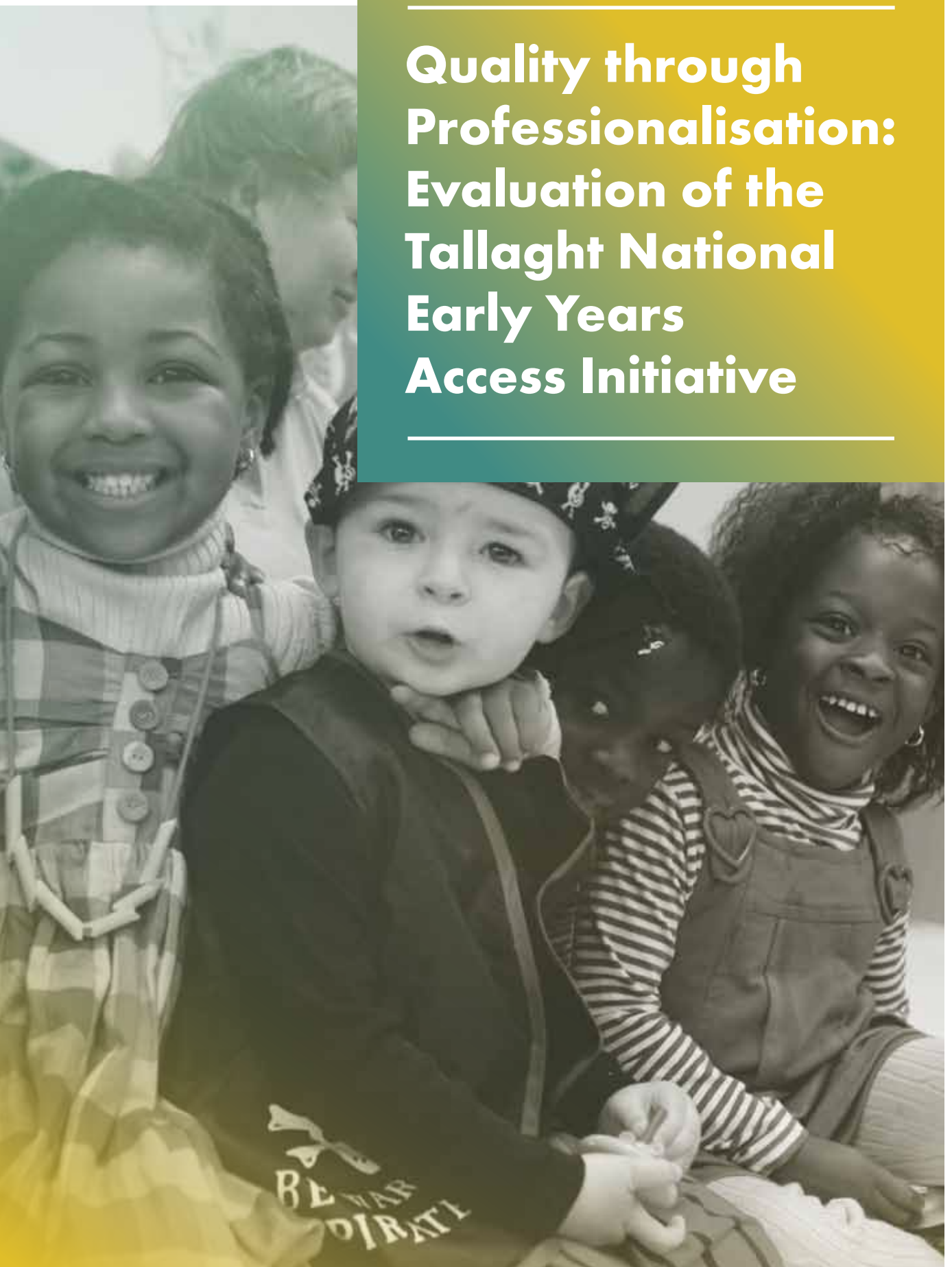


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# Quality through Professionalisation: Evaluation of the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative

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# Quality through Professionalisation: Local Evaluation of the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative

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**Supplementary Documents**

A number of resources have been developed as a result of the Tallaght NEYAI 'Quality through Professionalisation' programme. These documents have supported the delivery of training and implementation of the programme in the future. They include:

1. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual
2. The Train the Trainer Manual
3. QQI Level 6 Module Descriptor
4. Fledgling's Brochure
5. Special Purpose Award QQI Level 7 Additional Needs

Please visit the An Cosán website [www.ancosan.com](http://www.ancosan.com) to download a copy of the resources or contact Maura McMahon the Programme Coordinator [maura.fledglings@gmail.com](mailto:maura.fledglings@gmail.com) to request a copy of the resources.

**Quality through Professionalisation: Local Evaluation  
of the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative**



## FOREWORD

The An Cosán model of Learning, Leadership and Enterprise has been developed over the past 28 years. Our mission is to use the power of transformative education through learning, leadership and enterprise to end the injustice of poverty wherever we find it. A key element of our work is to share this ethos and transliminate poverty is our driving passion.

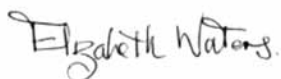
Great change happens in small steps – An Cosán and the people of Tallaght West are still on the path to a brighter future. It's a long road and since we began at The Shanty in 1986 many dreams have been realised and many remain to be fulfilled.

Early Years Education & Care at An Cosán now encompasses Rainbow House, Fledglings, and Lifestart. The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) has made a significant contribution to supporting us to raise the sectoral standards and support highly motivated staff to engage in continuing professional development. This programme will continue to form the backbone of the continual professional development programme at An Cosán's Early Education and Care centres and we look forward to developing its potential over the future.

My thanks to our Founders, Dr. Anne Louise Gilligan and Dr. Katherine Zappone, Chair Bill Roche, Vice Chair Maura McGrath, and our Board of Directors for the commitment, energy, expertise and creative talents they bring to An Cosán.

Thank you to the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative Consortium members whose dedication and leadership has led to the production of this document: Dara Hogan, An Cosán / Fledglings; Anne Genockey, An Cosán / Rainbow House; Dr. Carmel Brennan, Early Childhood Ireland; Bridie Clancy, Child & Family Agency, Tusla; Ruth Shortall, South Dublin County Childcare Committee, and Maura McMahon, An Cosán Early Years Education & Care. Special thank you also to the Highscope Ireland team from Early Years - the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland for their expertise and tireless work in the compilation of the manuals and supporting documentation. I welcome the research findings and thank Dr. Mareesa O'Dwyer and Marlene McCormack from Early Childhood Ireland for the production of such a valuable evaluation report.

I also offer a particular word of thanks and acknowledgement to the staff of An Cosán, in particular Maura McMahon who has led the NEYAI project so successfully. They work tirelessly to support individuals to change and transform their lives and develop their community. I am always inspired and encouraged by their spirit and generosity, care and vision of a just and equitable world.



**Liz Waters**

CEO of An Cosán

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Early Childhood Ireland would like to thank all those who contributed to the evaluation of the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative. Thank you to the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative Consortium members whose dedication and leadership has led to the production of this document, these include Liz Waters, An Cosán; Dara Hogan, An Cosán Fledglings; Anne Genockey, An Cosán Rainbow House; Dr. Carmel Brennan, Early Childhood Ireland; Bridie Clancy, The Child and Family Agency; Ruth Shortall, South Dublin County Childcare Committee, and Maura McMahon, An Cosán Early Years Education & Care. Special thank you also to the HighScope Ireland team from Early Years - the organisation for young children for their expertise and tireless work in the compilation of the manuals and supporting documentation. Furthermore, Bridget Dowling, an independent endorsed HighScope Trainer who conducted the preschool quality assessment observations. In terms of the research design and methodology, Dr. Bernie Grummell from Maynooth University who has provided invaluable support and guidance for the duration of the evaluation. Finally, we reserve special thanks to An Cosán, Rainbow House and the four Fledglings services who participated in the project; programme trainers, staff, boards of management, children and families. We hope that you are very proud of the work you have contributed to this valuable programme of research and wish you every success in the future.



