed and therefore actions taken collectively by the occupation to professionalise have not extended to directly influencing pay and conditions but have been directed at protecting their occupational title, increasing standards of practice, and on regulating the profession.

A professional body

In 1991, physical therapists formed the Irish Association of Physical Therapists (IAPT) with a view to ensuring standards of professional excellence are upheld by members and driving recognition of the discipline of physical therapy and promote education of members. Like other professional bodies, the IAPT is funded by member fees and has introduced a number of measures to promote and enhance the profession:

- It maintains a Register of Qualified Physical Therapists
- It requires members to engage in continuing professional development every two years
- It enforces a Fitness to Practice policy. Members of the public can submit a complaint to the IAPT about the professional misconduct or poor performance of an IAPT member. The IAPT will investigate the complaint and can censure the individual but it does not have statutory authority to stop someone from practicing
- The IAPT developed benefits for members such as access to a professional insurance package, offering courses run in conjunction with the Association and a web search facility for members of the public to find therapists.

Education

Historically, individuals involved in providing physical therapy were not required to have specific educational qualifications, leading to significant variety of attainment across the profession. Particularly from the 1990s, individuals involved in physical therapy and the newly formed private college, the Institute of Physical Therapy and Applied Science, promoted higher educational provision and attainment.

- The 'standard' qualification in the profession evolved from a two-year certificate to a diploma and then to a BSc Degree in Applied Health Science offering from the Institute of Physical Therapy and Applied Science.
- Members of the IAPT must satisfy membership criteria including holding particular qualifications recognised by the Association.

Public Policy Recognition

The IAPT lobbied government to recognise the occupational title of physical therapist. During this process, the Association collaborated with the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists

and both bodies entered into agreement over the mutual recognition of the educational levels and clinical standards that both physical therapists and physiotherapists possess. This agreement laid the foundation for the government granting formal recognition of their occupation. In 2016, the Minister for Health agreed that the title of physical therapist should be protected as a title under the Health and Social Care Professional Act 2005. Statutory Instrument 479 2018 was introduced which provides protection of the title of physical therapist as a variant of the title of physiotherapist for the exclusive use of professionals registered with the Physiotherapists Registration Board. This protection meant that:

- Physical Therapists became regulated by CORU through the Physiotherapists Registration Board. Only persons registered with CORU are permitted to use the professional titles of Physical Therapist. CORU is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of health and social care professionals.
- Registered physical therapists are bound by the Physiotherapists Registration Board's Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics (Statutory Instrument 497 2016).

Teachers

Context

Teachers particularly at primary school level are one of the most closely related occupations to ECEC workers. In a broad sense the work of both groups involves the care and education of children and young people and roles in both sectors share many similarities in terms of tasks undertaken and skills required, particularly in the early years of primary school. Indeed, international studies have suggested that ECEC workers should receive pay parity and similar working conditions to primary school teachers and this is already the case in certain countries for example New Zealand, Portugal, Canada and the Czech Republic[158]. Those working in ECEC are often titled educators or pre-school 'teachers'[159]. A fundamental difference between Ireland and most European countries is that there has been no long tradition of providing ECEC services in Ireland[160] so there is significant crossover between the ECEC and primary school sectors. This crossover has a long history.

- The national system of education was established in 1831 in Ireland and until the late 1800s children as young as two could begin their formal education in (national) primary school.
- In 1934 the age of enrolment increased to four[161] and currently all children must start school by age six.
- However, most children in Ireland start at age four or five thus much of what is considered pre-school education in other countries (from age four to six) is provided in Ireland through junior and senior infant classes in primary school[162].
- Aistear is an Early Childhood Curriculum Framework developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCAA) for all children between the ages of 0-6 that highlights the important relationship between education and care.
- The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme provides all children with entitlement to two full academic years of ECCE in an early years settings in September of the year they turn 3 years old. This equates to 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 38 weeks of the year.

- Early-Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) are carried out in early-years services participating in the ECCE Programme by the Department of Education and Skills.

Despite these similarities and crossover, there are significant differences in many respects between primary school teachers and ECEC professionals, particularly with regard to pay and conditions, professionalisation and the contextual factors that influence these. The primary school sector consists mostly of state-funded schools (or national schools) which can be further categorised by religious (mostly catholic), non-denominational, multi-denominational or Gaelscoileanna (schools that teach through the Irish language). The Department of Education and Skills has responsibility for primary education and school inspections. The Department is also responsible for the allocation of teachers to schools and teachers' salaries are paid by it. Conversely, while there is some funding and regulation of ECEC services by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the vast majority of ECEC workers are employed by private providers and given the non-compulsory nature of pre-school, almost all facets are delivered outside of the formal education system.

Teaching as a Profession

Professional status implies an occupation with certain characteristics including requirements for access to a specific body of skills and knowledge; extensive qualifications; respect and value of the work done by the community and formal organisations which protect and enhance the interests of the occupation. Traditionally, the teaching career in Ireland has enjoyed high social status and regard. In policy documents of the nineties for example the government pays generous tribute to the work of teachers, affirming the significance of their roles and proposed a proactive series of measures in support of the teaching career[163]. While numerous challenges have emerged in recent decades placing increasing demands and accountability on teachers, primary school teachers continue to present themselves as having a strong sense of what it means to be a professional[164]. This positive sense of status is closely linked to other aspects of quality education including continuous professional development (CPD), research, collaboration and involvement in decision-making[165]. On the other hand, ECEC workers are often perceived as low-skilled, low qualified workers with an enduring perception among many that these workers are similar to 'babysitters'. Such perceptions stem from the pervading belief that children's education only begins once they start formal schooling, the distinction many still make between care and education and the intangibility and low status generally of care work[166].

Professional body and trade unions

One of the key elements of professionalising an occupation is the establishment of collective organisations such as professional associations and trade unions that protect the interests of members and regulate and restrict entry to the profession. Teaching in Ireland has a very strong tradition of collective organisation in trade unions.

- The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) was founded in 1868 and is the oldest and largest teachers' trade union in Ireland.
- It represents 40,633 teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland[167]. The INTO enables teachers to articulate their opinions and concerns regarding matters that affect the teaching profession and provide an avenue for voice with government to influence education policies.
- The INTO is currently undertaking campaigns to reduce class sizes in Ireland which are

among the highest in Europe; to achieve pay parity for new entrants to the profession and to increase funding for school running costs.

- The INTO is also instrumental in organising conferences, seminars and approved courses for its members to encourage continued professionalisation.

The Teaching Council

The Teaching Council established in 2006 on a statutory basis is the professional standards body for teaching that promotes and regulates the profession.

- The Council was established on the basis that self-regulation is strongly linked with enhanced teacher status and professionalism[168].
- The 37-person Council is made up of various stakeholders in education, including teachers, teacher educators, school management, parents, and union representatives[169].
- Two of the stated aims of the Council are the promotion of teaching as a profession and the development of codes of professional conduct and practice[170] covering standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence. It is committed to ensuring such codes are promoted and observed in order to maintain public trust and confidence in the teaching profession.
- One of the key roles of the Teaching Council includes the establishment of a Register of Teachers and registration is a prerequisite to becoming employed as a teacher in Ireland.

The Teaching Council is a self-funded body, funded by the annual fees of registered teachers. No funds are received from government or other sources[171]. The council plays a significant role in reviewing and accrediting programmes for teacher education including establishing minimum entry requirements for such programmes. It also establishes procedures for induction into the profession; holds enquiries into a teachers' fitness to teach as appropriate and plays a key role in developing a framework for CPD of teachers. All of these functions are aimed at ensuring high standards in teaching and learning and maintaining the professions' status. The Council has identified three pillars that underpin its' work and the work of teachers across all areas: research, relationships and reflective practice[172]. In emphasising the importance of these pillars it has developed key frameworks which drive its' strategic plan and emphasise issues of importance to the profession. For example, the first National Framework for Teachers' Learning (*Cosán* - the Irish word for pathway) was developed by the Teaching Council in 2016. The research series Croí (Collaboration and Research for Ongoing Innovation) was launched to develop connections between research, policy and classroom practice. Droichead (the Irish word for bridge) is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers. The strategic goals of the Teaching Council are centred on 'setting standards for the profession and verifying to the public and the profession that they are being upheld while empowering others in contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of those standards, including the profession'[173].

Education and qualification

Teacher education has a long history in Ireland and the role of teachers was historically strongly linked with the driving forces for political independence and cultural nationalism. Teachers played an important role in promoting Irish language and culture among children. The history of teacher education dates back to pre-independence and numerous key developments influenced the shape of contemporary teacher education in Ireland today. A notable landmark was

the introduction of the Bachelor in Education Degree (B.Ed.) in 1974, long sought by the INTO, and within a short period in the 1970s teaching became an all-graduate career[174]. Degree qualification is a requisite for teaching along with an expectation of engagement with CPD. In order to register with the Teaching Council, teachers must be qualified to accepted levels. There are two main entry routes for those wishing to register on the basis of qualifications in primary school teaching (Junior Infants to Sixth Class) awarded in Ireland:

- A recognised Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.
- A recognised Graduate/Higher Diploma in Education (Primary) in combination with a primary degree at level 8 or a qualification at level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications[175].

The Teaching Council plays a key role in the education and qualification of teachers and the Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education[176] outlines a view of education as a public good and thus emphasises the role and responsibility of the state in this regard. The policy notes that the state should guarantee an adequate supply of highly qualified teachers through its higher education institutions, as has been the tradition for many decades. It suggests that the state and the profession share a responsibility for the CPD of teachers.

Pay and Conditions / Contemporary Issues

The pay and conditions of work for primary school teachers have for the most part historically been regarded positively. The changing profile of the teaching profession was reflected in the establishment of a common salary scale for teachers in 1972, with extra allowances for qualifications and the exercise of responsibility posts[177]. An incremental salary scale is in place with a starting point on the scale for primary teachers at around €31,000. A recent survey from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) found that education graduates have the highest starting salary of any group of graduates, and also had the best employment prospects[178]. Other attractive benefits include structured career paths, extended time off for holiday periods, additional leave entitlements when engaging in CPD and pension benefits. McGuire[179] suggests the relatively high CAO points reflect that young people regard teaching as a career that offers good prospects. However, in the past decade or so a number of critical issues have emerged across the education sector, that have seen significant erosion of pay and conditions for many teachers, particularly new entrants to the profession.

- As a result of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI legislation) in response to the Global Financial Crisis a lower salary scale for new entrants (recruited after 2011) to the teaching profession was introduced, effectively creating a two-tier pay structure.
- A moratorium on posts of responsibility also meant that schools were unable to appoint new people to these positions (for example assistant principals) since 2009[180]. There has followed a lengthy and continuing dispute and staged collective agreements between the teaching unions and the government in a bid to restore and equalise pay and conditions in the sector.
- A recent OECD study suggests that salaries remain above average compared to other OECD countries although instruction time and teaching hours are also longer[181]. There are suggestions however that many of Irelands' qualified teachers are being lured abroad to the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand the UK and China by better terms and conditions[182]. This reflects the negative effect of recent cuts as well as increased taxes and pension levies in the

wider sphere that are said to impact newer teachers throughout their career.

The teaching profession currently faces numerous challenges including increased demands for accountability, increased administration and bureaucratic paperwork, reductions in teacher autonomy, incorporation of ICT to the classroom, gender imbalance and inclusion issues, recruitment and the dangers of 'policy borrowing' from other countries[183]. However, there are strong structural frameworks in place in the form of trade unions and the Teaching Council to support teachers in facing and adapting to these challenges

Nurses

Context and the emergence of nursing as a profession

In Ireland and internationally nursing is widely viewed as a 'legitimate' profession. As such it is governed the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011. This legislation underpins the development of the nursing profession, with adherence by nurses to standards and guidance issued by Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). Registered nurses have a legal obligation to maintain registration on the Register of Nurses and Midwives. However nursing was not always considered a profession. Nursing was initially viewed as an overtly religious 'calling', an unselfish urge to tend to the sick and the traditionally highly gendered nature of nursing arguably contributed to this somewhat paternalistic perspective[184]. However, the last 100 years have seen nursing transform from a public perception of nurses as 'doctors' handmaidens'[185] into the largely secularised profession of today[186]. Much of this has been achieved through two key factors. First, activism on the part of nurses themselves who were very early adopters of both professional governance organisations and trade union organisation. Secondly increased demand for technical upskilling as standards of patient care developed and resulted in the requirement for nurses to move from a largely apprenticeship learning on-the-job model to a mix of formal university education and work placement.

Professional body and trade union

It is recognized in research that professional associations play an important role in developing professions, setting standards and evaluation of practice, and regulating entry to the profession[187]. Professionalisation sets its members apart from other workers in that they may identify with their profession to a greater degree than their employing organisation[188]. Equally trade unions based along professional lines can be powerful in advocating for the specific working conditions and pay levels of their members.

Irish nursing was an early adopter of a professional association. The Central Midwives Board and the General Nursing Council were established in 1918 and 1919, respectively. In 1950 An Bord Altranais (The Nursing Board) was established by the Nurses Act 1950 to take over the functions of two bodies. The Board was reconstituted and its functions were redefined and expanded by the Nurses Act 1985. The Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 updated the provisions relating to the regulation of nurses and midwives. The Act recognised midwifery as a separate profession. As a result, the name of An Bord Altranais changed to Bord Altranais agus Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann, or Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). This change of name reflects the recognition of midwifery as a separate and distinct profession to that of nursing.

Currently the NMBI as a statutory body describes its role as: setting the standards for the education, registration and professional conduct of nurses and midwives. It also controls the approval of education programmes relevant to the profession. NMBI also develops, publishes and reviews:

- A code of professional conduct and ethics.
- Guidance on all aspects of professional conduct.
- Guidance on maintaining professional competence.[189]

Through fitness-to-practise functions, NMBI is also responsible for considering complaints against nurses and midwives[190].

The role played by the nursing trade union in advancing the interests of nurses and nursing as a profession cannot be underestimated. Nurses have had access to a dedicated union since The Irish Nurses Union was formed in 1919 and was founded to address frustrations with poor pay, long hours and poor working conditions. It is asserted that this was the world's first organised trade union for nurses[191]. In the 1930s the name changed to the Irish Nurses Organisation and then in 2010 it changed to the present day iteration the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO). This final name change reflects the recognition of midwives as a separate profession through the 2011 Act. Currently over 80 per cent of registered nurses are in membership and the union has proved to play an influential role in lobbying for nurses interests. Psychiatric nurses are mainly represented through a separate union The Psychiatric Nurses Association of Ireland (PNA). Nurses also have a voice at government level whereby a Chief Nursing Officer resides within the Department of Health.

Professionalisation through education

The nursing profession itself has changed over the last two decades due to changes in qualifications and evolution in the role itself. The most striking development has been the transition of nursing from an apprenticeship training model to the current university education model, along with a growth in the body of research into nursing as a profession[192].

In terms of education, up until the 1950s nursing was not considered a profession containing specialised and technical knowledge. Rather, in General Nursing, knowledge of diseases and cures for example were limited within their training, as nursing was viewed as a caring role involved in recognising changes in patient conditions and preventing deterioration as opposed to gaining knowledge of pathology. In the first half of the last century consultants delivered lecturers to student nurses but a formal curriculum did not exist[193]. An Bord Altrainais addressed this in the late 1950s to incorporate more structured learning where student nurses were released on 'block' periods to attend more formal learning which simulated an apprenticeship type teaching model.

Within Ireland the pre-registration nursing apprenticeship model changed as nursing education progressed. The first three-year Diploma course started in UCD in 1960, with the programme being extended into a primary degree in 1984. A recommendation of the An Bord Altranais in 1987 was that nurse education should move primarily into the university/college sphere thus bringing the status of nursing in line with that of other professions.[194] This recommendation was endorsed in 1998 in a report: Report of the Commission on Nursing: a blueprint for the future[195]. This report emerged from an industrial relations conflict involving strike action by

nurses. This highlights the interconnectedness between the development of the profession in terms of the impact of both union and governing body.

The Commission of Nursing report addressed issues across the professional life span of nurses, and a key recommendation was the establishment of a four-year university-based degree as the entry point into nursing in Ireland. Such a move could strengthen the case for equal status with that of other professions[196]. The Bachelor of Nursing in Science (BNSc) or four-year degree programme was established in 2002 and this qualification is presently provided by Universities and Institutes of Technology. Nursing education in Ireland has therefore transformed over the two decades, moving from a traditional apprenticeship model to a more academic programme complying with EU regulations[197]. The current programme provides for a minimum 4,600 hours of instruction, of which clinical instruction must comprise at least half of the hours (2,300) and theoretical content must account for at least one third of the hours (1,533 hours). The system reflects a 'partnership approach to quality assurance' where assessment, programmatic review and validation involves external agencies, regulatory bodies, the employer as well as the higher education institutes. Clinical placement is assessed using a competency-based assessment model determined by the NMBI.

Since 2018 the NMBI has been mandated to develop, implement, and evaluate a new national competency tool which is used by all Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and Associated Health Care Providers (AHCPs) in assessing nursing clinical competencies. Pre 2018 each HEI implemented an assessment based on the NMBI Nursing Registration Programmes Standards and Requirements as well as the Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) standards.

Within the current nursing profession, a variety of qualifications and levels of educational attainment exist. According to the CSO[198], 27 per cent of nurses and midwives had a postgraduate qualification with 57.4 per cent having a third level degree in 2016. This indicates that apart from the initial required qualification, ongoing CPD has firmly been integrated into the nursing profession. A number of commentators argue that the shift in nursing education to the academic sphere has brought many changes to the profession including the benefits of a milieu with an educational focus[199].

Ongoing change regarding the profession of nursing

With the development of nursing as a profession, many of the more basic caring duties are being delegated to support workers within the health care environment[200]. In an Irish context the Healthcare Assistants perform much of the caring within the hospitals. As a result, the technical nature of the nursing profession has now taken centre focus, where nurses are completing many tasks doctors were once responsible for[201]. In tangent with this there has been increased funding made available in recent years for research into nursing development from funding bodies such as the Health Research Board. It is argued[202] that increased evidence-based scientific research will legitimize the advancement of the profession even more and allow for greater medical autonomy being delegated to nurses within healthcare settings. From an education point of view, data from the HEA[203] show that undergraduate enrolment in nursing decreased slightly (3%) in 2015, postgraduate enrolment increased significantly (43%) giving clear evidence that CPD within the profession is considered important.

Pay

There are many diverse roles and levels within nursing, and this is reflected in a wide range of

pay levels. Data from the INMO indicate that salary levels range from €25,666 starting salary for a post qualification pre-registration nurse up to €94,000 for an area director. There are also a range of allowances available. What is clear is that there are clearly laid out salary scales and allowances that align with career and professional development. Figures from the HEA[204] provide a more averaged out view. According to their 2017 publication, 71 per cent of undergraduate nursing graduates earned between €25,000 and €45,000 (compared to 50% of all graduates), 28 per cent earned less than €25,000 (compared to 47% of all graduates) and 1 per cent earned €45,000 or more (compared to 3% of all graduates).

Demographics

According to CSO 2020 Q1 figures, there are 62,300 nurses employed in Ireland[205]. Nursing as a profession continues to be dominated by women. Over 90 per cent of all nurses are women and this looks likely to remain the case for the short term as 96 per cent of registered student nurses are also female. Turnover was 7.3 per cent for staff nurses in 2019 and at any one time it is estimated that 3-4 per cent of the nursing workforce will be on maternity leave[206]. Figures from the HEA show that employment prospects for qualified nurses are high with over 90 per cent finding employment within 12 months of graduation. Over 96 per cent of graduates remain in Ireland. According to an Irish Times report in 2018[207], 59 per cent of currently registered nurses in Ireland are Irish trained with the remainder migrating from other EU/non-EU countries.

Section 6 International Systems of ECEC and Professionalisation of the Workforce

Australia

Sector overview

ECEC consists of childcare services and preschool services.

- Childcare services are for children aged 0–12 years and involve various types of care like long day care, family day care and outside school hours care. Approximately one third of children aged 0-12 used approved childcare services in 2019[208]. Long day care is the most prominent service and involves the provision of ECEC to children from birth to school age. Two thirds of long day care centres are privately owned, less than a third are operated by community organisations, and the remainder by non-government schools and government[209]. Family day care is the equivalent of childminders in Ireland.
- Preschool services or kindergarten involve play-based learning and are delivered by a qualified teacher in long day care centres or in preschools[210]. In 2018, 91 per cent of children were enrolled in a preschool programme in the year before primary school[211]. Preschools are usually managed by government or community organisations and only open during the school term. Community organisations refer to not-for-profit organisations or volunteer parent committees.

Funding

The state through national and lower-level government provide funding for ECEC through mechanisms like subsidies to parents and payments to services. Government spending on ECEC has risen significantly due to increased child participation but it is still below the OECD average[212]. As noted, many long day care providers are privately owned and over half of their revenue is from fees charged to parents[213]. State subsidies to parents for long day care and family day care include the 2018 Child Care Subsidy (CCS) which is paid to providers and the amount is based on a family's income level, their work related activity, and the type of childcare service. The government contributes to the operational costs of ECEC services in approved locations. Some childcare services do not receive Australian Government funding and are funded by state and territory governments only or do not receive any government funding. In some states, preschool is free. On the supply side, the national government has increased funding for children to access preschool, but state and territorial governments provide most of the funding to preschools. There is some mixed evidence on parental contributions to childcare costs. Before public subsidies, 30 hours of long day care for one child could cost parents up to 29 per cent of their weekly disposable income (for a low income family) but this falls to 7.5 per cent after subsidies are accounted for[214]. Other reports indicate that childcare costs account for 27

per cent of household income[215] while OECD data indicate that childcare costs account for 18 per cent of the average wage of a couple, which is not far behind Ireland[216]. Evidence suggests that family investment in ECEC has increased significantly over time and that the government's investment in the CCS led only to a temporary fall in childcare fees[217]. While the government introduced a free childcare programme for all families during Covid-19, this ceased in July 2020.

The ECEC Workforce

In 2016, over 80 per cent of contact staff in ECEC services had a relevant formal qualification (13% had a bachelor's degree or above) or three or more years relevant experience[218].
The ECEC workforce is composed of three groups:

- Educators who constitute 70 percent of the workforce.
- Service directors, teachers, and group leaders which account for 30 per cent of the workforce. This group are mostly employed on a full-time basis with substantial vocational training or higher qualifications. In 2014, almost 90 per cent of teachers delivering preschool programmes had teacher qualifications[219].
- Family day care educators who are typically self-employed but are supported by coordination units.

Pay and conditions

Up to 70 per cent of early childhood workers have pay set by awards, which is a much higher proportion than the general workforce[220]. Awards are legal documents outlining minimum pay and conditions for groups of workers in an industry or occupation and are set by the national workplace relations tribunal, the Fair Work Commission. The Children Services Award is the main award covering employers and employees in the children's services and early childhood education sector. It sets a wide range of minimum pay rates based on the level and experience of groups of ECEC workers. It sets weekly and hourly rates, weekend rates, overtime rates, shift pay, public holiday pay and a range of allowances such as in relation to training fees, protective clothing, and meals. Organisations do not have to use the award if they have an alternative arrangement like a registered collective agreement. In addition, an employer and an individual employee may agree to vary some of the terms of an award. However, the awards usually set pay at levels which are 'unlikely to attract and retain sufficient workers to meet increasing demand'[221]. There is little difference between the minimum rates in the Children Services Award and the national minimum wage and educators with a Certificate qualification are paid half the average weekly earnings of all occupations[222].

The pay of two thirds of ECEC teachers is set by collective agreement and their pay is generally higher than for educators. The Productivity Commission noted that staff were reluctant to seek pay rises because they were aware that many service providers could not increase pay without increasing fees charged to parents due to government funding formulas.

The ECEC sector has experienced considerable problems in relation to staffing including low pay and conditions, high stress, a significant administrative regulatory burden on staff and poor morale[223]. There has been some conflicting evidence on working hours. It has been noted that staff in long day care are more likely to be employed on a casual and part-time basis[224] while research has also noted jobs tend to be secure[225]. The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia 2012-2016 recognised that 'matters such as lower pay and conditions compared to other sectors are recognised as affecting professional status' but it noted that pay and conditions were matters for negotiation between employers and

employees[226]. Thus, state strategies have focused on education and CPD such as having qualification requirements for the ECEC workforce, introducing funding for some individuals degrees in specific circumstances, expanding of the number of university places for childhood teachers and using recognition of prior learning to allow experienced early childhood workers to obtain or upgrade their qualifications. The Productivity Commission[227] noted that the ECEC reforms including the push for better qualified staff would lead to higher labour costs which would need to be paid for 'by the service through lower surpluses or profits, by staff accepting less than market wages, by parents in the form of higher fees, or by governments, or a combination of these'.

Despite reforms and a national workforce strategy, a recent study of 1200 ECEC workers highlighted ongoing staffing problems:

- financial hardship
- long and sometimes unpaid work hours
- challenging work contexts causing stress and impacting on educator's mental health and general wellbeing
- a public image that fails to acknowledge the professional and educational nature of the work and thereby devalues those who choose to work in this sector'[228].

Some of the factors which have 'constrained efforts to improve opportunities and outcomes for educators over time' include:

- low pay and conditions
- 'distinctions between care and education, which continue to impact award provisions'
- 'demand-side funding models which see money go to parents'
- a low number of collective bargaining agreements[229].
- Employees' dissatisfaction led to them taking industrial action and protests in 2017 and 2018 demanding that the government improved pay but this has not resulted in significant changes.

McDonald et al.[230] identified three key reasons why educators stay in the sector and noted that while these 'may not prevent educator 'loss' to better-paid jobs outside ECEC, they may reduce the well-documented 'churn' within the sector'. These are:

1. intrinsic rewards - moral justifications, sense of achievement and emotional rewards
2. financial resources - workers' income supplemented by their own household
3. leadership and management practice – managers nurturing respect and recognition and who facilitate strong employee voice positively influenced staff motivations to stay in the job.

New Zealand

Sector overview

New Zealand is considered a top spender on ECEC services[231] and almost all children engage in ECEC services. There is no legal right to an ECEC place, but the state supports financing of year-round ECEC services through a number of subsidies. ECEC services are either teacher-led or parent-led. Teacher-led services consist of kindergartens, education and care-services, home-based education and care and correspondence school. Kindergartens account for 15 per cent of ECEC services, most in low- and middle-income areas, and they are administered by regional kindergarten associations, which are community-based, not-for-profit independent entities[232]. Education and care services, also named crèches, preschools, and childcare centres, can be owned by a non-profit community group or a private provider. There has been a substantial rise over time in the numbers of children attending education and care services and a drop in the numbers attending kindergartens[233]. In 2013, the government was the source of 90 per cent of kindergarten income and 75 per cent of education and care income (22 per cent from parents)[234]. ECEC services can charge parents fees for child attendance outside of the state free hours allocation and for other costs that are not regulated by legislation.

ECEC workforce

New Zealand has been described as 'leading the way in attaining a professionalised early childhood workforce'[235]. The following measures were introduced, mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, which contributed to professionalising the workforce[236]. The childcare and education sectors were integrated when the policy and administrative responsibility for both was allocated to the Department of Education, some of which had formerly been under the control of the Department of Social Welfare. The government introduced the Diploma of Education (Early Childhood Education) as the benchmark teaching qualification in the 1980s.