Mareesa O'Dwyer & Marlene McCormack

Early Childhood Ireland

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## ACRONYMS

B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
CCS	Community Childcare Subvention
CE	Community Employment
CETS	Childcare Education Training Support
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
COR	Child Observation Record
COREQ	Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DCYA	Department for Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECI	Early Childhood Ireland
EPPE	Effective Provision of Preschool Education
EPPNI	Effective Provision of Preschool Education Northern Ireland
ETB	Education and Training Board
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
IPPA	Irish Preschool Play Association
KDI	Key Development Indicator
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCNA	National Children's Nursery Association
NEYAI	National Early Years Access Initiative
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PQA	Preschool Quality Assessment
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SDCCC	South Dublin County Childcare Committee
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

## GLOSSARY

<b>Aistear</b>	Aistear is the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for Ireland. Aistear is for all children from birth to six years.
<b>An Cosán</b>	An Cosán is the home of an organisation founded over 20 years ago by Dr. Ann Louise Gilligan and Dr. Katherine Zappone. It is seen as a path to learning, leadership and enterprise in the heart of the community of Tallaght West. It was originally created in 1983 and called “The Shanty Educational Project”. It was set up to address the problems of poverty and disadvantage affecting people in this community.
<b>Community Employment Scheme</b>	Community Employment schemes are designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities.
<b>Early Years</b>	The organisation for young children in Northern Ireland – formerly NIPPA. Early Years is the largest organisation in Northern Ireland working with and for young children.
<b>Early Years Educator</b>	The title of the professional who works within a preschool setting. Other terms are also used to describe this role e.g. early years professional, practitioner, preschool teacher, childcare worker and childcare professional. No consensus exists on the terminology of this role.
<b>Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme</b>	Also referred to as the free preschool year. This scheme started in 2010. All children aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months on 1st September are entitled to the free preschool care for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, over 38 weeks. This is a free benefit available to all children.
<b>Early Childhood Ireland</b>	The largest and most representative early years membership organisation in Ireland.
<b>Fledglings</b>	Fledglings is An Cosán’s not-for-profit social franchise providing high quality, affordable early years education for the children of Tallaght West. Fledglings also provides QQI accredited training and HighScope training for early years educators, as well as courses in parenting and even a course for grandparents.
<b>HighScope</b>	A quality approach to early childhood care and education which has been shaped and developed by research and practice over a forty year period. It identifies and builds on children’s strengths, interests and abilities. HighScope Ireland is licenced through Early Years.
<b>Intervention</b>	A programme or series of programmes aimed at bringing about change in a particular area.
<b>National Early Years Access Initiative</b>	NEYAI was a four-year initiative (2010–2014) which was set up to find ways of improving services for children aged 0-6 years by evaluating the innovative work of its 11 NEYAI projects in over 130 early childhood care and education settings.
<b>Pobal</b>	Pobal, established in 1992 is a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status that manages various funding programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU.
<b>Preschool</b>	The physical environment which provides early childhood care and education. Other terms are used to describe this place e.g. service, childcare centre and early years settings. The naming of this place varies from setting to setting.
<b>Preschoolers</b>	Refers to children approximately 3 years to 5 years of age.
<b>Síolta</b>	Síolta is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland.
<b>South Dublin County Childcare Committee</b>	Strategically co-ordinates the sustainable development of an accessible and holistic, quality childcare infrastructure in South County Dublin.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	An individual or group with an interest in the success of an organisation in delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of the organisation’s services.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

In January 2014, Early Childhood Ireland, the largest and most representative early years membership organisation in Ireland, was commissioned by the Tallaght National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) consortium to undertake an evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI. Early Childhood Ireland represents 3,330 childcare facilities across Ireland. This report presents the findings of the research that was undertaken between January 2014 and August 2014.

The Tallaght NEYAI entitled 'Quality through Professionalisation' is one of 11 projects supported by Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills (Early Years Policy Unit), and Pobal who manage the initiative. The Quality through Professionalisation programme sought to address the acute need to upskill and professionalise the early childhood care and education workforce. Five community based preschools were involved in the programme, all of which were located in the Tallaght area.

The cornerstone of the project was to develop a comprehensive, accredited, professional education and training programme which would focus on the implementation of the An Cosán / Fledglings Manual. This manual focused on implementing Aistear and Síolta in HighScope settings. The Tallaght NEYAI consortium commissioned Early Years, the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland to design, develop and deliver a Train the Trainer Manual to support tutors to deliver this programme on-site to the early years workforce five participating services. The training programme was designed to support early years educators achieve the outcomes for a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 6 compulsory module 'Early Childhood Curriculum. The purpose of this award was to equip the learner with the knowledge, skills and competence required to develop and implement a broad based curriculum in an early childhood care and education setting.

The rationale for the Quality through Professionalisation programme was anchored in the need to professionalise and upskill the early childhood care and education workforce. Research has consistently reinforced the message that a better prepared, skilled and competent workforce in early childhood care and education settings will improve the quality of centre based early childhood experiences for children and impact positively on the lives of the children and their families. The location of the services in this project provided an additional rationale for the programme as they were located in areas of rural and urban disadvantage; the Starting Strong II Report, published by the OECD in 2006, evidences that young children experiencing poverty are more likely to benefit from the provision of high quality early childhood care and education.

Strong collaborations and interagency working were crucial for this project, this was channelled in particular through the formation of a dynamic consortium. The Tallaght NEYAI consortium operates under a formalised memorandum of understanding between partner organisations. An Cosán, who were commissioned to undertake the design and delivery of the Quality through Professionalisation programme, acts as the lead agency of the consortium supporting the strategic, financial and human resource management of the project on behalf of the consortium. An Cosán aimed to draw upon the expertise of local, regional and national agencies who had a passion for early childhood care and education.



## **METHODOLOGY**

Five preschools were invited to participate in the local evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI, all 5 agreed to take part. It was essential that all early years educators participating in the training were HighScope trained. The geographical spread of the preschools focused on Tallaght in South County Dublin. Each of the five preschools were individually managed by a manager. One preschool withdrew from the project in May 2014 due to the closure of the service.

### **The evaluation approach focused on the following broad areas of investigation:**

1. Conducting a profile analysis of the preschools involved in the programme
2. Conducting an investigation of the impact of the Tallaght NEYAI on the early years educators
3. Assessing the quality of provision within 4 of the participating services post-training delivery
4. Conducting a process evaluation investigating the reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the training programme

The table below summarises the key research tasks related to the areas of investigation that were undertaken and the time at which they occurred.

## EVALUATION MILESTONES AND TIMELINE

Time	Task
January 2014	Completion of the Day 1 Individual Rating Scales (cohort A and B)
February 2014	Completion of the Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire
April 2014	Direct observation of training programme (cohort A)
April 2014	Completion of the Day 7 Individual Rating Scales (cohort A)
May – June 2014	Preschool Programme Quality Assessments
June 2014	Focus group with training cohort A
July 2014	Direct observation of training programme (cohort B)
July 2014	Completion of the Day 7 Individual Rating Scales (cohort B)
July 2014	Focus group with training cohort B
July 2014	Interviews with trainer / managers
August 2014	Interview with programme co-ordinator

## THE TALLAGHT NEYAI TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Quality through Professionalisation programme was developed with both a local and national context in mind. Furthermore, the design and implementation of this programme was theoretically underpinned by a number of frameworks, principles and programmes including Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009), Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and HighScope (Farnworth et al., 1985). The training was designed to support early years educators achieve the outcomes for a QQI Level 6 compulsory module entitled Early Childhood Curriculum. To be awarded the module, each early years educator must have completed a project and skills demonstration throughout the duration of the training as well as complete all assignments and relevant paperwork.

**There were two phases of training associated with the Quality through Professionalisation programme, namely:**

1. Training of Trainers
2. Training of Early Years Educators

**A number of programme resources were developed to support the implementation of both programmes, these included:**

1. The An Cosán/ Fledglings Early Years Manual
2. The Train the Trainer Manual
3. QQI Level 6 Module Descriptor
4. Fledgling's Brochure
5. Special Purpose Award QQI Level 7 Additional Needs.