Qualifications and CPD:

- Early childhood practitioners enter the field with the same training background and professionals across the sector engage with each other through conferences and professional development courses.
- Public policy has been to encourage certified teacher qualifications. Teacher-led services are required to have at least half of supervising staff as qualified teachers. In 2018, 57 per cent of teaching staff were qualified[237]. Once students qualify with an ECEC qualification, they acquire provisional teacher registration and engage in a two-year teacher induction process with a mentor teacher. Registered teachers must hold a practising certificate to be employed. This lasts three years and they attain the certificate after presenting evidence that they meet the Teaching Council's Standards for the Teaching Profession.
- State funding to teacher-led services is based on an ascending scale which takes into account the proportion of certified teachers in the service and the age of the child. Budget 2020 provided that from 2021, there will be higher public funding to services which have 100 per cent certified teachers. The state also provides educational supports including student grants and scholarships for ECEC qualifications; funding for trainee teachers mentoring programme, and relocation grants and return to teaching allowances to encourage recruitment in geographical areas with labour shortages[238].
- The government has funded the use of recognition of prior learning, where individuals'

prior experience can count towards qualifications.

Career development:

- Career development options include leadership roles in an early learning setting or management roles across several settings, teaching trainee teachers in tertiary institutions; research, policy or advisory roles, training and education roles[239].

Pedagogical discourse and job titles

- The OECD[240] notes that the terminology used to describe early years work has shifted from a care and education narrative to an education narrative in policy documents. In addition, the term 'teacher' applies to all qualified early childhood staff employed in licensed early childhood centres. The terms 'minders' and 'childcare workers' have fallen out of use[241].
- Overall then, there has been little of the 'education vs. care divide that still persists in many other countries'[242] with early years work viewed in policy discourse as part of education and this is reinforced by the educational programmes and by workers being a part of a teaching trade union. As Dalli[243] notes, these provisions 'situate early childhood education as an integral part of the broader education sector, and early childhood teaching as part of the overall profession of teaching'. The measures introduced above to advance professionalising followed a lengthy period of advocacy in the sector[244].

Workforce Alliances:

- In the 1990s, the Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (CECUA) merged with the primary teachers' union to form NZEI Te Riu Roa. While it was argued that this created 'a powerful alliance for the pay parity campaign of the late 1990s'[245], more recently it has been suggested that part of the difficulties in addressing workforce problems is the fact that the union has 'only a small percentage' of early childhood teachers as members though it has sought to increase membership to pressure the government for improvements[246].

Despite the apparent high level of public expenditure on ECEC and the high educational profile of staff, problems have emerged in the sector with reports of poor, even 'harmful' quality of ECEC provision, significant labour shortages, high turnover, low pay, poor working conditions, precarious contracts, non-qualified staff, a decline in ECEC students, and staff who are stressed and overworked[247]. These issues have been variously attributed to a privatised model of provision, inadequate government funding and to a lack of collective power of workers[248].

Pay and conditions

Different systems of pay and conditions apply to kindergartens and non-kindergarten services with a wide variation in employment conditions between the two. The pay and conditions of kindergarten teachers is set by a collective agreement which is negotiated between the union (NZEI Te Riu Roa) and the Secretary of Education which only covers teachers employed by a kindergarten association and who are members of the trade union. Qualified kindergarten teachers have pay parity with primary school teachers. The current agreement covers the period 2019-2022 and covers pay scales, working hours (divided into maximum child contact time and minimum professional time for other duties), rest breaks, consultation rights, union rights,

redeployment, all forms of leave, allowances, complaints about teachers, disciplinary processes, grievance procedures, professional development, severance, restructuring, termination of employment, sick leave and retirement savings schemes.

The government is not responsible for the pay and conditions of employees in non-kindergarten services. A collective agreement, the Early Childhood Education collective agreement, covering staff in approximately 200 independent ECEC providers, was in place between 2018 and 2019 and was negotiated by the trade union and Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, a bargaining agent. Teachers in non-kindergarten services did not have pay parity with kindergarten or primary teachers and estimates suggest the former earn 24 per cent less than kindergarten teachers[249]. The last collective agreement notes that the parties to the agreement were

> 'committed to achieving pay parity with qualified and certificated teachers in kindergarten and in the primary and secondary education sectors for qualified and certificated teachers covered by this agreement. The parties acknowledge that adequate government funding is fundamental to achieving this vision and agree to meet during the term of this agreement to discuss how pay parity might be fully achieved'.

There was no updated collective agreement after 2019 due to inadequate government funding and NZEI Te Riu Roa and Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand jointly developed a fair pay plan with 8 principles to present to government (Table 10).

- As part of Budget 2020, the government provided additional funding of over €150m over four years specifically to improve the pay of ECEC teachers because 'a significant pay gap between early childhood education (ECE) centre teachers and other teachers in schools and kindergartens has built up over time'[250]. However, the funding has been criticised because it only requires a minimum salary and 'and a teacher does not have to be paid more for holding higher qualifications, for their years of experience, or responsibilities and leadership positions held'[251]. In addition, the trade union has expressed concerns that the additional funding would not be passed by all services on to salaries[252].
- Unqualified teaching staff like teaching aides and assistants are reportedly paid low wage rates[253].
- In addition to providing more funding, the government's 2019-2029 early learning action plan commits to addressing labour shortages by attracting overseas trained teachers and to developing 'a mechanism that promotes more consistent and improved teacher salaries and conditions in the early learning sector'[254].
- In addition, NZEI Te Riu Roa[255] has called for several measures including:
  - that the teaching workforce is publicly funded as part of a Just Transition out of the Covid-19 crisis
  - government incentives to ECEC services to be part of a public system of provision though for example centrally funding salaries and increased free hours subsidies and increased funding for services with all certified teachers.

Ontario, Canada

Canadian Approaches

It is broadly accepted that a consistent and well-identified professional identity, and recognition, are lacking within the early childhood care and education (ECEC) sector, which is also the case in Canada[256]. One of the contributing factors to this, it has been argued, in Western economies is that responsibility for the sector tends to reside with health and social care authorities rather than with the education sector[257]. The distinction between education and care has long existed in the Canadian system whereby 'kindergartens' were deemed as centres of education provision while 'day nurseries' were regarded as providing care[258] . However, as in many jurisdictions, changes in the nature of service provision have blurred the lines between care and education where the mandate of a given facility becomes unclear. Therefore, recent efforts in Canada have moved towards an attempt to bridge the philosophical divide between kindergartens and childcare[259].

In Canada, legislation and regulation pertaining to ECEC is determined within each province and territory rather than at federal government level. However, the federal government indirectly impacts the childcare system through the allocation of spending or direct tax credits to support specific childcare policies[260]. This approach, coupled with a low rate of universal childcare credit introduced in 2006, led to a fragmented system in early childhood care and education[261]. However, many jurisdictions have established new lead departments with responsibility for early childhood services. One of these has been Ontario, which the remainder of this section focuses on.

Ontario: Sector Overview

Ontario has the most expensive childcare costs in Canada[262] . Early years delivery in Ontario includes non-profit, private, and public services. Regulated childcare is provided in licensed centres and through providers who operate out of their homes. Overall, non-profit childcare comprises the majority of the market; in 2017, Ontario had approximately 76 per cent non-profit and 24 per cent private centres[263]. While most early years and childcare operators prefer that their employees have training in early childhood education, the province of Ontario does not make this a requirement. Findings from a 2017 study of Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Ontario suggest that the majority of the workforce have some level of post-secondary training, which suggests that requiring post-secondary training to work in the sector would have negligible impact on the workforce.

Ontario was the first province to professionalise the early childhood workforce, with the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), a self-regulated body for ECEs in 2007[264]. This, it has been argued, resulted in increasing professional duties and expectations for childcare workers but did little to stimulate higher wages and improved working conditions. The minimum qualification required to become a Registered ECE (RECE) and to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators is a two-year ECE diploma from a College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT). To become a RECE, an applicant must provide proof of their education and citizenship, indicate fluency in either English or French, and pay an application and registration fee. Recent research indicates that one in three RECE positions are held by non-RECEs, and that one in five supervisor positions are held by ECEs who have not received formal training[265].

Similarly to the Irish context, in Ontario some early childhood educators' also work as both frontline practitioners and directors within childcare, assuming administrative responsibilities and leadership duties in addition to working directly with children. The societal marginalisation of the predominantly female workforce has negatively impacted wages, typically low in comparison to their counterparts in the elementary school system, as well as limited educational and career opportunities[266]. In Ontario, while early childhood educators typically require a 2-year tertiary college diploma, kindergarten teachers require a 4-year university-level degree. In compensation terms, an early childhood educator's annual average salary is less than half that of an elementary or kindergarten teacher's annual salary[267]. Two separate entities are responsible for governance and licensure of these professions. Early childhood educators are accredited by the College of Early Childhood Educators and kindergarten teachers attain licensure from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

Care and education split systems

In around a third of all European countries a split between 'childcare-type' provision and 'pre-primary education' remains. A contrasting approach is an integrated model where educators are trained and provided with opportunities to work across both early childhood care and education sectors[268]. Ontario also falls within this 'split system model' where clear divisions exist between childcare provision (for the under four-year-old population) and education provision (for children aged four up to compulsory schooling)[269]. However, steps have been taken to move toward greater integration.

Previously, early years education and care (birth to age five) has been housed within the social care sector under the directive of the province's Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). In 2010, Ontario implemented a full-day early learning kindergarten programme (ELKP) model which was regulated within the formal education system. This effectively meant a change in responsibility from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education[270]. Therefore, responsibility for early learning services for children aged 3 and 8 months to 5 years resides within the Ministry of Education. This is a publicly funded initiative where 4-5 years olds in Ontario attend a kindergarten delivered by one Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) and one ECE. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010), a crucial ingredient in the success of the ELKP model is the involvement, collaboration, and professionalism of both a primary school teacher and early childhood educator within the same classroom. This model attempts to merge what are often regarded as separate ideological systems of education and care. However, obstacles to the achievement of that model included the nature of educator roles, educational qualifications, compensation, and licensure of early childhood educators and teachers. As Harwood[271] noted, the educational qualifications and licensure of early years educators and teachers remains divisive. The provision of regulated childcare services for children aged under 3 and 8 months is delivered largely by the private sector.

Pay and Conditions

As is the case in the Irish context, attracting and retaining staff within the sector has been challenging. In Ontario, efforts were put in place in 2015 to close a wage gap in the sector which was also envisaged as helping childcare operators deal with hiring and retention issues through a wage enhancement grant. The wage enhancement funding is designed to help close the wage gap between Registered Early Childhood Educators in the public education system and those working for licensed childcare programmes. According to the Ministry of Education[272], $269 million was committed over three years to support a wage increase for

eligible childcare professionals working in licensed childcare. The implementation equates to a wage increase of up to $1 per hour plus benefits for eligible program staff. To be eligible for the wage enhancement, the childcare professional must not earn more than $26.27 per hour. Applications were high for the 2015 wage enhancement grant, which was applied for by 94 per cent of licensed centres. In 2016, the Ministry brought the total wage increase up to $2 per hour plus benefits for eligible programme staff and home childcare visitors working in a licensed childcare programme. As part of the scheme, home childcare providers were eligible for a Home Child Care Enhancement Grant (HCCEG) of up to $10 a day if they earned less than $262.70 a day. However, the representative body for the sector, Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO), has been highly critical of the scheme for a number of reasons[273]. They argue that the enhancement grant represents a further example of a "piecemeal solution" to addressing staff wages in the sector[274]. The representative body also highlighted that the wage enhancement grant made no distinction between RECEs and other staff such as assistants in childcare settings. Nor is there recognition of levels of training, years of experience or service, or existing benefits and pensions as part of the scheme. The AECEO criticised the operationalisation of the scheme since the grant is optional for employers and only applies to the position within the programme, not to the individual workers receiving the wages. Finally, the AECEO raised concerns that the wage enhancement scheme funding is available to private operators, which they claim raises concerns about the use of these funds to increase profits. Overall, they argue that the grant does not ensure a fair and consistent salary increase for all ECEs.

In August 2017, the Ministry for Education commissioned a workforce study on early years and childcare educators in the licensed childcare and early years system in Ontario. The remit of the study was to inform the ministry's approach to the workforce rather than to provide recommendations for employers. The study included a comprehensive wage analysis of pay rates in Ontario for early years and childcare professionals based on data collected via national surveys which were compared other occupations in the same North American Industry Classification System code. The AECEO however conclude that despite changes in the sector, on average, workers in early childhood education earn just 58 per cent of a teacher´s salary, a wage gap wider than can be justified by educational differences[275].

Strategies to Improve the Status of Workers

The public undervaluing of early childhood education and care has been viewed as one of the contributing factors which limit the enhancement of job quality in the sector. In part to combat this, in 2015 the Ministry of Education Early Years Division launched the Child Care Public Awareness Campaign which was designed to raise public perceptions of ECEs by increasing awareness of the value of the work they do. This involved a radio, print and online campaign which outlined the indicators of quality in childcare settings, illustrating the ways in which the work is complex and demanding and how higher qualifications lead to better care. A further initiative includes the annual Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Education Appreciation Day which is supported by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). The purpose of this initiative is to promote a better understanding of the education, skills, commitment, and dedication of those working as ECE and childcare staff.

Continued Challenges

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) argue that despite initiatives

such as the wage enhancement grant, a professionalisation gap still exists in the sector. They claim that the expectations and responsibilities of the workforce have increased through legislative and regulatory changes, with little attendant improvement to wages and working conditions. AECEO reports on decent work in the sector recognise the role that unions play in advocating for a publicly funded system of early childhood education and care. However union density remains low in the licensed childcare sector though membership has increased under the full day kindergarten (FDK) approach and this was viewed as a positive development that could impact on the sector as a whole.

Germany

Sector overview

Germany is arguably the birthplace of early years education and care with it being the homeland of the famous educationalist Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), the inventor of kindergarten and the philosophy of the education of children through play[276]. Despite this, the issue of ECEC in Germany, and in particular the professionalisation of workers in this sector, has been the subject of much debate in recent times. There are two main characteristics of ECEC in Germany:

1. First, the responsibility for ECEC resides in the child and youth welfare system[277] and not the public education system, indicating the guiding ideology and principles around the provision of early years education and care in Germany.
2. Second, the regulation of ECEC is based on the principles of federalism and subsidiarity[278] with high levels of autonomy decentralised to the 16 federal states, Lander, and local government bodies. This means that there is regional variation in the funding, provision, and regulation of ECEC – in particular, there are some significant differences between the Western and Eastern federal states.

There are many types of early years education and care centres in Germany with the OECD[279] identifying four main settings (Table 8).

Table 8 ECEC Settings, Germany

Early years education and care setting	Age group	ISCED* level
Centres for all age groups (Kindertageseinrichtung)	0-6	01, 02
Centres for children aged 3-6 (Kindergarten)	3-6	02
Centres for children under age 3 (Krippe)	0-3	01
Family day care for all age groups (Kindertagespflege)	0-6	01, 02

* In some states a fifth setting, a pre-primary class (Vorklasse), may exist; ISCED – International Classification of Education

The main providers of ECEC in Germany are not-for-profit bodies including welfare organisations, the churches and other associations – private providers also exist but in relatively small numbers. Public authorities also provide ECEC but only do so where other bodies are not able to provide such services. Schreyer and Oberhuemer drawing on federal level statistics, indicate that approximately two thirds of ECEC centres are run by voluntary, non-profit child and youth welfare agencies (church-affiliated bodies accounted for 32.9% whilst non-church affiliated bodies accounted for 31.1%), approximately 33 per cent are run by public local authorities, with private providers having a very small share of the market[280].

Whilst not compulsory, participation rates in ECEC have been increasing in recent years. OECD data indicate that the participation of 0-2 year-olds in ECEC is below the OECD average (29% and 33% respectively), but it has been increasing in recent years (for example the corresponding figure was 10.4% in 2003)[281]. OECD data for participation rates for 3-5 year olds indicate that Germany is significantly above the OECD average (97% and 84% respectively)[282]. Explanations for increasing participation rates in ECEC in Germany include the introduction of a legal entitlement for a child to a place in ECEC, increased efforts to make early years education and care more affordable or free, increasing birth rates and female labour market participation.

Funding

The funding of ECEC is a combination of public investment and private fees with the combination varying depending on the region. As noted by the OECD, ECEC provision in Germany is more likely to be government-dependent and privately owned (which also refers to non-profit providers)[283]. Public authority providers and non-profit providers are funded by State, Region (Lander), Local, and parental contributions[284] with primary responsibility for funding at regional and local level[285]. There is an effort in most regions to provide at least one year of early years education and care free of charge (usually the year before entering school) and in some states free provision may be provided for up to three years[286]. Parental contributions or fees vary across regions and income distribution, ranging from no costs, all the way up to €200 per month[287]. In relation to regional differences, parental contributions (in 2012) account for 24.7 per cent of the total financing of ECEC in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, whereas in Berlin parental contributions accounted for only 7.3 per cent[288]. Parental contributions are also income related and efforts are made to ensure fees/contributions are set at a rate that ensures parents do not suffer unreasonable hardship[289].

According to recent statistics by the OECD, Germany invests more in ECEC per child than on average across OECD countries[290]. For example:

- Germany spends USD 16,169 on early years education and care, 34 per cent more than the OECD average of USD 12,080.
- At pre-primary level, Germany invests USD 10,101 per child compared to USD 8,349 on average.
- Total expenditure on early years education and care represents 0.9 per cent of Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) - slightly higher than the OECD average of 0.8 per cent.

The share of private expenditure in Germany is very similar to the OECD average at 19 per cent, with funding from private entities other than households also higher in Germany than in other countries[291].

The early years workforce

The employment sector of day-care centres and kindergartens in Germany is the largest of its kind in Europe[292]. There are four main categories of staff working in early years education and care settings in Germany[293]:

1. Educators: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional. This group is seen as the core practitioners in the provision of ECEC, representing 67 per cent of the workforce. Qualification for this role is through Vocational College or more recently, university.
2. Childcare Assistants/Social Assistants: This group are supplementary staff in the provision of ECEC representing 13 per cent of the workforce. Qualification for this role is through Vocational College.
3. Childhood Pedagogues: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional. This group are considered core practitioners in the provision of ECEC. Qualification for this role is through University of Applied Sciences or university.
4. Social Pedagogues: Social (and Childhood Pedagogy) Professional. This group are considered as core practitioners in the provision of ECEC. Qualification for this role is through University of Applied Sciences or university.

A characteristic of the ECEC in Germany regarding its labour force is the limited specialist and hierarchical distinctions[294].

The professional training of educators is among the oldest and largest in the educational and social field in Germany, with the number of qualified educators continuously on the rise[295]. However, the qualification of staff has been the focus of much debate in Germany in recent times. Early years education and care educators are primarily trained at vocational level and not university level like primary and secondary educators. The three-year qualification route for an early years education and care educator is classified in Germany as 'vocational further education' leading to a post-secondary vocational award. Entry requirements for the programme include either a 2-year course as a childcare assistant or training and work experience in a related field[296]. This has meant that early years education and care educators are seen as having a lower level of formal qualification internationally[297]. However, triggered by external events such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and The Bologna Process, a number of qualifications in social work and social pedagogy have emerged at university level leading to a hierarchy of pedagogical qualifications in the broad early years education and care field[298]. Furthermore, in 2013, a controversial decision placed the traditional, post-secondary vocational award for early years education and care educators at the same level as the higher education award of Bachelor – at Level 6 in Germany. This development has caused confusion as the route to a Level 6 qualification is now available through both vocational colleges and universities which has raised a series of questions including the potential replacement of vocational colleges as the core training body of early years education and care staff; the involvement of vocational colleges in the process of academisation and; the coexistence of both vocational colleges and universities as training bodies[299].

As noted earlier the increasing participation rates in ECEC has put significant pressure on staffing levels. The OECD, drawing on research by a Swiss consultancy firm Prognos, suggest that as many as 372,000 additional early years education and care staff will be required by 2025, and a further 112,000 by 2030[300]. The research further notes that the anticipated number

of graduates will not meet this demand leading to a shortfall of 200,000 staff by 2025[301]. The issue of staff shortages has also been highlighted by Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW), the trade union representing workers in the education sector. GEW have noted that many ECEC centres are either closing down or lack capacity because of a severe staff shortage across Germany. The GEW argues that the underlying causes of staff shortages is due to the training model in place – five-year duration and tuition costs unlike other sectors – and the need for society to recognise the value of this profession[302]. A recent OECD report notes several initiatives introduced in Germany to address ECEC workforce challenges[303]:

- Act on Good Day Care Facilities – commitment to invest €5.5 Billion between 2019-2022 in early years education and care including measures to improve attraction and retention of early years education and care staff.
- Skilled Labour Initiative for Attracting Talent and Retaining Professionals in early years education and care - this scheme aims to improve the attractiveness of a career in early years education and care and provides a stipend during training.

Pay and conditions

The pay of staff in early years education and care centres varies according to the provider they are employed by. Whereas in the private, mostly non-profit sector, it is generally the providers who decide on the level of earnings, in the public sector pay as a rule is linked to collective agreements[304]. Staff are divided into different pay categories depending on their job characteristics (e.g. Educators, Group Leader, Centre Head) and length of service. Christmas bonuses and extra money for living in certain cities may also form part of the remuneration package[305]. Oberhuemer and Schreyer in a review of remuneration in the sector from data from the collective bargaining talks in Spring 2017 provide the following salary details[306]:

- The gross basic starting salary of a Child-care Assistant 'without demanding tasks' is €2,106.31 per month whilst for an Educator 'with demanding tasks' is €2,599.20 per month. In the highest salary scale for each occupation the gross basic salaries amount to €2,579.59 and €4,014.09, respectively.
- A Centre Head in a centre with more than 180 places starts with a salary of €3,610.85 per month; in the highest salary scale the respective amount is €5,446.34.
- The role of Child Pedagogy is relatively new and thus the salary is usually the result of negotiation.
- The role of Social Pedagogue is paid the same as Educators ranging between €2,570 and €4,091 per month with demanding tasks.

Although the most recent collective bargaining round did result in pay rises, it is argued that pay levels do not meet the cost of living, particularly for single parents and those in the larger cities[307]. In Germany, for example, salaries for pre-primary teachers vary considerably with the relevant collective agreement but are typically much lower than for competing occupations, such as primary education teaching[308]. This pay disparity between early years education and care and teachers is common across many countries and for trade unions, this is a source of much discontent. Furthermore Manfred Brinkmann, GEW Officer for International Affairs, notes that more and more is being asked of ECEC educators but with no extra pay[309].

There have been a number of studies examining terms and conditions of early years education

and care staff in Germany:

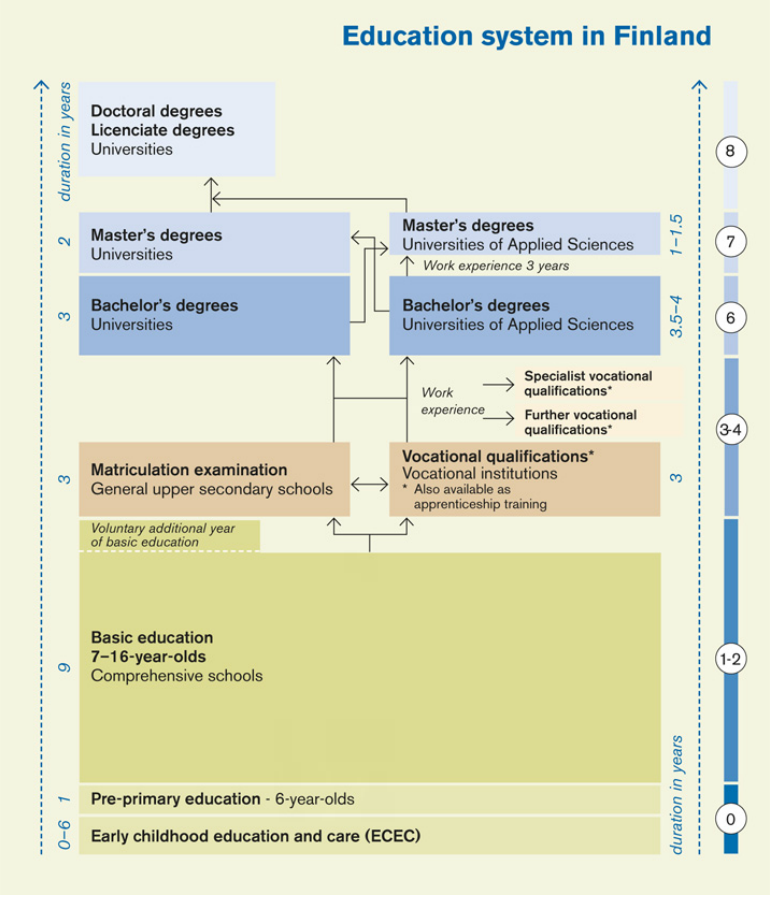
- ECEC staff are more likely to be part-time than full-time and they are more likely to have a permanent contract[310].
- ECEC staff teaching time is 70 per cent higher than the average teaching time among OECD countries[311].
- Many early years education and care staff (74%) are suffering from a "gratification crisis", whereby they believe the work they do greatly exceeds the recognition and rewards received with just 2 per cent of respondents believing that their work is fully appreciated in society[312].
- Germany has a comparatively lower percentage of early years education and care staff reporting to be satisfied with their jobs, feeling valued in society, feeling satisfied with their salary, high levels of absenteeism due to stress, and difficulties in accessing CPD. Early years education and care staff reported improving salaries and reducing group size as top priorities[313].

Finland

Background

In Finland, the education and care of children can be described as a holistic and intertwined process that starts from birth right through to adulthood (Figure 1). Finnish parents have access and rights to paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave until their child/ren are 9 months old. After that all children have the right to access day care until they are 6. After that, they must participate in kindergarten and from then to primary and secondary education.

Figure 1 The education system, Finland [314]



Sector overview

Finland has had access to free universal daycare for children aged eight months to five years in place since 1990, and a year of 'preschool/kindergarten' at age six, since 1996. 'Daycare' includes both full-day childcare centres and municipal playgrounds with adult supervision where parents can accompany the child. Parents can choose from day care centres run by municipalities, private day care centres, or family/group family day care. Family day care arrangements only cater for very small groups of children and tend to be based in homes of children. If a parent chooses to employ a carer in their home, they are classed as employers and must adhere to employer obligations. Municipal day care centres may also include a kindergarten or pre-primary education facility.

The Finnish system of ECEC can be described with the concept of EduCare. It fulfils both the day care needs of small children and the educational and instructional perspective. The concept of EduCare has been used internationally to describe more extensively the ECEC model of a Nordic welfare state, where care, education and instruction have been combined to form an integrated whole and where play is a central tool of pedagogical activities. Children's day care and other systems supporting care for small children are thus part of early childhood education and care. Activities and groups in ECEC centres are usually organised by age group. A typical way of forming groups is to have:

- groups of children under 3 years
- groups of children between 3 and 6
- groups of children in pre-primary education.

Other models exist as well. For example, in the so-called sibling groups, the age distribution is wider. Children with special needs are mostly integrated to settings near their home.
In family day care, child minders can care for up to 4 children including their own children under school-age on a full-day basis as well as for one pre-primary or school-age child on a part-day basis. In group family day care, there are 2–3 adults and 8–12 children in a group.

The municipalities have a statutory duty to ensure that the provision is sufficient to meet the demand. They also provide evening, over-night and weekend care for children whose parents work shifts. Around 7 per cent of Finnish children attend flexibly scheduled ECEC, where both parents, or a single parent, work non-standard hours. Although many countries nowadays offer extended hours of day care, only Finland has a publicly provided, law-based system guaranteeing ECEC during non-standard as well as standard working hours[315]. Municipal ECEC centres normally provide both part-time and full-time services from 6am or 7 am to 5pm or 6pm, depending on local childcare needs. Extended hours or overnight and weekend care are provided in some centres only.