The training received by the early years educators was based on The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual and guided by the Train the Trainers Manual. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual is a resource for early years educators which aligns HighScope, Aistear and Síolta whereas the Train the Trainers Manual guides the trainer's daily schedule. Other documents were used during the delivery of the training, these included:

- Síolta user manual for full and part-time day-care
- Síolta Research Digest
- Aistear Principals and Themes Curriculum Framework
- Childcare Regulations 2006
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children
- HighScope Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool
- Preschool Quality Assessment A and B

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Preschool Characteristics**

Eighty percent of services operated a sessional service while 60% offered full day-care. All services provided care and education for preschool children while 40% and 60% offered services to babies and wobblers and toddlers, respectively. All of the services operated a HighScope Curriculum while none of the services were Síolta validated. A total of 270 children were enrolled in the five participating preschools ranging from 29 to 106. A total of 55 staff were employed within the five services with an average of 11 per service. There were marginally more part-time staff employed across the five services with 31 part-time and 24 full-time. At the time of data collection, two staff working within one service were employed under the Community Employment (CE) scheme. A Level 5 qualification was the dominant qualification obtained by staff working within the preschools, with 80% having achieved a Level 5 at the time of data collection. Eighteen percent of the staff working within the preschools had a Level 7 or Level 8 qualification (ordinary degree or honours degree), whilst a very low percentage (4%) of staff working within the services had no childcare related qualification.

### **Quality within Preschools**

The findings from the PQA observations indicate that curriculum planning and assessment scored highest however a large standard deviation of 1.0 suggests that there was a great variation in scores between all four services. This is confirmed with a minimum score of 2.0 and a maximum score of 4.2. The adult child interaction domain scored lowest with an average score of 2.8 across services, however the standard deviation of this domain was low, indicating that all services scored consistently low in this domain and there was little variation in scores from one service to the next. There were no significant differences within the domains of the learning environment domain and the daily routine. These observations were conducted prior to the implementation of the Quality through Professionalisation programme and therefore cannot be used to infer any impact of the programme on practice.



### **Impact of Training on the Early Years Educators**

The results from the individual rating scales suggest that staff had a positive experience of the programme, with all of staff reporting that participating in the Tallaght NEYAI. Early years educators perceived an increase in their knowledge, skill level and competence after the training, with the largest increase attributed to an increase in their perceived knowledge of Aistear and Síolta. This is logical as the early years educators must return to their settings to really implement their learning to impact their skills and competence. It must also be highlighted that these results relate to perceived changes and not actual change, a more objective measurement tool is required to investigate the actual impact of the training programme on the early years educator's knowledge, skills and competence.

### **Trainers Experience of the Tallaght NEYAI**

The findings suggested a number of higher and lower order themes emerging from the interviews with the Trainers of the Quality through Professionalisation programme. These themes focused on the participant's expectations of the Train the Trainers programme, the skills and knowledge imparted to them on the training, the outcomes of the training and the impact it had on them as potential trainers. Furthermore, the trainers discussed the suitability of the training in terms of the scheduling and structuring of the programme and the resources associated with delivering the training. The most dominant theme to emerge from the interviews with trainers related to the concept of time and the importance of specifically allocated time to embed and sustain the programme.

### **Staff Perspectives of the Tallaght NEYAI**

Twelve staff who participated in the training programme agreed to participate in a number of focus groups to discuss their experience of the Quality through Professionalisation programme. A number of higher and lower order themes emerged from these focus group discussions. These themes related to the early years educators knowledge prior to the programme commencing, their perception of quality within early years settings, their most favoured elements of the programme, the early years educators perceived impact of the training on their practice and their thoughts on training programmes aimed at early years educators.

### **Process Evaluation**

The RE-AIM framework (Glasgow et al. 1999) guided the reporting of the process evaluation findings, RE-AIM is an acronym that focuses attention on five key domains related to successful impact, specifically: Reach; Effectiveness; Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance.

- **Reach** A total of 42 (76.4%) staff from the 5 participating services enrolled on the programme. Thirty-two of these participants completed all elements of the training programme which indicates that 58.2% of the staff working within the 5 services have fully completed the training.
- **Effectiveness** It is not possible to report on the effectiveness of the training on practice within the preschool setting. A long-term evaluation which incorporates the implementation of the programme within the preschools is recommended for that purpose. Rather, the impact of the programme can be reported, which relates to the shorter term effects. It was evident from the staff feedback on the rating scales as well as during the focus group that the training programme had positively impacted them in terms of knowledge, skills and competence in relation to implementing Síolta and Aistear within their HighScope settings.
- **Adoption** The actual adoption of this programme is another element of the RE-AIM framework which is difficult to measure in a short-term evaluation. Feedback from the focus group and the manager interviews suggest that all staff are keen to adopt the principles of the programme in their respective settings. Staff see the value of using evidence sheets and development plans to guide their work and managers believe that using Aistear and Síolta within their services is a valuable way of operating their service.
- **Implementation** The training programme reached 58.2% of staff within the services, and there were few variations across both training cohorts in terms of the fidelity of the implementation. Both trainers delivered the training using the same resources and overheads and therefore there was a consistency in the sequence and content of delivery.
- **Maintenance** Managers reported that they could give early years educators who have not received the training an overview of the programme but full training would be required to ensure all staff were upskilled in aligning Aistear, Síolta and HighScope. Furthermore, to support and maintain the programme the early years educators agree that the An Cosán / Fledglings Manual is a useful document and will be beneficial when completing evidence sheets, action plans and development plans.

## KEY LEARNING

The table below outlines the key learning stemming from the evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI – Quality through Professionalisation

Theme	Key Learning
Impact of staff training	<p>A number of key learning points arose with regard to the strengthening training programmes targeting early years educators, these points focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Timing of the training is acceptable to those participating</li><li>- Adequate time between training sessions to observe and allow for the transfer of learning into practice</li><li>- Develop and utilise internal expertise</li><li>- Consider quid-pro-quo arrangements between organisations</li><li>- Provide ongoing booster training to consolidate learning</li><li>- Ensure programme trainers have undergone specific training to ensure programme fidelity</li><li>- The value of active training methods when providing training to adult learners.</li></ul>
Involving the users of the programme	<p>A novel element of the Quality through Professionalisation programme was the engagement of users of the programme in the development of the programme resources. The findings of the evaluation suggests that the benefits of including programme users are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Recruitment and retention rates are likely to be better</li><li>- Concerns about fairness are addressed</li><li>- Acceptability of the programme is enhanced</li><li>- Effective implementation of the programme is heightened</li><li>- Higher chance of producing implementable data.</li></ul>
Engaging in change – the importance of the ‘lead-in’ phase	<p>From this evaluation, it was clear that the supports needed to enable positive change to occur at either an individual or organisational level, are often underestimated, or not considered at all. The findings from this evaluation found that for change to be successful a number factors must be considered, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Time to prepare for change</li><li>- Excellent planning</li><li>- Commitment to the programme outcomes</li><li>- A shared vision within the consortium</li><li>- Delivery of consistent messages</li><li>- Effective leadership from management.</li></ul>

Theme	Key Learning
Translating learning into practice	<p>Findings from this evaluation generated some key learning with regard to translating training into practice, these key learning points include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time for early years educators to plan practice</li> <li>- Time for trainers to plan training delivery</li> <li>- Formation of communities of practice</li> <li>- Informing practice using the evidence gathered.</li> </ul>
Monitoring and evaluation	<p>To further explore the long-term effectiveness of this programme an evaluation focussing on the implementation of the Quality through Professionalisation programme within preschool settings is warranted. It is recommended that this occurs at 6 months to assess medium-term impact and 12 months to assess long-term impact, post programme delivery.</p>

## CONCLUSION

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that the Quality through Professionalisation programme, a novel training programme for early years educators, impacts the knowledge, skills and competencies of staff post-programme delivery. Such programmes require ample time and resources to be implemented fully. Further investigation is required to determine the long-term effectiveness of this programme on quality within preschools settings.





**01**

**Introduction**

# Introduction

# 01

This document reports on the evaluation of the Quality through Professionalisation programme of which An Cosán<sup>1</sup> is the lead agency. The Quality through Professionalisation programme is one of 11 projects under the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI). This introduction provides a background to the programme and the evaluation.

## 1.1 THE NATIONAL EARLY YEARS ACCESS INITIATIVE AND EVALUATION

The NEYAI aimed to improve the quality and outcomes of services in the early years sector. It was a three year initiative (2011-2014) which was officially launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in June 2011. The national programme is funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills (Early Years Policy Unit), and Pobal who manage the initiative. There are 11 demonstration projects across Ireland that make up the NEYAI, each project has a different focus but essentially are all striving for the same outcome; to improve the quality and co-ordination of local services to young children and families. Each demonstration project is made up of a consortium comprising of a lead organisation and at least two other relevant stakeholders.