Funding

Whilst parents may have to pay a nominal fee to a day care centre, no family has to pay more than €290 a month to have a child in day care, with fees sliding downwards for lower income households. It is estimated that overall parents contribute just 14 per cent of the cost of providing municipal early childhood education and care. The services are funded with local taxes levied by the local authorities and through state subsidies allocated by the state to the municipalities. The proportion of the municipal social and health care expenditure paid by the state is determined according to the age distribution, morbidity rate, population density, surface

area and the financial situation of the individual municipalities[316]. Parents can also arrange their children's care by means of child home care allowance. The child home care allowance has enabled parents either to care for their children themselves or to choose a place in private day care. Once parental leave is over, either the mother or the father can stay home with the child with the child home care allowance. The parents are entitled to this allowance until the child turns three years of age, and it is used by a significant number of families in Finland. It is estimated that around 40 per cent of children aged between one and three attend municipal day care centres compared with 80 per cent aged between one and three in Sweden. Some Finnish municipalities pay an additional municipal supplementary benefit to financially support the home care of children to encourage parents to take care of their children at home and thus, lessen the demand for municipal day care[317]. However, there is a large variation between municipalities concerning the provision of the supplement and its amount[318], which may have consequences for the parents' decision between staying home with the child and using the ECEC services.

Legislative underpinning

The obligation to organise day care for children under school age rests with the local authorities. The local authorities may provide day care either in day care centres or in the form of family day care. As from 1996, the parents of all children under school age have enjoyed the right to a day care place provided by their local authority. Since August 1997, it has been possible for families to receive private child-care allowance for providing their children with private care.

In 2016 a controversial change to legislation meant that the entitlement to day care was reduced to part-time provision (20 hours per week) where one parent was at home caring for another child or had been unemployed for more than two months. The amendment limiting the subjective right (2016-2020) was not adopted in all municipalities which gave rise to public disquiet. The universal entitlement to full time ECEC was restored in August 2020 after public outcry. Interestingly the current ECEC Act (2018) approaches the ECEC as a right of the child rather than the right of parents.

The early years workforce

According to the OECD policy profile for Finland[319] , the strength of the Finnish ECEC system rests on the employment of well-educated, well-trained, multidisciplinary staff. These staff work as small teams with qualifications from diverse disciplines. A day care centre may have a range of staff including kindergarten teachers, practical nurses, social welfare workers, special education teachers, childcare workers, and special needs assistants. The Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals Act [272/2005]) mandates that at least one in every three educators in each day care centre must be a kindergarten teacher who has a bachelor's degree in education (from a university), or a bachelor's degree in social sciences (from a university of applied sciences). Other staff, for instance practical nurses and childcare workers, must have at least a vocational upper secondary qualification in the field of social welfare and health care. Special needs assistants do not require specific qualifications, though two years vocational training is recommended. There is no difference in staff qualification requirements between younger and older children's groups. Currently, there is a lack of qualified kindergarten teachers with pedagogical training (university degree) in Finland and the situation is particularly problematic in the metropolitan area. Currently it is estimated that within ECEC, the qualifications of staff are approximately: high school or upper secondary 54 per cent, Bachelor 38 per cent, Masters 8 per cent. Upper secondary/high school in Finland is

not directly comparable with the Irish model of secondary education. Once students complete their basic secondary education at around 16 years of age they can spend three years in a more specialised vocational/upper secondary form of education. At this level they can specialise in social welfare/healthcare and can graduate as 'practical nurses. It is to this level that most ECEC staff are educated. These qualifications are relatively new in Finland and is recognised as being more in depth with respect to early years education. Furthermore, practical training and work placements as part of this level of education have been increased.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Act came into force in the beginning of September 2018. The reformed legislation includes the following key changes.

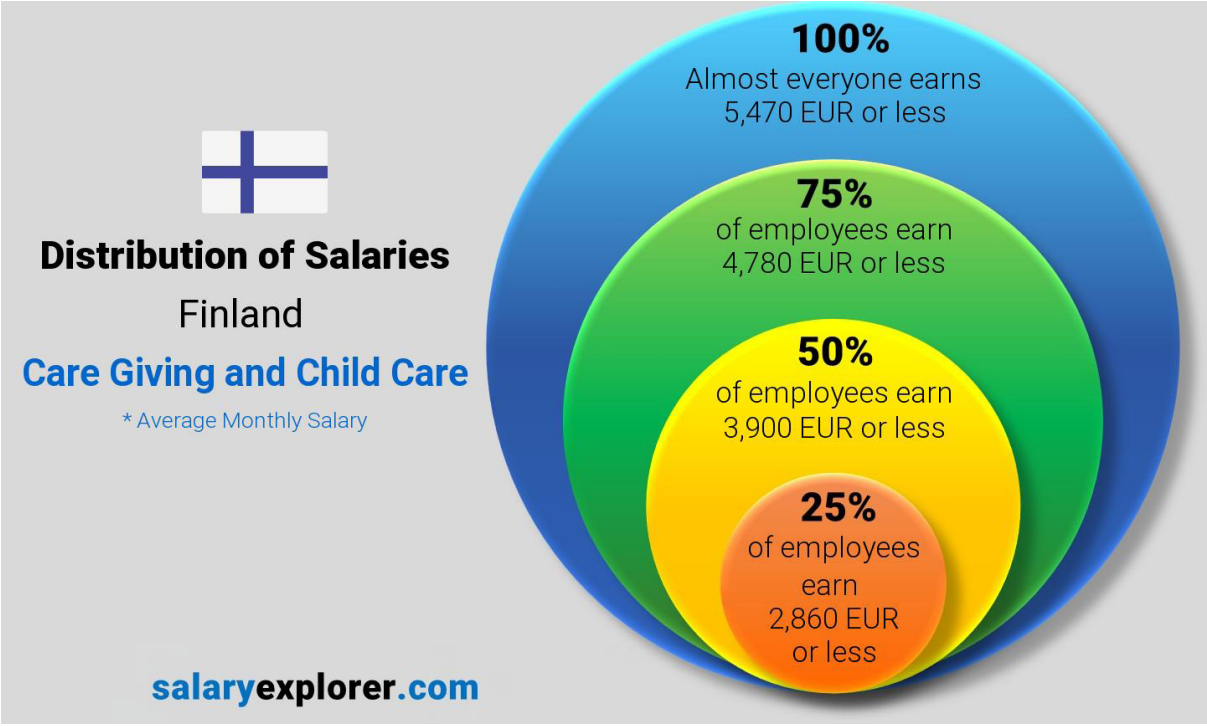
- The number of ECEC staff with a higher education qualification will be increased. By 2030, two thirds of the ECEC centres' staff must have a Bachelor level qualification.
- Job titles will be reformed and clarified.

Most family day care supervisors, who are the administrative superiors of family child minders, are qualified kindergarten teachers or social educators. They may also be professionals in social and health care or education, with a minimum qualification such as a Bachelor or Masters of Education. Kindergarten teachers must have a primary degree. Kindergarten teachers are currently educated both at the universities and universities of applied sciences, but the content of teacher education is not the same. Among other things, kindergarten teachers graduating from universities of applied sciences do not have a qualification to teach in pre-primary education and their education focuses more on social aspects of ECEC work, whereas university education provides more nuanced understanding of pedagogy and is more research-based. Current discussion particularly evolves around the question of whether kindergarten teachers from both educational backgrounds are equally competent to deliver pedagogically-oriented ECEC, as it is considered a key aspect of high quality ECEC and explicitly highlighted in the normative Core Curriculum (2016). Simultaneously, more complex work with children and parents in ECEC and in the changing society requires the professional competence of kindergarten teachers with both educational backgrounds

Pay and conditions

Basic salaries for teaching staff are set in collective agreements and the basic is currently €2,557 per month having recently risen from €2,300 per month (see also Figure 2). Salaries for nurses and childcare workers are slightly lower. Sick pay and other conditions such as working time allocation are included in collective agreements. For those working in public day care centres there is a general expectation that municipalities will top up basic salaries. In 2018 there was widespread public criticism when it emerged that many municipalities had made 'under the table' agreements with each other not to top up salaries or to provide minimal top ups of 200 euro or less[320]. An entry-level kindergarten teacher (1-3 years of experience) earns an average salary of €31,220. On the other end, a senior level kindergarten teacher (8+ years of experience) earns an average salary of €52,542. There is currently a shortage of ECEC personnel, especially at kindergarten teacher level and ECEC centres must have a certain proportion of such teachers. On a practical level, other staff are 'acting up' into the role of Kindergarten teachers.

Figure 2 Distribution of salaries[321]



Teaching staff working in public sector ECEC and many of those working in private providers are generally members of the Trade Union of Education (OAJ). Not all private day care centres are unionised. Private providers have their own employers' association: The Finnish Association of Private Care Providers (HALI). HALI and the OAJ engage in collective bargaining regarding pay and conditions of employees in the private sector. In 2020[322] the OAJ and HALI arrived at an agreement relating to working time allocation of teaching staff within centres and pay rises which will last for two years. This will also cover private providers who are not organised. The OAJ is currently involved in a campaign to raise the starting salaries of teachers generally and they have specifically linked the starting salaries of those with teachers in early education to this campaign. Practical nurses and childcare workers are normally members of the union, THEY, which estimates that 80 per cent of all social care workers in Finland are union members. Collective agreements negotiated by the union apply also to private non-organised centres.

Denmark

Background

Nordic models of early years' education and care provision are generally viewed as the best in the world. Underpinned by a universal approach in services with significant tax-based financing and public provision of care services, the Danish model is grounded in assumptions of dual-earner / dual carer families, gender equality and high rates of labour market participation by both men and women. Most children are cared for at home for up to the first year of life as parental leave provisions enable both parents to take time off work to care for their child. Leave is typically shared between the mother and the father although as in most societies, women's share is greater. Nordic countries have a strong focus on children's rights and access to a place in early years' education and care is a legal right for all children in Denmark from 6 months old.

- Nordic countries have the highest coverage rates in ECEC, especially among the under-

threes[323].

- Danish legislation introduced in 1964 gave municipalities responsibility for securing adequate coverage of early years' services, the intention being that in the future all children would be cared for by professionals in ECEC centres[324].
- Local municipal authorities are responsible for the funding, organisation and regulation of early years care and education provision while the responsible authority at national level is the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs *(Børne- og Socialministeriet)*[325].
- Participation rates in Denmark are among the highest in the EU with the take up of ECEC at over 90 per cent among children when they reach the age of three[326]. Children in Denmark normally attend nursery from 1 year, Kindergarten from age 3-6 with formal schooling beginning at age 6/7.

Sector overview

Provision of ECEC in Denmark for children aged 6 months to 6 years is located within the social welfare system. Approximately 70 per cent of provision is public and about 17 per cent of services are provided by non-profit NGOs that receive a subsidy from the municipality of around 70 per cent of costs. Services run by private organisations or individuals, a type of service not legally recognised until October 2005 make up a small but quickly growing proportion - estimates of around 1 per cent in 2010; 3 per cent in 2013 and 13 per cent in 2017[327]. Centre based provision of services are typically open up to 10 hours daily with provisions also for day and night centres to facilitate night time care of children for parents who work shifts. Provision of these alternatives with extended opening hours is low however with demand also reported to be low[328]. Parents' fees cannot exceed 25 per cent of gross operating costs while low-income families pay reduced or no fees and parents of children with disabilities also do not pay[329]. In 2017, the average monthly fee was between €229 and €398 depending on age and setting[330].

Typically, the provision of ECEC facilities are as follows[331]:

- Infant-toddler centres / nurseries (*vuggestue*) (0-3 years)
- Kindergarten (*børnehave*) (3-5/6 years)
- Age integrated centres (*aldersintegrerede daginstitutioner*) (0-5/6 years or in some centres up to 10 or 14 years)
- Family day care / Home-based provisions (*dagpleje*) (0-3 years with some taking children from 3-5 years)
- School-based leisure time centres (6-9 years before and after regular school hours)

Early childhood education and care

There are numerous views of what ECEC settings should be – educational institutions, providers of care or a service offered to parents as customers. Urban[332] notes the importance of recognising what early childhood institutions should be for in order to ensure adequate investment and develop frameworks for professional qualification of practitioners and research. The Danish ECEC model is very much established with a focus on the professional care and development of children to become social and political citizens[333]. Dahlberg[334] describes ECEC settings as social institutions where adults and children meet and 'participate together in projects of cultural, social, political and economic significance'.

- The professional worker in early years' services in Denmark is the pedagogue and early years care and education are seen not just as an economic issue enabling parents (mothers) to work but as being central to the wellbeing of all children[335].

It is worth noting that language and translation issues means that the term pedagogy may be used in a different context in English. In a Danish context, pedagogy is a relational and holistic approach to working with people where pedagogues undertake a three-and-a-half-year degree course that qualifies them to work, as some put it, with people from birth to a hundred years of age[336]. The pedagogue is a special identity for early childhood staff who undergo distinct training (separate from school teachers) leading to a qualification of pedagogue.

The early years workforce

Pedagogues

Pedagogues with a Bachelor degree are the core practitioners in early childhood centres accounting for almost 60 per cent of the staff[337]. The training programme takes three and a half years of full-time study and amounts to 210 ECTS credits. The degree is on a par with other professional bachelor programmes such as teachers, social workers, and nurses. Pedagogues undergo common training on basic professional competence (70 ECTS), placement periods (10 ECTS) and then specialise in one of three key areas (140 ECTS):

1. Early childhood pedagogy - aimed at working with children from birth to five years
2. School and leisure pedagogy - aimed at working with school children and young people aged between six and 18 years.
3. Social and special pedagogy aimed at pedagogical work with children and young people with special needs and people with physical or mental disabilities or social problems.

The specialisation course also consists of an inter-professional course, a bachelor project and three placement periods. Pedagogy education focuses on the development of personal skills (for example in music, drama, sport, outdoor activities) as well as knowledge among students as there is a significant focus in the profession not just on learning but on contributing to cultural and community activities. There is a strong interplay between college learning and work placement throughout the degree. Danish pedagogues have considerable scope for job mobility, both vertical (for example, into management or training) and horizontal (moving, for example, between working with young children and working with young people or adults), one of the reasons why the profession has attracted a relatively high number of men[338].