At a national level, the initiative is concerned with establishing an evidence base contributing to improvements in practice and influencing policy changes with regard to improved learning, education and well-being outcomes for young children and their families.

At a local level, the initiative is concerned with building the delivery capacity of local projects, strengthening the quality and impact of each of the 11 demonstration projects while simultaneously contributing to the learning of the initiative as a whole.

## 1.2 THE TALLAGHT NEYAI

The Tallaght NEYAI entitled Quality through Professionalisation, sought to address the acute need to upskill and professionalise the early childhood care and education workforce by developing a training programme for early years educators which focused on aligning the national quality and learning frameworks, Siolta and Aistear, with a specific curriculum approach, namely HighScope. This project included five Fledglings<sup>2</sup> community based preschools, all of which were located in the Tallaght West and were using a HighScope approach within their practice. In the first instance 16 professionals, including preschool managers and early years quality specialists undertook the Train the Trainers Programme. Subsequently, 31 staff participated in the Training Programme for Early Years Educators. Both of these

<sup>1</sup> An Cosán is seen as a path to learning, leadership and enterprise in the heart of the community of Tallaght West. It was originally created in 1983 and called "The Shanty Educational Project" and it was set up to address the problems of poverty and disadvantage affecting people in this community. An Cosán has a board of management which operates strategically through the CEO. The CEO has a senior management team and a variety of support services including finance, human resources and IT.

<sup>2</sup> Fledglings is An Cosán's not-for-profit social franchise providing high quality, affordable early years education for the children of Tallaght West. Fledglings also provides FETAC-accredited training and HighScope training for early years educators, as well as courses in parenting and even a course for grandparents.



training programmes are described in detail in Chapter 3. The project involved the establishment and maintenance of formal and informal partnerships and collaborations across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

**The objectives described in the project application and action plan to Pobal (2010) were:**

- To design a comprehensive professional education and training programme for implementation of The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual
- To implement a locally adapted The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual in Early Childhood Ireland early years services with children aged 0 – 3 (as agreed with NCNA prior to the merger of NCNA and IPPA)
- To implement The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual in Tallaght West early years services with children aged 3 – 6 years
- To refine the training methodology and manual content based on the feedback from the early years sites
- To release the revised The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual and Training Programme to all Fledglings centres; and to release the manual for local adaption programme to early years settings using HighScope throughout Ireland
- To formalise early years education provision for children with additional needs by developing a discrete section of The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual focused on children with additional needs.
- To create a collaborative learning community at a trainer, student and consortium level.

The cornerstone of the project was to develop a comprehensive, accredited, professional education and training programme which would focus on the implementation of the An Cosán/ Fledglings Manual. This manual focusses on implementing Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) and Siolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) in HighScope settings. The training programme was designed to support the early years

educators achieve the outcomes for a FETAC Level 6 compulsory module 'Early Childhood Curriculum. The purpose of this award was to equip the learner with the knowledge, skills and competence required to develop and implement a broad based curriculum in an early childhood care and education setting. This is further explained in Chapter 3.

### 1.3 OVERALL VISION FOR THE PROJECT

The vision for the Tallaght NEYAI was to work towards a highly professional early years sector where early years educators, informed and supported by their qualifications and professional experience, made a significant contribution to the development of the children and families they work with, ensuring better outcomes for children. Specifically, the project held a vision of a group of professional early years educators who are fully competent to apply and integrate the national frameworks of Aistear and Siolta within the HighScope curriculum and who, consequently, will deliver a high quality early years education and care programme to the children and families attending their setting. This vision centred on the design and implementation of a training programme which utilised an innovative early years manual, developed for Fledglings Early Years Centres at An Cosán, by The Centre for Progressive Change Ltd.

The vision, with all its' elements, is underpinned by national and international research. Nationally, the Workforce Development Plan, endorses the belief that 'the skills and qualifications of adults working with young children is a critical factor in determining the quality of young children's early experiences (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). Internationally, there is broad consensus that high quality early childhood care and education improves child outcomes, and equally that low or mediocre quality may harm children and that the competences and qualifications of the workforce are strong predictors of quality in settings (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, Sylva et al., 2004). Research suggests that the benefits of high quality provision during the early years are particularly salient for children who live in disadvantaged families (Hayes, 2007, Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

## 1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT

The rationale for the Quality through Professionalisation programme was anchored in the need to professionalise and upskill the early childhood care and education workforce. Research over the last number of decades has consistently reinforced the message that a better prepared, skilled and competent workforce in early childhood care and education settings improves the quality of centre based early childhood experiences for children and impacts positively on the lives of the children and their families. This is further supported by the publication of the national quality assurance framework Siolta and the national early childhood curriculum Aistear. The Tallaght NEYAI felt that training early childhood educators to incorporate Aistear, Siolta and the curriculum approach of HighScope would further strengthen the provision of early childhood care and education.

The location of the services in this project provided an additional rationale for the programme. Services involved in The Quality through Professionalisation programme are located in areas of urban disadvantage. The Starting Strong II Report (OECD, 2006), evidences that young children experiencing poverty are more likely to benefit from the provision of high quality early childhood care and education.

Finally, the office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs (2009) required that any service participating in the free preschool year must agree to provide an appropriate educational programme for children, adhering to the principles of Siolta. The training in and implementation of the Quality through Professionalisation programme provides an appropriate education programme for young children.

Quality through Professionalisation and the associated training programme, meets the need for promotion and dissemination of Siolta and Aistear through professional development. In time this project will significantly contribute to the achievement of the implementation of these frameworks for services using the HighScope Approach.

## 1.5 POLICY CONTEXT

There has been a series of policy developments in the Irish context intended to enhance the quality of early childhood care and education provision

and consequently impact upon the professionalism of the sector. The following are a list of significant developments and initiatives which have sought to impact professionalisation of the sector:

- Child Care Act, (Department of Health and Children 1991)
- Childcare (preschool Services) Regulations (Department of Health and Children 1996)
- White paper on Early Childhood Education: Ready to learn (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1999)
- National Children's Strategy: Our Children-Their lives (Department of Health and Children 2000)
- Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2002)
- National Quality Framework: Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2006)
- Revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (DHC 2006)
- Early Childhood Curriculum Framework- Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009)
- Free preschool year in ECCE scheme (Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs 2010)
- The implementation of a preschool quality agenda arising from Budget 2013 - funding of €4.5 million to recruit additional pre-school inspectors, establish a pre-school mentoring service and support staff training.

These ongoing developments highlight not only the importance of quality early childhood care and education but the complexity of working with young children. These developments underpin the need for a highly trained and skilled workforce. Indeed the task of ensuring that high-quality education and care services are made available to young children depends, in a crucial way, on the quality and training of the personnel involved in the service (OECD 2006).

The continuation of government funding, primarily through CCS, CETS and ECCE schemes; supports children and families and aids sustainability of community (and other) services but concurrently requires high levels of accountability and places quality and governance demands on staff, managers and boards of management.

# TALLAGHT NEYAI CONSORTIUM

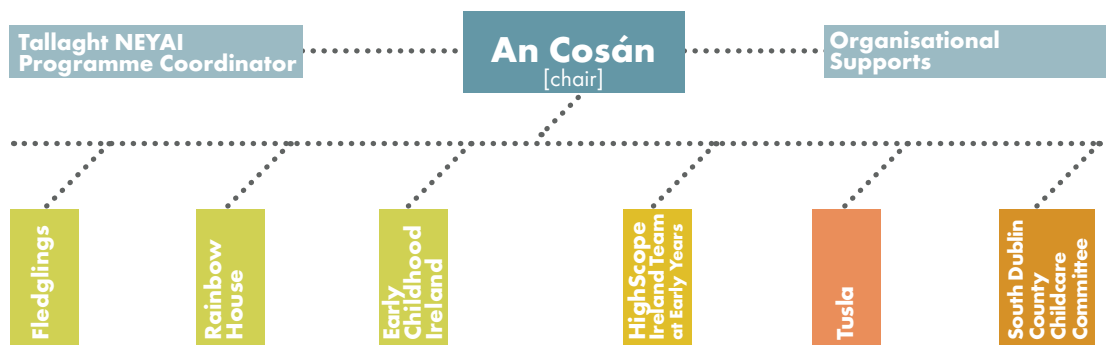


Figure 1 Graphical illustration of the Tallaght NEYAI consortium

At a broader policy level, there is a growing recognition of children's rights (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC]), evidenced in the Children's Referendum in 2012 which carries implications for services in how they position, understand and engage with children.

## 1.6 TALLAGHT NEYAI CONSORTIUM

Strong collaborations and interagency working were crucial for this project, this was channelled in particular through the formation of a dynamic consortium. The Tallaght NEYAI consortium operates under a formalised memorandum of understanding between partner organisations. An Cosán acts as the lead agency of the consortium supporting the strategic, financial and human resource management of the project on behalf of the consortium. An Cosán aimed to draw upon the expertise of local, regional and national agencies who had a passion for early childhood care and education. It was envisaged that these key partners would guide and inform the project content and delivery and disseminate the work of the Tallaght NEYAI to their respective agencies. Figure 1 illustrates the range of partners involved in the Tallaght NEYAI.

**The consortium involves a range of relevant stakeholders including:**

- An Cosán
- Fledglings<sup>3</sup>
- Rainbow House
- Early Childhood Ireland (formerly IrishPreschool Play Association [IPPA] and National Children's Nursery Association [NCNA])

- HighScope Ireland Team at Early Years
- Tusla – The Child and Family Agency
- South Dublin County Childcare Committee

## 1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

This report has a number of aims. First, to discover whether the training programme impacted the knowledge, skills and awareness of the early years educators participating in the training programme; second, to examine the implementation process through studying the managers, early years educators, trainers and project staff experiences of the programme; and third, to provide a detailed review of the implementation practices in the Tallaght NEYAI regarding reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the interventions.

**The report is organised as follows;**

- Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature relating to the main aims and objectives of the programme
- Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology
- Chapter 4 describes the design and implementation of the training programme
- Chapter 5 details the qualitative, quantitative and process evaluation findings
- Chapter 6 summaries the key learning and legacies stemming from the evaluation
- Chapter 7 details the reference list.

<sup>3</sup> The Fledglings representative on the consortium represented 5 Tallaght based Fledgling's services, one of whom (Fledglings Tallaght Institute of Technology) closed after the training programme was delivered to early years educators.





# 02

## Literature Review

# Literature Review

# 02

The following review of the literature will focus on the importance and the impact of adequate training opportunities on the quality of service provided by early years settings.

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This review of the literature will incorporate both national and international literature and include a range of early childhood care and education evaluation studies focusing on professional development and quality improvement. By doing so, the literature review will investigate the existing research on the relationships between on-going professional development, quality within settings, interactions between staff and children and outcomes for children. Furthermore, the review will summarise the importance of early intervention, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

In reviewing the literature, the authors have drawn extensively on Irish research projects including data emerging from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives, the Community Development Initiatives and the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study. International landmark studies and reports including the EPPE Project in the UK (Sylva et al., 2004), the CoRe Study on Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011) and the Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005) are examples of some of the research studies which will be discussed throughout the chapter. At a policy level, developments including curriculum development (Aistear), quality improvement (Siolta), funding schemes (ECCE, CETS, and CCS), national plans including The Workforce Development Plan (Department of Education and Skills, 2010b) and their implications for professional development within the sector will underpin this literature

review. This approach to the literature review will ensure that the research is located within the current legislative, economic, social and cultural context in Ireland.

**Given the wide scope of this project, the literature will review the following areas:**

- The emergence of early childhood care and education in Ireland
- Quality in early childhood care and education
- Professional development of the sector
- The principals of adult learning
- Change and the importance of reflective practice

## 2.2 THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Early childhood care and education has become the norm in many European and North American countries, where most children of 3 years and upwards attend regulated early education services. These services represent much more than a drop-off location for working parents and play an important role in child development by affording children an opportunity to engage in a range of educational and social activities (Currie, 2001). The increasing number of children in formal early childhood care and education settings is largely attributed, on one hand, to the convergence of research showing the positive influence of early education on



school readiness and, on the other, to the rise in maternal employment (Gregg et al., 2005). Many of the changes in childcare provision and women's work patterns were predicted by remarkable changes in the Irish labour force and market during the last twenty years. The period 1994 to 2007 was a period of exceptional and sustained growth in the Irish economy. The number employed almost doubled, from just under 1.2 million in 1993 to 2.2 million in 2007 (Central Statistics Office, 2009). One of the most distinctive features of this growth was the participation of females in the workforce. In 1992, the employment rate of women in Ireland was just over 37%. By 2004, the employment rate of women was 56%, similar to the EU average. Growing Up in Ireland data from 2008 states that the employment rate for women in Ireland was 60% (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2008). Since then, the employment rate for women has fallen due to the recession though not as much for women as men, signifying that the gender gap in employment has also narrowed (Central Statistics Office, 2013).

Historically in the absence of a specific government department for early years education and without a national Irish preschool policy, preschool settings developed in a fragmented way across a wide policy context including, employment, education, family and child policy. Preschool services in Ireland compete across a community, private, commercial and the state sector within a mixed market and mixed pedagogical system. During the decade 2000-2010, the Irish state in partnership with the European Union initiated an expansion programme administered through the intermediary Pobal to support the development of crèche, preschools and family resource centres. Pobal also funds the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative and the County Childcare Committees to assist with the development of the sector. Over the last two decades various government departments and organisations have been involved in inspection, training and curriculum development and have worked to attain international targets for the sector.

Government support for childcare in Ireland has been guided by a number of competing objectives including a growing recognition that the first years of life track to later learning and social development, female employment, social inclusion and high birth rates. The Irish government attempted to steer a course that

was neutral in terms of providing support through the Universal Child Benefit scheme for care in the home (by parents) and care outside the home, distinguishing Ireland from many European counterparts (OECD, 2006). Unlike other European countries, Ireland does not have a long tradition of young children attending preschool services (Department of Education and Skills, 2010a). However, the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (also referred to as the free preschool year) in 2010 has set about changing that. This year has provided a free year of part-time preschool education for children aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months on 1st of September of the year they will attend (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2012). The State of the Nation Report suggested that 95% of families availed of the free preschool year in 2012 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). The 2014 budget saw small investments within the sector with €4.5 million in total being ring-fenced. This was further broken down into €1.1 million for the preschool inspectorate; €2.5 million for a national mentoring programme and €1.5 million for training support to up skill those already working in the sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2013). These additional funds are being used to appoint additional staff to the preschool inspectorate, establish a mentoring service for preschool services and provide a training support fund to assist staff already working in the sector to meet the new qualification requirements by 2015.

Despite the increasing uptake of childcare, quality of provision within the childcare environment is varied, due to the costs associated with maintaining quality. High quality is characterised by a qualified, well-paid and stable work-force, low adult-child ratios, efficient management and good governance structures (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011). The OECD contends that while quality may cost more due to higher staff pay and lower ratios, the message is clear 'quality costs but is worth the investment' (OECD, 2012). This is discussed further in Section 2.3.

## 2.3 QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

An earlier conceptualisation of preschool services very much viewed them as a service for working parents. This view focused on the needs of the service economy rather

than on the development of the young child. Currently influenced by a growing body of literature, this section underlines the importance of ensuring a quality childcare experience for children and their families.

Recent debates on Irish childcare policy have recognised the importance of the quality of care, qualifications and professionalisation of the childcare sector, as highlighted, for example by the publication of a workforce development plan for the sector (Department of Education and Skills, 2010b). These milestones are very much welcomed and are in line with international policies and the quality of service provision (Oberhuemer, 2005, OECD, 2006).

The quality of childcare has been shown to be a key factor in child development outcomes, and previous research has demonstrated a clear link between carer qualifications and quality of care and education. Developing the workforce in preschool services has long been identified as central to the delivery of quality experiences and environments for young children. Many studies have demonstrated the impact of quality early years provision on educational outcomes. The Perry Preschool Programme, an early intervention program for disadvantaged African-American children was one of the first preschool education programmes to be evaluated. This programme generated short-term IQ gains that diminished within 2 years. However, this was followed by long-term gains in attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates and earnings, and reductions in transfer payments and pregnancies (Gramlich, 1986). Furthermore, the programme resulted in higher levels of education, employment, and earnings, and lower rates of crime, teenage pregnancy and social welfare dependency, resulting in an estimated social rate of return of between 7-10% per annum (Heckman and LaFontaine, 2010).