- The majority of pedagogues are members of BUPL, the National Union of Child Care and Youth Educators. Danish pedagogues state that their work can be described as multidimensional: providing care, socialisation of the community, 'Bildung' for citizenship and democracy and learning through the development of individual skills[339].
- In recent years there has been a push to reform the 'Nordic model' and move towards more curriculum based care as the strong emphasis on a child-oriented approach to care creates concerns that so much freedom might compromise learning and development.
- In 2004, following PISA results showing that Danish children's learning was at a low level, a curriculum was introduced for young children. The curriculum was very open and reflected the nursery school tradition with parents and pedagogues expected to discuss and interpret themes and devise their own curriculum suited to their circumstances[340].

However, many Danish pedagogues and researchers viewed this as a problematic step towards

more bureaucratic state regulation and as an adjustment to schooling[341]. BUPL reacted by making the pedagogic vision of the pedagogue more explicit by initiating a discussion on the interpretation of professionalism. These developments reflect an increased focus more generally in the education sector on measurements and tests and political views that education should reflect market needs rather than 'empowering children to work their way into adulthood as strong, autonomous self-confident adults and participants in democracies'[342]. In 2018 the Danish Parliament agreed a new educational curriculum for all Danish ECEC institutions (0-6 year olds). The new curriculum emphasises the importance of children's play, curiosity and social relations and institutions design their own local curricula based on the new national framework. The agreement also aims to promote a culture where ECEC staff are critical and reflective of their own practice[343].

Support staff

Pedagogues are supported by auxiliary staff without a required qualification - 'pedagogical co-helpers' (*pædagogmedhjælpere*)[344]. There is no clear distinction in tasks between these two groups, but pedagogues have overall responsibility and delegate tasks to co-helpers. In recent times, centres have moved from flatter towards more hierarchical organisational structures and heads/leaders have been upgraded as the group of pedagogues with the most postgraduate qualifications. Leaders have also become more conscious of the difference between pedagogues and their co-helpers. Auxiliary staff are encouraged to gain qualifications and engage in continuous professional development (CPD). In 1997 Denmark introduced an initial (optional) training course for pedagogical assistants. From 2009 it was called the Pedagogical Assistant Training (*Pædagogisk Assistent Uddannelse, PAU*); it is a post-16 upper secondary vocational course[345]. It is possible for pedagogue helpers to become qualified pedagogues by gaining entry to a merit-based bachelor programme aimed at experienced but untrained workers where credit is given for previous experience and pedagogical work. Working in ECEC is a common motivation to take up studies in the area and Urban et al.[346] note that a pedagogue co-helper is five times more likely to start pedagogue education than a person without work experience in an ECEC institution. Some University Colleges also have a 'building bridge' or pre-course for people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Pathways towards gaining pedagogue qualification have been described as a flexible and inclusive approach[347].

Funding and quality of service

The first ECEC public subsidies in Denmark date back to 1919[348]. Sources consistently cite investment in ECEC facilities in Denmark at around 2 per cent of GDP, among the highest in EU countries[349]. Most recent OECD[350] estimates note 4.8 per cent of GDP in Denmark (compared to 3.6% OECD average) spending on education (including primary, secondary etc.).

- In 1987 responsibility for funding of early childhood services was transferred from central government to municipal level and Denmark currently has the most extensive network of centre-based ECEC and family day care provision in Europe[351].
- The provision of high quality services is central to the Nordic model of both ECEC and after-school services and Denmark is said to have the best-trained child care and education workers and the highest number of children in state-subsidised ECEC in Europe[352].
- Social pedagogues are considered the protectors of the quality of care; the higher the level of education, the higher the quality of care[353]. Jensen[354] highlights the importance of public commitment, including funding for both the education of pedagogues and the early childhood centres, as of the uttermost importance in maintaining continuity and quality.

Overall, when judged in terms of quality, affordability and accessibility, the Danish ECEC model would appear to score highly on all measures.

Pay and conditions

Generally, work in ECEC in Denmark has a long history of being positively perceived. Pedagogues are well-paid professional roles with salaries only minimally lower than a school teacher's salary. Pedagogues and assistants who work full-time work a standard working week of 37 hours, are granted 6 weeks' annual leave, one years' paid maternity or parental leave and occupational pension. Average monthly salaries for full-time staff in different job positions in early childhood centres are as follows[355]:

- Non-qualified staff: 24,000DDK (€3,200)
- Pedagogues: 28,000 DDK (€3,800)
- Department leader / deputy leader: 31,000DDK (€4,200)
- Leaders: 37,000 DDK (€5,000)

Oberhuemer et al. in 2010[356] suggested that staff recruitment was becoming an issue in the sector as the number of applications to higher education institutions to study pedagogy were declining. However, Jensen [357]suggests that the pedagogue education remains a popular choice and an attractive profession among young people in Denmark with around 5,000 students enrolled each year so there is no recruitment problem in Denmark. The proportion of male pedagogues is relatively high but the number of males working in ECEC is not significant and there has been a focus for a number of years on an agenda to recruit more male pedagogues to ECEC. Professionalisation is key to the quality and success of the sector but there is an emerging debate in Denmark as to whether the professionalisation of low or non-qualified assistants might threaten the professionalisation of their more qualified colleagues. BUPL has raised concerns that vocational training for assistants is a threat as it is inferior to pedagogue education and budgetary measures could favour the influx of unskilled or low-skilled (and less costly) assistants reducing the ratio of qualified workers[358].

There has also been a general trend in the sector in recent years of increasing workloads due to implementation of government policies at centre level reflecting national government policies. This includes requirements for increased documentation, learning plans, more demands from parents and other time consuming activities that require a high level of professionalism among staff. These trends are leading to concerns about the reduction in time professional ECEC workers have to spend with children and the erosion of the long-standing child-centred approach to ECEC in Denmark.

Norway

Sector overview

The high quality of Norwegian ECEC services (known as kindergarten) in terms of outcomes is well-documented. Children from the age of one have a statutory right to a full-time place in ECEC and almost all children from age one participate in ECEC while children under one are generally under parental care. ECEC services consist primarily of so-called ordinary

kindergartens but there are also family kindergartens and drop-in centres. The state strategic and administrative approach to ECEC provision can be described as coherent and holistic and there is a strong emphasis on the transition of children from ECEC to primary school. The coherence in ECEC strategy is facilitated by several factors:

- The Ministry of Education and Research National is responsible at a national level for ECEC provisions while municipalities are responsible at local level for ensuring provider compliance with regulations, for funding, for staff child ratios, and for running the non-private services.
- There are a common set of core values between ECEC and schools in that they are both seen as 'institutions that provide care, opportunities for play, learning and formation'[359].
- Privately- and publicly-owned ECEC providers abide by the same quality standards and 'cooperation with private [kindergarten] owners has been important in reaching the policy goals'[360].
- Stakeholder groups are integrated into the planning and development of ECEC services including national parents' groups, trade unions, student unions and associations of private providers.

There has been a trend over the last 20 years of a shift from children being placed in predominantly publicly-owned services to privately-owned services so that by 2013, under half of ECEC services were owned by municipalities while more than half were privately owned and approved by the municipality[361]. Private providers is a term used in the Norwegian context to describe ownership by 'parents, churches, foundations, pedagogical/ideological organisations, small private enterprises, limited companies and corporations' though the government has noted an increase in the prevalence of corporations[362].

Funding

There are a number of important features of ECEC funding in Norway.

1. All ECEC services are publicly funded regardless of provider type.
2. Funding responsibility rests with municipalities who receive block grants from the government.
3. The funding system has not been static but has changed over the last 20 years:
   a. There has been a trend of increasing public expenditure on ECEC from 0.5 percent of GDP in 2000 to 1.3 percent in 2013[363].
   b. Municipalities are required to treat public and private providers equally which means there has been an increase in the funding towards private provider costs.
   c. This rise in public expenditure has been accompanied by a decline in parental contributions to fees. Parents pay a maximum monthly fee (approximately €280 in 2019) and caps are decided annually though ECEC services may charge parents extra for meals. There are free kindergarten hours for children from lower income families.

The early years workforce

The kindergarten workforce consists of head teachers (managers), pedagogical leaders (department lead) and assistants. In 2013, the name of preschool teacher was changed to kindergarten teacher 'to emphasise the value of kindergarten in its own right, rather than just as preparation for school'[364]. Head teachers and pedagogical leaders are required to have a kindergarten teacher degree but there are no specific qualifications required of assistants though some undergo training in childcare and youth work.

Pay and conditions are contained in a national collective agreement between trade unions (Union of Education Norway, 'Utdanningsforbundet', the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees, 'Fagforbundet', and the Confederation of Vocational Unions, 'Delta') and the employer bodies representing local authorities and private providers (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the National Association of Private Kindergartens (PBL)) though there is flexibility for negotiation on issues such as pay at a local level. A recent collective agreement between the trade unions and employer bodies for 2018-2020 includes issues such as the rights and obligations of the parties, paid professional development, working hours, allowances, pensions, pay increases, sick pay and dismissals.

Recruitment and Retention Challenges

Even with significant public investment in ECEC, Norway has experienced labour shortages particularly of kindergarten teachers. Various reports on Norway have identified the following reasons as contributing to recruitment and retention difficulties[365]:

- The introduction of universal access to ECEC and subsequent growth in children attending ECEC and associated need for kindergarten teachers.
- A lack of funding in universities to increase the number of graduates.
- Approximately half of all educated kindergarten teachers do not work in ECEC.
- Unattractive pay and conditions:
  - All categories of employees in ECEC received significant increases in pay between 2002 and 2013 but only head teachers had a salary higher than the national average salary.
  - The pay of kindergarten teachers is lower than primary school teachers particularly when working hours are taken into account. In addition, there are low increases in salary with higher qualifications.
  - Data also indicate that a larger pay gap exists between assistants and head teachers in private providers than in public providers.
  - The profession suffers generally from a lack of social status.
  - There is a lack of career progression opportunities.
  - Employees' lack of financial resources to undergo further education.
  - A lack of a satisfactory working environment.

A consequence of labour shortages has been an increase in the numbers of employees entering the sector without the regulated minimum qualifications. If a service provider cannot fill a kindergarten teacher position, they can apply to the municipality to get an exemption from qualification requirements and recruit non-qualified personnel. In 2013, 44 per cent of kindergarten staff had no formal education in early years education and care, though over time there has been an overall downward trend in the proportion with no qualification[366].

The government has sought to introduce several measures to address staff shortages such as[367]:

- Financing and incentivising the upskilling of employees and to increase the number of qualified teachers. For example, there is a seven-stage process for improving the educational profile of assistants from acquiring basic knowledge to attaining a teacher degree through part-time education.

- The introduction of a mentoring programme for first year kindergarten teachers to ease the transition into work.
- The launch of a 'best job in the world is vacant' recruitment campaign.
- Giving priority to male applicants to improve gender balance.

However, the OECD[368] has noted that weaknesses in recruitment and retention strategies are that there is no legal requirement to reward employees for training and education; that the training system for unqualified assistants is not attractive enough; and that 'kindergarten teacher communities seem to be weak stakeholder groups in Norway's education system and thus kindergarten teachers themselves have struggled to foster professionalism and claim the professional status that would be crucial for the sector'. Added to this, the government has noted that it is difficult for it to address turnover because of its lack of influence over pay and conditions as these are the subject of collective agreements[369].

Commentary on the international review

The professionalisation of early years workers, including through improving pay and conditions, can involve complex issues. There are commonalities and differences in the way in which countries have sought to improve the situation of the early years' workforce. A key commonality has been public policy attention on enhancing the educational profile of staff. Many countries also increasingly recognise the importance of having decent pay and conditions though the extent to which this has been advanced varies. The effectiveness of a system for setting pay and conditions (discussed further in Section 7) in low paid sectors is dependent on a number of factors particularly (i) the level the pay and conditions are set at and (ii) the coverage of workers, that is, the proportion of workers in the sector whose pay and conditions are regulated by the wage setting mechanism. The international review has highlighted that some countries have experienced significant challenges with the recruitment and retention of early years workers due to poor pay and conditions. A key problem is that within countries, there are various pay setting mechanisms, with varying levels of worker coverage and pay rates.

Separate pay setting mechanisms have tended to develop based on the ownership model of early years provision. The pay of employees in publicly- provided early years services tend to be set by collective agreement such as in Germany while pay amongst private providers might be set by collective agreement or there may be no wage setting mechanism. Separate wage setting mechanisms have also developed in a number of countries for degree-educated early years/kindergarten teachers with other staff having a different system or none at all. The variety of systems within countries means that mechanisms which may be superior in delivering better pay often do not have extensive coverage of workers. Alternatively, mechanisms with wide worker coverage may have pay and conditions set at inadequate levels. For example, in Australia, only ECEC teachers are covered by a collective agreement while most early years workers, who make up the majority of the workforce, have pay set at lows levels through the 'awards system'. In New Zealand, only kindergarten teachers have pay set by a collective agreement and this is funded by the state while pay setting for non-kindergarten employees is variable because there is no collective agreement or one with limited coverage. Collective agreements are more extensive in Nordic countries with a national collective agreement in Norway covering public and private providers. In Finland, different agreements exist for the public and private sectors. Evidence on collective agreements more generally show that they have a wage premium – workers covered by them earn on average higher earnings than workers not covered by them. However, a collective agreement will not resolve recruitment and retention problems if the pay and conditions it contains does not keep pace with national salary trends, as is the case in Norway, and qualified staff are attracted to other sectors.

It may be noticed that terms such as Employment Regulation Orders and Sectoral Employment Orders familiar in Ireland are not evident in the international review. A key feature of EROs and SEOs is their extensive worker coverage, that is, they regulate pay and conditions of categories of workers across a sector. Collective agreements in European countries can have the same effect either because employer organisations which negotiate the agreements represent a large proportion of employers in a sector or because collective agreements have 'extension mechanisms'. These occur when a government legally expands the coverage of a multi-employer collective agreement across a sector though usually governments do not do so if opposed by one of the bargaining parties. Extended agreements have the advantage over collective agreements in individual workplaces of having universal application, so all employers

and workers are on the same playing field, thereby having a similar effect as an ERO or SEO. In Finland, some collective agreements in ECEC extend to all private providers for a particular category of worker. The awards system in Australia is not a collective agreement but is a tribunal-mandated system and it is also in similar in effect to EROs and SEOs with extensive worker coverage.

Section 7
Conclusion – Key Themes, Considerations, and Questions on Professionalisation and Pay and Conditions of the Early Years Workforce

Introduction

The Irish state has given significant public policy attention particularly over the last decade to issues regarding professionalisation of the early years workforce through government and parliamentary committees' policy documents (Section 2). Indeed, the state itself has promoted the idea of professionalising, though this for the most part has been concerned with increasing the qualification profile. In this regard, there has been substantial upskilling of the workforce. Census data indicate that between 2011 and 2016, the number of the people in the 'pre-primary' education labour force with a higher certificate or honours degree more than doubled with significant increases also in the numbers with advanced certificates, ordinary degrees and postgraduate qualifications (Table 16, Appendix 1)[1]. However, labour turnover remains a problem in the sector. National policy documents have recognised that pay and working conditions are important factors influencing the recruitment and retention of employees. The reality though is that the workforce remains in a policy limbo. On the one hand, early years employers have the legal authority but not the financial capacity to improve pay and conditions, and on the other hand, the state has the potential financial capacity but not the legal authority of an employer. This has led to an unsustainable policy 'merry-go-round' with no winners. The unsustainability is evidenced by a 2019 survey which found that 65 per cent of 3,200 early years professionals do not expect to be working in the sector in five years' time 'if things stay the same'[370]. More recently, during the Covid-19 crisis, a survey of over 1,000 professionals found that 32 per cent intend to leave the sector within the next 12 months[371]. Specific policy goals are needed which target and address the issues of pay and conditions.

The aim of this section is to draw out key themes, questions and considerations arising from the experiences of international ECEC systems and other occupations within Ireland, conscious of the need to restrain from excessive 'policy borrowing', which has been a concern expressed in other professions[372]. It is hoped these will inform discussions for holistic policy development on professionalising the early years workforce. Given the key challenges of recruitment and retention of the early years workforce, we begin with a summary of strategies used to improve recruitment and retention in other low paid sectors internationally.

Recruitment and retention strategies in low paid jobs

Improving recruitment and retention in low paid jobs generally is notoriously difficult. There are varied reasons for low pay including employer cost containment strategies, low qualifications

1 See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the 'pre-primary' sector.

of employees and a cycle of low investment in employee training, the undervaluation of work and the segmentation of jobs in the labour market into well remunerated 'insider' jobs and poorly remunerated 'outsider' occupations. In some low paid sectors, where there are not high skill requirements, employers can partly address high turnover rates by expanding the supply of labour to include for example, students and migrant workers, and this widening of labour supply has historically been used in low paid sectors to suppress wages. International research has highlighted a number of strategies in various sectors to progress recruitment and retention and these are noted in Table 9. The strategies can be generally categorised as either workplace-focused or sector-focused. Workplace strategies centre on factors that are within the control of the individual organisation and these tend to concentrate on investment in employee training and career development as a way of making jobs more attractive. However, a vicious circle can arise where a lack of investment in employee training leads to higher employee turnover and this in turn acts as a disincentive to employers to invest in training[373]. The limitation of workplace-specific strategies is that they are incomplete measures for sector-wide problems. This is one reason why strategies in low paid sectors generally have tried to focus on wage setting systems with extensive worker coverage.

Table 9 Examples of strategies to improve jobs and employee retention in low paid jobs[374]

Workplace-centred strategies in low paid sectors	Sector-wide strategies in low paid sectors	Strategies in ECEC internationally (section 6)
• Better pay and fringe benefits • Improved work relationships: employee voice, appreciation and respect, improved communication, better supervision, and more teamwork • More and better staff • Pre-employment training and apprenticeships • Internal development and progression programme linked to pay increases • A competency framework for employee roles • Improved management systems e.g. purchase of equipment • Flexible study • Improving scheduling practices • Public image campaigns • Financial supports for training • Collective agreements • Coaching programmes • Counselling for employee stress and burnout • Self-managed teams	• Minimum wage legislation and other employment law • Collective agreements • Legally binding orders or legal extensions of collective agreements • Employment standards attached to public funding mechanisms • Public image initiatives • Targeting recruitment and training initiatives on students, those who have left the sector, and people from more diverse labour pools e.g. unemployed • Financial support for education/training	Pay and conditions: • Collective agreements • Sector-wide orders • State financial supports for wages Training & qualifications: • Qualification requirements • State financial supports to individuals for qualifications • Higher state funding to providers, dependent on the proportion of qualified staff • Expansion of the number of university places for childhood teachers • Using recognised prior learning (RPL) to allow experienced early childhood workers to obtain or upgrade their qualifications Other areas: • Public image campaigns • Professional body/ associations/unionisation • Staff mentoring programmes

A shared responsibility

The strong links between the quality of the workforce and the quality of early years services means issues of professionalisation and pay and conditions are the shared responsibility of the government, providers, and employees. It is important these groups collaborate, so they have 'a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities'[375]. Workforce issues should receive attention at a national-level forum of key stakeholders. Strong cooperation between stakeholders on ECEC policy is evident in other countries such as Norway. The EU Council Recommendation 2019 on Higher Quality ECEC Systems notes that member states should consider a system with a 'strong culture of dialogue and reflection, fostering a continuous process of development and learning between actors at all levels. There have been some

examples of stakeholder/policy forums in Ireland including the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Childcare Subgroup from 2018-2019 and the current Steering Group Workforce Development Plan for the ELC/SAC Sector.

- ⇨ National dialogue on the ECEC sector should not be temporary but there should be a permanent national forum for policy makers and stakeholders to ensure that professionalisation of the workforce receives the necessary policy attention it requires.

Framing and Messaging

The OECD[376] has noted that 'the ECEC sector will only be attractive to better qualified staff in the long term if its societal status increases'. Framing and messaging are important in efforts to improve societal status and this status is often reflected in rewards to professions (see Section 4). There are two issues regarding framing. The first relates to the public relations messages that should be portrayed by early years stakeholders in striving to elevate the status of the sector and covey the importance of the sector and its workforce to the public and policy makers.

In relation to the work undertaken by ECEC professionals, international literature indicates that a strong message from the sector should include[377]:

- ⇨ that ECEC is a public good not a business
- ⇨ that ECEC should be considered as 'a basic investment in the wealth and sustainable development' of a nation
- ⇨ public funding in ECEC is an investment, not a cost
- ⇨ excellent pay and conditions are necessary to ensure a skilled and stable early years workforce
- ⇨ high quality ECEC is central to the wellbeing of children.

An important issue for the early years community to consider when positioning the early years workforce to the public and policy makers, are the levels of pay it demands and other occupations it benchmarks itself against. It is notable that the *First 5* strategy explicitly recognises the common professional interests of the early years workforce with teachers and the health and social workforce, and about aligning CPD structures with those of primary school teachers. It also includes a commitment to develop an Early Childhood Workforce Initiative 'which will include the health and social care workforce and the early learning workforce, including ELC staff and primary school teachers, among others[378]. Section 5 in this report reviewed professionalisation issues in established occupations (teaching, nursing, social care) and occupations traditionally regarded as low qualified and in some cases low paid and where improvements have been made in qualifications and working conditions (SNAs, health care support assistants).

- ⇨ Careful consideration should be given to the occupations that early years professionals seek to emulate. They can look to improvements in professionalisation or pay/conditions achieved by other low paid groups or with established professions, including those with common professional interests to early years professionals. A risk with a strategy which aims for some but minimal improvements in pay and conditions, such as a living wage rate, is that it can lead to this becoming the public policy target which if achieved, can reduce momentum for further improvements amongst policy makers.

Pay and conditions

Public funding

Early Childhood Ireland's[379] assessment of the costs of an early years service concluded that 'the average childcare service in Ireland operates on a breakeven basis' which makes it difficult to re-invest in the service including in wages which can account for up to 80 per cent of total operational costs. Early Childhood Ireland argued that capitation rates would have to significantly increase to extend working hours for staff or to increase their wages to the living wage rate or average educational wage rate. In terms of state funding of early years, the ILO[380] has emphasised:

> 'that sustained public funding, combined with standard setting and regulation, are essential factors to achieve quality goals, especially ensuring the recruitment of highly qualified ECE personnel. Governments have the principal responsibility to guarantee the level of national resources so as to realize the main objectives of universally accessible and highest-quality ECE'.

Within Ireland, the 2016 Joint Committee on Health and Children Report on Affordable and Quality Childcare noted the long-term need to move towards greater state subsidisation of childcare. While the Irish state has increased the level of funding it provides to the early years services under a variety of programmes, it is well documented that Ireland's level of public expenditure lags well behind many other EU countries[381].

- ⇨ Insufficient public funding means providers, parents and early years professionals have borne significant costs to ensure the operation of the system. International research also highlights the role of early years professionals' households in supplementing the low incomes of employees and so their families are also partly financing the ECEC sector[382].
- ⇨ Any state plans to improve pay and conditions of the workforce will have to be ambitious. Increased public spending towards wages cannot just sustain current pay levels or aim for minimal improvements, as these are unlikely to address the workforce retention problems, as evidenced in other countries.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs[383] has noted that 'due to the structure of the ELC sector, the DCYA does not act as employer. At present, the Minister cannot mandate minimum pay scales above the National Minimum Wage legislation but can encourage the pursuit of same'. The review of ECEC systems in other countries (Section 6) and other occupations (Section 5) clearly show there is less complexity in addressing workforce issues where occupations are mostly publicly employed. Yet in relation to ECEC, the government has shown its power to introduce regulations and conditions related to funding:

- set regulations for providers on a range of areas such as staff child ratios and qualifications of staff
- introduced measures specifically to improve pay for higher qualified staff through the ECCE higher capitation grant
- increased investment during COVID-19 to explicitly subsidise wages and attached conditions to increased sector funding including a cap on parents' fees.

In addition, there are a number of other occupations such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and teachers (Section 5) where the employer is identified as school management but who have standard national contracts of employment, standardised pay scales and the funding for their pay comes from the state. In another example of state involvement in pay, in recent years the government committed to providing additional funding to so-called Section 39 non-profit

agencies (who employ healthcare support assistants) to increase the pay of staff who experienced pay cuts during the recession.

Substantially increased state funding to ECEC is not of itself an unlimited guarantee of increased pay and conditions. The following are critical issues and considerations that arise in relation to state funding.

1. The experience of other countries (e.g. New Zealand, Norway, Australia, Germany) shows that high or increased public investment in early years services will not in of itself resolve recruitment and retention issues, unless, as recommended by the CSCCE[384], it is clearly ring-fenced for workers' pay. The wage enhancement fund introduced in Ontario, Canada requires providers to indicate on staff pay cheques the portion of funding that is provided through the wage enhancement fund and providers have to attest to their local municipality that they have provided all of the wage enhancement funding directly to eligible staff[385]. Providers were also provided with funding for administration of the wage enhancement system.
2. Public policy efforts to reduce the burden on parents regarding fees should not be addressed in isolation of the issue of workforce pay and conditions.
3. Increased public investment in the early years workforce can take different forms: compensation strategies and other income-related strategies[386].
    a. Compensation strategies involve increases to pay and/or benefits through setting salary standards. These strategies require adequate public funding.
    b. Other income-related strategies:
        i. Stipends include cash awards based on supplement scales according to educational level and retention, and educational supports to staff such as scholarships, expenses, time off to attend courses or mentoring.
        ii. While these income-related strategies can offer some income relief and can help improve the educational profile of the workforce, they may lead to little discernible improvements in salaries. In some instances, educational supports can be accompanied by increased wages as an incentive, but the increases may be small and not sufficient for decent wages[387]. The CSCCE (2019) argues that income-related strategies 'are an interim strategy and not a long-term solution to achieve appropriate wages and benefits'.
4. Compensation strategies can have different objectives, and these should be carefully considered. In ECEC, compensation strategies can be used: (i) as a source of accountability such as through paying higher wages for higher qualifications or meeting specific quality standards and/or (ii) to recognise the value of the work undertaken by early years professionals[388].
5. The effectiveness of future compensation strategies through increased public funding depends on the factors highlighted in Table 11. For example, 'exit' options refer to provisions/clauses which can reduce worker coverage of a wage setting mechanism. These are evident in Ontario's wage enhancement fund for ECEC, which requires providers to apply for the fund and the fund is not available to staff hired through temporary agencies[389].
6. The CSSE recommends that increased compensation should be built into existing initiatives or standards as a condition of public funding rather than creating separate ad hoc programmes.
7. If an objective of a compensation strategy is to recognise the value of the work and rewarding additional upskilling, then it must be set at a level which will make the sector attractive. As evidenced in Section 6, if salaries are not in line with comparable professions,

they will not resolve retention problems.

8. The ECEC workforce needs pay scales and this was acknowledged 20 years ago in Ireland's National Childcare Strategy 2000 and reiterated in the 2013 Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy and the 2017 Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector. Pay scales are readily available from Mercer's[390] role evaluation and benchmarking exercise which proposed salary scales for four roles within early years from €27,000 to €68,000.
9. State funding can rise but also fall and is vulnerable during economic recessions (see health care support assistants, Section 5). Sustained public funding requires sustained policy pressure by stakeholders about the importance and need for ring-fenced investment.

Wage setting systems

Collective agreements and extended collective bargaining agreements have been used in many countries to improve pay and conditions in low paid occupations. The OECD[391] has also recently notet that collective bargaining can help address gender wage gaps experienced by women. A number of countries reviewed in Section 6 have pay and conditions of at least some staff in ECEC regulated by collective agreements including New Zealand, Norway, Australia, Denmark, Finland and Ontario, Canada but as noted earlier, these agreements may cover a limited proportion of workers or have inadequate levels of pay and conditions. The lack of universal coverage of a wage setting system can lead to segmentation of the early years workforce into a well-remunerated qualified workforce and a poorly remunerated non-qualified workforce. It is worth noting the recent efforts by trade union and employer representative bodies in New Zealand. Like Ireland, New Zealand has significant recruitment and retention difficulties and in 2019, the two parties agreed a fair pay plan to present to the government based on a set of principles (Table 10). Table 11 outlines the key features of any wage setting system that influence its effectiveness in achieving the aims of improving pay and conditions.