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study in Britain, which involved ~3000 children found that high quality preschool provision accounted for significant improvements in maths and English scores in comparison to children who had attended no form of preschool. The data generated by this large scale research study suggests that the benefits deriving from 18 months of preschool is similar to that gained during 6 years of primary school (Melhuish, 2011). These findings were later replicated in The Effective Provision

of Preschool Education Northern Ireland (EPPNI) study in Northern Ireland (Melhuish et al., 2013). This longitudinal study found that preschool experience was related to age 11 performance in English and maths. Melhuish and colleagues reported that high-quality preschools show consistent effects that are reflected not only in improved attainment in Key Stage 2 English and maths scores, but also in improved progress in maths over primary school. In this study children who attended high-quality preschools were 2.4 times more likely in English, and 3.4 times more likely in mathematics, to attain Level 5 than children without preschool experience.

Furthermore, it has been postulated that providing any childcare or preschool education is not enough. Studies from the USA (Vandell et al., 2010), England (Melhuish et al., 2008), Northern Ireland (Melhuish et al., 2013) and Denmark (Bauchmuller et al., 2011) indicate that the quality of preschool is critical for longer-term beneficial effects. The OECD examined the educational attainment data for 65 countries. It found that literacy at age 15 was strongly associated with preschool participation in countries where a large population avail of it, where it is used for more months, and where there were measures in place to maintain quality. The OECD concluded that widening access to preschool can improve performance and reduce socio-economic disparities, so long as extending coverage did not compromise quality (OECD, 2010).

According to Ahnert and colleagues, high quality ensures that care environments are developmentally appropriate and adult-child-ratios in the setting are kept low. Group size and composition also need to be considered as mediators of the quality of individual care provider-child relationships (Ahnert et al., 2006). It is also important to keep in mind the dynamic nature of childcare – infants depend, for example, on a caring didactic relationship with a parent or parent figure whereas for older children, the relationship of the carer with the whole group becomes more important. Caring for children requires different care strategies, and for this reason providers of care and education to young children need to be valued by society, well compensated, and enriched by careful education and training.

The definition of 'quality' in the context of early childhood care and education is a much debated topic. Moss and Dahlberg have argued that the concept of quality in childcare 'as some universal and knowable



thing waiting to be discovered and measured by experts' is misguided and that quality is laden with a particular set of managerial values (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008). They focus instead on the importance of nurturing democratic values in practices with early childhood care and education. In line with this approach, Bennett (2003) suggests that within childcare settings there should be involvement of parents and respect for the natural learning strategies and agency of young children. Bennett draws attention to the importance of developing high quality services of effective governance structures, adequate and stable public funding, a well-qualified workforce, appropriate pedagogical practice and ongoing professional development (Bennett, 2003). In the Siolta national quality framework (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and the Aistear curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009), a vision is presented which sets about achieving high quality preschool provision for all children. The quality of services for young children lies partly in environmental characteristics (e.g. space, areas of interest, outdoor areas promoting gross motor play), but above all quality lies in the interactions between children and staff. Factors that affect the ability of staff to engage responsively and appropriately with young children include their professional training, the ratio of adults to children, the curriculum and the continuity of staff (Melhuish, 2004).

However, one of the challenges in developing national policy in relation to the provision of services for young children is the separation of childcare from early childhood education in terms of policy, funding, delivery and staffing (OECD, 2006). Unlike the education system which is clearly defined, services in Ireland that provide for the out-of-home care and education of children aged birth to six years are described variously as crèches, nurseries, preschools, playgroups, after-school clubs, etc. This reflects the variety of purposes which are attributed to these services including caring for children of working parents and providing opportunities for early educational experiences for young children.

## 2.4 EARLY INTERVENTION IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Deprivation early in life has multiple long-term consequences for both the individual and society in general. The consequences of being raised in disadvantaged circumstances are significant, as socio-economic inequalities in children health and development emerge early and increase overtime (Najman et al., 2004). Growing up in poverty can affect a child's early skill development leading to greater vulnerability at school entry (Duncan et al., 1994), as well as more emotional and behavioural problems (McLeod and Kaiser, 2004). In addition, such early developmental difficulties can also affect major long-term public and social policy issues such as academic achievement (Raver, 2003), employment (Haskins and Rouse, 2005), teenage pregnancy (Polit and Kahn, 1986), and psychological well-being (Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Such deprivation is intergenerational in nature and is difficult to combat. Remediation policies are the most common method of addressing social inequalities, yet evidence suggests that they are both costly and less effective than preventative policies (Heckman and Mosso, 2014). An increasing body of evidence has found that targeted, early interventions aimed at at-risk children and their families can reduce socioeconomic disparities in children's capabilities (Diamond et al., 2013). Yet, this evidence is predominately US based and there is a clear lack of research on the effects of early interventions in countries with different social and cultural contexts such as Ireland. The Growing Up in Ireland national longitudinal study in time will be able to track child outcomes and their relationship to socio-economic status.

Investment in early intervention programmes is efficient from both a biological and economic perspective. Intervening early in life when children are at their most receptive stage of development, has the potential to permanently alter their brain development and subsequent developmental trajectories (Duncan and Magnuson, 2013). Early intervention has also been found to be economically efficient. Research on early intervention programmes has demonstrated high rates of return such that the individual and societal benefits accrued from intervening early typically outweigh the costs (Head, 2010, Reynolds III et al., 2012). One of the major studies which highlight economic efficiency is the

US Perry Preschool Programme which implemented the HighScope curriculum. Implementation of this programme resulted in higher levels of education, employment and earnings for participating children, and lower rates of crime, teenage pregnancy and societal welfare dependency, resulting in an estimated social rate of return of between 7-10% per annum (Heckman et al., 2010).

**The evidence is clear and strong; participation in an established, high quality early childhood intervention programme for low-income children is associated with better educational and social outcomes.**

The literature suggests that the long-term effects of early childhood intervention are traceable to a combination of school support, cognitive development and family support experiences. The mechanism by which these effects occur are complex but important to understand when designing and implementing early intervention programmes. Factors influencing the long-term effects of intervention can be modified by educators, parents, and policymakers. Policy initiatives that encourage the identified factors and processes are likely to benefit children's development. Alternatively, if family and school experiences after the end of intervention are not of sufficient quality, the long-term effects of intervention will be less likely to occur (Currie, 2001, Lee et al., 2014). School mobility, grade retention, and low parent involvement during the intervening years have been found to reduce the transmission of effects to school completion and furthermore studies have shown that school commitment has contributed to lower levels of anti-social behaviour. Within the literature, it is thought that continued identification of preschool programme features and environmental conditions that promote success will help ensure that the benefits of early intervention endure.

## **2.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR**

Professional development is a term that has not been conclusively defined within the literature and means different things to different groups. Workshops, conferences, in-service training and formal study are often

the commonly reported professional development activities undertaken by staff working within the early years sector, however in-depth discussions, problem solving, sharing of ideas and reflecting critically on experiences are also considered as professional development activities. The effectiveness and impact of each of these activities vary and will be discussed later in this section.

One determinant of high quality early childhood care and education which is cited regularly in the literature is professional development, this has been linked to both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes in children (OECD, 2012, Urban, 2008, Dalli, 2008). It has been reported that better educated staff are more likely to provide high quality pedagogy and stimulating learning environments, which in turn are linked to children's development which positively impact future outcomes (Taguma et al., 2012). Given the evidence which has emerged over the last decade stemming from high quality randomised controlled trials, there is a strong consensus among researchers, practitioners and policy makers that the quality of early childhood care and education and eventually the outcomes for children and families depend on well educated, experienced and competent staff (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011).

The professional competence of staff is one of the most salient indicators of quality within early childhood care and education. Effective early years educators nurture children's learning and development in a number of ways including the creation of rich and stimulating environments, by intentionally sustaining shared thinking and logical reasoning in social interactions, by valuing children's ideas and thoughts and extending their opportunities to learn (Sylva et al., 2004, Sommer et al., 2013).