Table 10 NZEI Te Riu Roa and Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand Fair Pay Plan[392]

The parties have agreed to fix the pay gap for all employees covered by the Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement (ECECA). The principles underpinning this are:

1. Pay parity with the education sector (primary, post-primary and kindergarten) for all certificated teachers.
2. Fair pay rates for all other roles.
3. A commitment to addressing gender under-valuation through the pay equity process.
4. Ensure the ECECA continues to set the benchmark for the attestation salary rates for teachers employed in the Early Childhood Sector.
5. No reduction in pay for any employee.
6. Ensuring the rates of pay are maintained and are kept aligned across the education sector.
7. Recognition of ECECA members' contribution to achieving fair pay.
8. Settlement of the ECECA is contingent upon the government's agreement to fund the fair pay plan.
9. Jointly approach the government with the fair pay plan to remedy the pay gap.

Table 11 Factors influencing effectiveness of wage setting systems (minimum wages, employment law, collective bargaining)

- the system's coverage in terms of the proportions of workers in a sector
- whether the system has 'exit' options whereby some workplaces/workers can be excluded from its coverage
- whether pay/conditions are set at a level that has a meaningful impact on workers
- the degree of compliance with the system through strong 'buy-in' from employers and through a sufficient monitoring and enforcement mechanism.

Pay comparability with the teaching profession

Numerous national and international policy documents and studies have recommended that the pay and conditions of ECEC staff should be aligned with teaching professions[393].

Internationally:

- The European Commission[394] recommended raising the status of the early childhood education and care profession by creating professional standards, aligning qualification requirements, professional status and career prospects of early childhood education and care educators with those of primary school teachers and creating professionalisation pathways for staff with low or no qualifications and specific pathways to qualify assistants.
- The OECD[395] notes that pay parity with teachers enhances the attractiveness of early years jobs.
- UNICEF[396] has recommended that for staff in early childhood services, there should be 'a move towards pay and working conditions in line with the wider teaching or social care professions'.
- The Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care report [397] recommends that all qualified ECEC staff should be ideally paid a salary in line with that of primary school teachers.
- In Section 6, countries reviewed where there is a close association between the pay and conditions at least some ECEC staff with school teachers include New Zealand and Denmark.

Nationally:

- The Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector in 2017 recommended introducing terms and conditions on a par with the rest of the education system.
- As noted in Section 5, education graduates in Ireland have the best employment prospects, a starting point on the scale for primary teachers at around €31,000 and benefits including additional leave entitlements when engaging in CPD, sick pay and pension benefits.

Issues for consideration on pay parity:

- ⇨ We are mindful that early years professionals should play a prominent role in articulating goals on compensation strategy reform, as recommended elsewhere[398].
- ⇨ Should public policy aim to align the pay and conditions of ECEC staff with other professions such as teaching, it should ensure that 'no one gets left behind', that is, that a significant pay divide does not emerge between those staff who are more highly qualified (including those with pay parity with primary teachers) and low or non-qualified staff. Such a divide has been identified in Ontario, Canada, and New Zealand.
- ⇨ When only a portion of staff has pay and conditions aligned with teaching, without 'decent' pay and professionalisation pathways for other employees integrated into early policy development, risks emerge. These include (i) pressures on the ECEC sector to dilute staff qualification requirements when recruitment or retention challenges arise, such as in Norway, and (ii) fears amongst more highly qualified staff that professionalising of less qualified ECEC employees can represent a threat to their professionalisation, such as in Denmark.

Non-pay issues

Working conditions, and not pay alone, are important for the recruitment of retention of ECEC workers. A state strategy for development of the workforce should include non-pay elements.

- The inclusion of non-contact time as part of working hours and pay for professional responsibilities such as curriculum planning, administrative work, and reflection. The EU Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems also highlights the importance of providing non-contact time for professional responsibilities.
- Support and opportunities for ongoing professional development activities such in Finland, Germany and Norway. Incentives and enablers for training include pay rises, certification and career options, substitute staff, models that combine work and study[399].
- Career development pathways[400].
- Mentoring and leadership support
- By way of example, the following non-pay items for ECEC staff are included in collective agreements in other countries (Section 6):
  - » working hours including minimum professional time, rest breaks, consultation rights, union rights, redeployment, various forms of leave, allowances, disciplinary processes, grievance procedures, professional development, severance, restructuring, termination of employment, pensions, sick pay.

Professionalisation

Pay and conditions are a critical element of professionalisation, but they are not the only part and professionalisation concerns other issues such as professional identity and the level of influence practitioners wish to have over the development of their professions. Table 12 condenses the evidence on pathways towards professionalisation pursued by other occupations while Table 13 we also summarise some of the issues on professionalisation reviewed in Section 4.

Table 12 Summary of measures towards professionalisation used by occupations reviewed in Section 5

- Strong activism through professional associations and trade unions.
- The development of professional associations (or amalgamation of multiple associations) leading to political lobbying, influencing educational systems and outcomes, setting goals for the development of the profession, promoting or requiring CPD, development of fitness to practice policies, engaging in research and forums for professional discourse such as conferences.
- Union campaigns for improving pay and conditions and state recognition of the role. The pursuit of legal protection of the professional title, a professional body and statutory registration of workers.
- The formation of alliances with other professional associations.
- Support for research on role development.

Table 13 Considerations on professionalisation

- What is means to be an early years professional is complex and contested. Practitioners in the ECEC community are best placed to develop and construct what it means to be an ECEC professional[401].
- Practitioners should consider a 'by us' rather than an 'on us' approach to professionalisation i.e. that practitioners seek to heavily influence their development as professionals.
- Efforts at professionalising roles in ECEC should apply to the whole workforce[402].
- Public policy has pursued professionalisation primarily by aiming to increase the educational levels of the early years workforce. Enhancing the qualification profile is laudable but evidence suggests links between higher qualifications and employee turnover intentions when pay and conditions are not commensurate with qualifications.

Professional body and professional association

Many professions including a number reviewed in Section 4 are regulated and there are usually two sources of this regulation. One source can be categorised as being *external and mandatory* – a professional body with legal authority to regulate the profession, maintain a register of professionals, establish standards of conduct and competence and to sanction individuals for non-adherence to standards. Such bodies are considered external because their legal authority is established in legislation and examples include CORU for health and social care professionals and The Teaching Council. Internationally, Section 6 noted examples of professional bodies such as Ontario's College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). A second source of regulation can be described as *internal and voluntary* – a professional association developed by members from a profession and it develops its own fitness to practice or code of conduct rules and promotes higher education attainment amongst professionals. The body can receive complaints about conduct of members, and it can impose sanctions, but these can only be applied to people who voluntarily become members of the professional body. Sanctions have no legal authority and relate to membership of the body and therefore cannot stop someone from practicing, such as the Irish Association of Physical Therapists. Some professions have both sources of regulation.

Many occupations have sought out regulation of their profession as a way of gaining legitimacy, recognition and prestige in society, to raise and maintain standards of competence and to discourage or eliminate the presence of practitioners with low levels of competence. There is evidence of support from within the early years community for a professional body. In a survey of ECEC practitioners in Ireland, 97 per cent indicated support for the establishment of a professional body for the early years sector[403] and Moloney and McKenna[404] previously advocated for the introduction of an Early Years Council. *First 5* notes an aspiration to move towards a professional standards body to promote and regulate the ELC (and school-age childcare) profession. Research suggests that it is important that a profession has a strong, common voice which can coherently represent the professional interests of the community. Fragmentation in a sector militates against this coherence. Examples have been presented in this report of professions where multiple professional associations or multiple trade unions amalgamated, such as in the case of social care workers (Section 5) or ECEC and education unions in New Zealand (Section 6).

Issues for consideration:

1. Does the ECEC community support the development of a professional body?
2. If so, should the professional body conform to the external and mandatory variant and/or internal and voluntary variant?
3. If a professional body is of the external and mandatory variant, what type of input or influence do organisations such as Early Childhood Ireland seek to exert as a voice of members? For example, regarding the design of the professional body, its remit, powers, structure and membership?
4. If a professional body is of the external and mandatory variant, what forum/space will organisations like the Early Childhood Ireland have for influencing the professionalisation of early years professions?
5. Increased regulation of professions also tends to be associated with increased bureaucratization and administration (see teaching and social care work, Section 5). Consideration should be given to instituting safeguards for professionals that they are not overburdened by these demands.
6. The establishment of a professional body can develop standards amongst the workforce but will not automatically lead to improved pay and conditions unless financial issues within the sector are addressed, as evidenced by Ontario, Canada.

Conclusion

The experience of the early years workforce in Ireland shows that labour market is not responding to the 'rules' of supply and demand so that increasing demand for workers has not led to significant rises in pay given the limitations on the sector. This report has discussed in detail the multiple facets to professionalisation of the early years workforce. Evidence from other occupations in Ireland and ECEC systems internationally indicate that a holistic approach addressing all elements of professionalisation is preferred. It is critical though to emphasise that efforts to develop professionalisation such as through increased training, the development of a professional body, changes in job titles and so on are unlikely to change the trajectory of recruitment and retention challenges in the absence of sustained and substantial actions on the funding of pay and conditions.

Appendix 1

The classification of the ECEC workforce in national data collection

Examining national statistical methodologies is informative in understanding how occupations are classified by statistical agencies in terms of the nature of work performed, and their skill and education levels. In the national census, individuals are categorised in statistics in terms of their occupation, the economic sector they work in, their socio-economic group and their social class. The 2016 Census statistics do not use job titles that might be typically used by the early years community like educator or room leader but tend to refer to various terms noted below.

Occupation:

- Occupation refers to the kind of work a person performs in earning a living and is unrelated to economic sector they work in. Each occupation is classified under sub-groups and then under one of nine umbrella occupational groups[2].
- The CSO classifies 'nursery nurses and assistants and play workers' and 'childminders and related occupations' as part of the sub-group Caring, Personal Service Occupations and the umbrella group of Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations.
- 'Primary and nursery education teaching professionals' are classified as Teaching and Educational Professionals under the umbrella group of Professional Occupations[405].

Economic sector:

- The economic sector refers to the main economic activity carried out in the local unit in which a person works. The CSO defines 'child day-care activities' (i.e. child day-care activities, crèche, day nurseries for pupils, day nursery, day-care activities for disabled children, play centre for pupils, playgroup) as part of the Human Health and Social Work Activities sector while 'pre-primary education' (i.e. kindergarten school, Montessori school, nursery school, play school, own account teacher pre-primary) is categorised under the Education sector.

Socio-economic group:

- Socio-economic group classifies workers with similar social and economic statuses based on the level of skill or educational attainment required. There are 11 socio-economic groups, and they are not in order of socioeconomic importance[3].
- 'Childminders, nursery nurses and playgroup leaders' are classified as either employers/ managers, own account workers (self-employed with no employees) or non-manual workers.
- 'Primary and nursery education teachers' are classified as lower professionals.

Social class

- Occupations are ranked into one of seven social class groups[4] based on their level of skill.

2 The nine groups are (i) managers/senior officials, (ii) professional occupations, (iii) associate & technical professionals, (iv) administrative occupations, (v) skilled trades, (vi) caring, leisure & other service occupations, (vii) sales & customer services occupations, (viii) process, plant & machine operatives, (ix) elementary occupations.

3 (a) Employers and managers (b) Higher professional (c) Lower professional (d) Non-manual (e) Manual skilled (f) Semi-skilled (g) Unskilled (h) Own account workers (i) Farmers (j) Agricultural workers (z) All others gainfully occupied and unknown

4 The seven social class groups are 1. Professional workers 2. Managerial and technical 3. Non-manual 4. Skilled manual 5. Semi-skilled 6. Unskilled 7. All others gainfully occupied and unknown.

- ‘Childminders, nursery nurses and playgroup leaders’ are classified as part of the skilled manual social class.
- ‘Primary and nursery education teachers’ are categorised as part of the managerial and technical social class.

Table 14 Population Aged 15 Years and Over in the Labour Force 2011 to 2016 by Industrial Group 'Pre-Primary Education' and Age Group (number)

Age	2011	2016
15-19	140	124
20-24	2,409	2,438
25-29	3,061	3,939
30-34	2,380	3,570
35-49	6,129	8,411
50-64	2,420	4,288
65 and over	111	207
Total	**16,650**	**22,977**

Source: CSO statbank. Profile 11 - Employment Occupations and Industry. Available https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/statire/SelectTable/Omrade0.asp

Table 15 Population Aged 15 Years and Over in the Labour Force 2011 to 2016 by Occupational Group (Number)

Occupational group	2011	2016
Primary & nursery education teaching professionals	38,876	42,388,
Nursery nurses & assistants	5,144	4,926
Childminders & related occupations	17,636	20,146

Source: CSO statbank. Profile 11 - Employment Occupations and Industry. Available https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/statire/SelectTable/Omrade0.asp

Table 16 Population Aged 15 Years and Over in the Labour Force 2011 to 2016 (Number) by Industrial Group 'Pre-Primary Education' and Highest Level of Education (number)

Highest level of education	2011	2016
No formal education	14	29
Primary	409	338
Lower secondary	1,247	1,152
Upper secondary	2,047	2,042
Technical/vocational	4,115	4,007
Advanced certificate/completed apprenticeship	1,830	3,336
Higher certificate	1,827	3,748
Ordinary Bachelor degree/professional qualification or both	1,438	1,822
Honours Bachelor degree/professional qualification or both	1,157	2,811
Postgraduate diploma or degree	620	914
Doctorate (Ph.D.)	9	19
Not stated	262	324
Economic status - total at school, university, etc.	0	0
Economic status - other	1,518	2,230
Total	**16,493**	**22,772**

Source: CSO statbank. Profile 11 - Employment Occupations and Industry. Available https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/statire/SelectTable/Omrade0.asp

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