There is substantial evidence outlining that staff qualifications matter, furthermore specialised training has been associated with higher quality within settings as well as better developmental outcomes for children (Fukkink and Tavecchio, 2010).

**Research also shows that staff qualifications by themselves are not sufficient to predict high quality care and education for young children: the content of the training and the methodologies adopted for its delivery play a crucial role.**



In this regard, the use of diversified training techniques – lectures, small group work, supervised work placement and reflective practice – which incorporate both theory and practice have been found to be a major success factor in the professional development of staff working within the early years sector (Hamre et al., 2012, Rush and Shelden, 2011).

Findings relating to the impact of continuing professional development within the early childhood care and education sector reveal wide variations in the characteristics of the training on offer and subject of study. Studies differ by length of intervention, with some lasting a few weeks while some last years. Variation in the content of the continuing professional development also exist, some are embedded in coherent, well-developed large scale programmes (e.g. HighScope), which focus on all elements of child development, while others consist of once-off workshops addressing a specific topic (e.g. Outdoor Play; Behaviour Management). A third dimension is that there is substantial heterogeneity in training content and delivery as well as in study design, which poses challenges when evaluating programmes. However, commonalities do exist. In most studies, continuing professional development tends to be a focused intervention, a combination of attending courses, workshops coupled with the support of specialised staff within daily practice. This type of intervention is often

underpinned by a broad pedagogical framework. The support from specialised staff can occur in a variety of ways, in some interventions it is called participatory action research (Bleach, 2013), other programmes refer to this type of support as coaching or mentoring (Peeters and Sharmahd, 2014), while others refer to it as work based learning, a learning community or communities of practice (Christ and Wang, 2013). Overall, the studies cited in this review caution that important conditions for the success of continuing professional development initiatives must be met, these include funding for team planning and non-contact time for the early years educators and a commitment to investing in long-term professional development. Research suggests that beyond the specific procedures for training delivery, the effectiveness of continuing professional development interventions seems to largely depend on their responsiveness to early years educators needs arising from their day to day work with children and families, as well as the empowerment and motivation of educators to implement educational innovation within their setting.

One of the most widely reported benefits of continuing professional development is the improvement in early years educator's levels of self-confidence. Participating in continuing professional development often leads to the educator reflecting on and reconceptualising their role within their setting. Studies report improvements in

the practice of reflection on practice goals, purposes and methods. Many studies argue that continuing professional development assists educators become more reflective in their thinking and in using a cycle of observation, documentation (making practice visible), team discussion, changing practice and creating new knowledge, all of which is very much in line with the concepts of action research.

There is overwhelming evidence relating to the impact of continuing professional development on teamwork through sustained workplace dialogue. Workplace dialogue about daily practice can lead to shared understandings and perspectives, leading to concrete changes in pedagogical practice. Keeping teams together during continuing professional development gives the opportunity for team members to develop a common language to discuss practice in order to bring about change. Continuing professional development can increase the confidence and competence of early years educators in giving feedback to their colleagues. Furthermore, where not all staff in a team participate in continuing professional development, change is harder to sustain. Most importantly continuing professional development has been reported to have a positive impact on the interactions that occur between staff and children.

**Early years educators who have engaged in continuing professional development have reported that the training has assisted them in reconceptualising children as protagonists of their own learning, who are capable and confident, and holders of rights. Children seen in this way by educators are facilitated and supported as active learners, whose autonomy is encouraged within early childhood care and education settings.**

Few studies report the direct impact of continuing professional development on outcomes for children and their families, it is usually mediated through assessments of quality. The assumption is made that if quality improves it will be of benefit to children's learning and socialising experiences, and to their cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes.

## 2.6 ADULT EDUCATION - THEORIES, PRINCIPALS AND ASSUMPTIONS

As previously outlined, the content and methodologies used within a training programme play an important role in the preparation of staff entering or continuing work in an early years setting, this is particularly true for adult learners.

There is no single theory of learning that can be applied to all adults. Indeed, the literature of the past century has yielded a variety of models, sets of assumptions and principles, theories, and explanations that make up the adult learning knowledge base. The more familiar adult educators are with the knowledge base, the more effective their practice can be, and the more responsive their practice can be to the needs of adult learners. Three major theories; andragogy, self-directed learning and transformational learning are investigated and discussed in this literature review, along with their implications for practice.

Research on adult learning has highlighted the importance of four different elements for professional development to be effective for improving teacher-related outcomes (Brookfield, 1988). It firstly should be learner-centered, building on individual teachers' strengths and needs; secondly, it should address important content knowledge which is applicable to the participants; thirdly the professional development experience should provide individuals with opportunities to test their understanding by trying things out and receiving feedback; and lastly it should occur within a collaborative environment (Merriam, 2001). This framework highlights the importance of individualised work with educators that focuses on content knowledge and effective pedagogy within an identified domain (e.g., literacy, mathematics; interactions, etc.) as critical for professional development. There is substantial evidence that brief workshops are ineffective in promoting lasting changes in instruction, a result consistent with this perspective on professional development and adult learning (Zaslow et al., 2010).

Adult learners have been reported to bring experiences and self-awareness to learning that in many cases younger learners do not. To understand adult learning, it is important to understand learning domains, learning styles, and how and why adults learn. Research has determined that most adults, adolescents, and children learn best by experiencing a blend of activities that promote the three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. The cognitive learning domain refers to knowledge or a

body of subject matter, affective refers to attitudes and beliefs, and behaviour refers to practical application.

### ANDRAGOGY

In attempting to document differences between the ways adults and children learn, Malcolm Knowles

(1980) popularised the concept of andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn), contrasting it with pedagogy (the art and science of teaching children). He posited a set of assumptions about adult learners, and also suggests how trainers can deal with each of these assumptions (Knowles et al., 2012).

**TABLE 1 ASSUMPTIONS OF ADULT LEARNERS**

Assumption	How a trainer can deal with this assumption
<p><b>Adults want to know why they should learn.</b> Adults are motivated to put time and energy into learning if they know the benefits of learning and the costs of not learning.</p>	<p>Develop “a need to know” in the learners - make a case for the value of the learning in their lives. Help learners answer the question, “What’s in it for me?”</p>
<p><b>Adults need to take responsibility.</b> By definition, adult learners have a self-concept of being in charge of their own lives and being responsible for their own decisions, and a need to be seen and treated as being capable of taking on responsibility.</p>	<p>Realise that despite this self-concept and need for responsibility, once they enter a classroom many adults revert back to their school and college days when they tended to be passive learners. As a trainer it is important not to fall into a trap of assuming that they want to learn passively. Empower them to learn and to take responsibility for learning. Enable learners to assess their own learning. Adults bring experience to learning.</p>
<p><b>Adults bring experience to learning.</b> That experience is a resource for themselves and for other learners, and gives richer meaning to new ideas and skills. Experience is a source of an adult’s self-identity.</p>	<p>Experience is both a plus and a minus. It is a plus because it is a vast resource. It is a minus because it can lead to biases and assumptions. Because adults define themselves by their experiences, it is important that a trainer respects and values that experience. Adults are ready to learn when the need arises.</p>
<p><b>Adults are ready to learn when the need arises.</b> Adults learn when they choose to learn and commit to learn. That desire to learn usually coincides with the transition from one developmental stage to another and is related to developmental tasks, such as career planning, acquiring job competencies, improving job performance, etc. Often, however, adults perceive employer-provided training as employer-required training.</p>	<p>As trainers, one must be aware that some learners might not want to be there. In which case, be honest. Acknowledge that fact and agree to make the most out of training nevertheless. On the other hand, be aware that for those who want to be in the class, training is important and they must walk away with something</p>
<p><b>Adults are task-oriented.</b> Education is subject-centered, but adult training should be task-centered. For example, a child engaged in learning English composition learns grammar, and then sentence and paragraph construction. An adult engaged in an English composition training program learns how to write a business letter, a marketing plan, etc.</p>	<p>Trainers working with adult learners should organise content around tasks, not subjects.</p>

Adapted from: Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. [2012]. *The adult learner*.

Inherent in the assumptions are implications for practice. Knowles suggests that adult educators set a cooperative climate for learning in the classroom, that they assess the learner's specific needs and interests and develop learning objectives based on the learner's needs, interests, and skill levels. The adult educator should design sequential activities to achieve the objectives while working collaboratively with the learner to select methods, materials, and resources for instruction and finally evaluate the quality of the learning experience and make adjustments, as needed, while assessing needs for further learning (Knowles, 1984).

#### Further to the assumptions of adult learning Knowles suggests 4 principles that are applied to adult learning:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010).

Given that adults need to know why they are learning something, effective teachers should explain their reasons for teaching specific skills and because adults learn by doing, effective instruction focuses on tasks that adults can perform, rather than on memorisation of content. Adults are problem-solvers and learn best when the subject is of immediate use, effective instruction involves the learner in solving real life problems. However, andragogy is not without criticism. Brookfield called the theory "culturally blind" stating that the concept of self-directed learning and the concept of the student's establishing a non-threatening relationship with the teacher as facilitator of learning may neglect races and cultures that value the teacher as the primary source of knowledge and direction (Brookfield, 2003).

### SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Approximately 70 percent of adult learning is self-directed and about 90 percent of all adults conduct at least one self-directed learning project a year (Cross, 1981). Self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative, without the help of others in

planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Knowles, 1975). In essence, self-directed learning is an informal process that primarily takes place outside the class-room. What qualifies learning as "self-directed" is who (the learner) makes decisions about content, methods, resources, and evaluation of the learning. Individuals take responsibility for their own learning process by determining their needs, setting goals, identifying resources, implementing a plan to meet their goals, and evaluating the outcomes. The benefit of self-directed learning is that learning can easily be incorporated into daily routines and occur both at the learner's convenience and according to their learning preferences. It can involve the learner in isolated activities, such as researching information on the internet; it also can involve the learner in communication with experts, mentors and peers, as in a traditional classroom.

Self-directed learning can be difficult for adults with low-level literacy skills who may lack independence, confidence, internal motivation, or resources. Brookfield suggests that not all learners prefer the self-directed option and that many adults who engage in self-directed learning also engage in more formal educational programs, such as teacher-directed courses (Brookfield, 1985). Within the adult education setting, the teacher can augment traditional classroom instruction with a variety of techniques to foster self-directed learning for individuals or for small groups of learners who are ready and willing to embark on independent, self-directed learning experiences e.g. the formulation of a learning community or community of practice. Self-direction is a critical component of persistence in adult education, helping learners recognise how and when to engage in self-study when they find they must step out of formal education.

#### The following are strategies for facilitating self-directed learning. The teacher can help the learner to:

1. Conduct a self-assessment of skill levels and needs to determine appropriate learning objectives
2. Identify the starting point for a learning project
3. Match appropriate resources (books, articles, experts on the topic) and methods (internet searches, lectures, online forums) to the learning goal
4. Negotiate a learning contract that sets learning goals, strategies, and evaluation criteria



5. Acquire strategies for decision-making and self-evaluation of work
6. Develop positive attitudes and independence relative to self-directed learning
7. Reflect on what he / she is learning.

#### The teacher can also:

- Encourage and support learners throughout the process, helping them recognize their own growing thought processes and strategies
- Offer a variety of options as evidence of successful learning outcomes.

### TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Transformative learning is often described as learning that changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world, and that involves a shift of consciousness. For example, English language learners often report a shift in their view of different cultures and in their view of themselves as they gain confidence communicating in a new language (King, 2000).

Different theorists look at transformative learning through various lenses. Freire taught Brazilian workers to read by engaging them, through a problem-posing instructional approach, in discussions about working conditions and poor compensation, thereby helping them change their thinking and strive for social change (Freire, 2000). To Freire, transformative learning was emancipating.

On the other hand, Mezirow postulates transformative learning as a rational process (Mezirow, 1997). As individuals reflect on and discuss their assumptions about the world, they often experience a shift in their frame of reference or world view. For this to happen, individuals engaging in reflective discourse need to challenge each other's assumptions and encourage group members to consider various perspectives. It is essential that participants engaging in reflective discourse have complete and accurate information about the topic for discussion, be free from bias, and meet in an environment of acceptance, empathy, and trust (Mezirow, 2000). A criticism often directed at Mezirow's transformative learning theory is that it does not account for the effect of the individual's race, class, and gender, or the historical context in which the learning occurs (Sheared and

Johnson-Bailey, 2010, Cervero and Wilson, 2001). It has also been criticised as hyper-rational, ignoring feelings, relationships, context and culture, and temporal aspects (Silver-Pacuilla, 2003).

Adult educators seeking to foster transformative learning within their classes may wish to consider the following:

#### 1. Create a climate that supports transformative learning

Taylor suggests that teachers need to be trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrative of high integrity. They need to provide students with immediate and helpful feedback, employ activities that promote student autonomy, participation, and collaboration and help them to explore alternative perspectives and engage in problem-solving and critical reflection (Taylor, 2000).

#### 2. Know your students and the types of learning activities that most appeal to them

Cranton suggests that "thinking types" who enjoy logic will appreciate case studies, debates, critical questioning, and analyses of theoretical perspectives (Cranton, 2002). Those who are uncomfortable with confrontation and having their statements challenged may be more successful when learning occurs within harmonious groups in which participants discuss, but do not debate, alternative viewpoints. The experiential learner will enjoy field trips and simulations, and the intuitive learner will appreciate brainstorming and games involving imagination.

#### 3. Develop and use learning activities that explore and expose different points of view

Cranton (2002) suggests using films and short stories. She also suggests having student's engage in journal writing to engage in self-reflection. The teacher can ask a learner to write a brief autobiographical essay and then ask other students to review and reflect on the writer's assumptions. Each student can take a turn at writing his / her autobiographical essay. Another technique is to use critical incidents to engage in reflective discourse, in which learners reflect on an experience, either good or bad, and analyse their assumptions and various perspectives. When the teacher writes and shares as an equal, an atmosphere of trust and openness is fostered.

The art of teaching adults effectively requires an understanding of various principles or theories of how adults learn, and requires making an effort to apply some of those principles to practice. The three major theories presented in this review and the implications for practice arising from each are not mutually exclusive. Suggestions for applying these theories to writing instruction for adult learners include the following:

1. Incorporate more writing in more contexts in the adult education setting to promote self-reflection and articulation of learning. Use ungraded, short and timed prompts such as “quick writes,” “entry/exit slips,” or “yesterday’s news”. Writing is a natural means of self-reflection, and sharing personal writing is a way to bring stories of personal challenge, growth, resilience, and dreams into dialogue.
2. Promote online communities where the learner is either a contributor, reader or peer, to foster self-directed learning, self-study, and persistence.
3. Provide feedback that challenges learners’ assumptions and deepens their critical thinking.

The literature presented within this chapter sets a context for the chapters subsequent to this, specifically in terms of the importance of quality, early intervention, professional development of the work force and considerations for working with adult learners.



A young child with curly hair, wearing glasses and a dark winter jacket, is pushing a grey plastic toy shopping cart. The child is standing on a red carpeted floor in a play area. In the background, there is a large mural of a person with their arms raised, and a white handprint is visible on the wall to the left. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

**03**

**Methodology**

# Methodology

# 03

Data collection occurred during the delivery of the training programme (January 2014 – August 2014).

## 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The timeline of events in relation to the evaluation is illustrated in Figure 2. The tools used to collect data are described in section 3.3. Figure 3 provides an overview of the methodological approach which was adhered to throughout the project. This outlines the major evaluation milestones in terms of project initiation, data and policy review, data collection and dissemination.

Time	Task
January 2014	Completion of the Day 1 Individual Rating Scales (cohort A and B)
February 2014	Completion of the Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire
April 2014	Direct observation of training programme (cohort A)
April 2014	Completion of the Day 7 Individual Rating Scales (cohort A)
May – June 2014	Preschool Programme Quality Assessments
June 2014	Focus group with training cohort A
July 2014	Direct observation of training programme (cohort B)
July 2014	Completion of the Day 7 Individual Rating Scales (cohort B)
July 2014	Focus group with training cohort A
July 2014	Interviews with trainer/ managers
August 2014	Interview with programme co-ordinator

Figure 2 Timeline for data collection

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR THE TALLAGHT NEYAI LOCAL EVALUATION

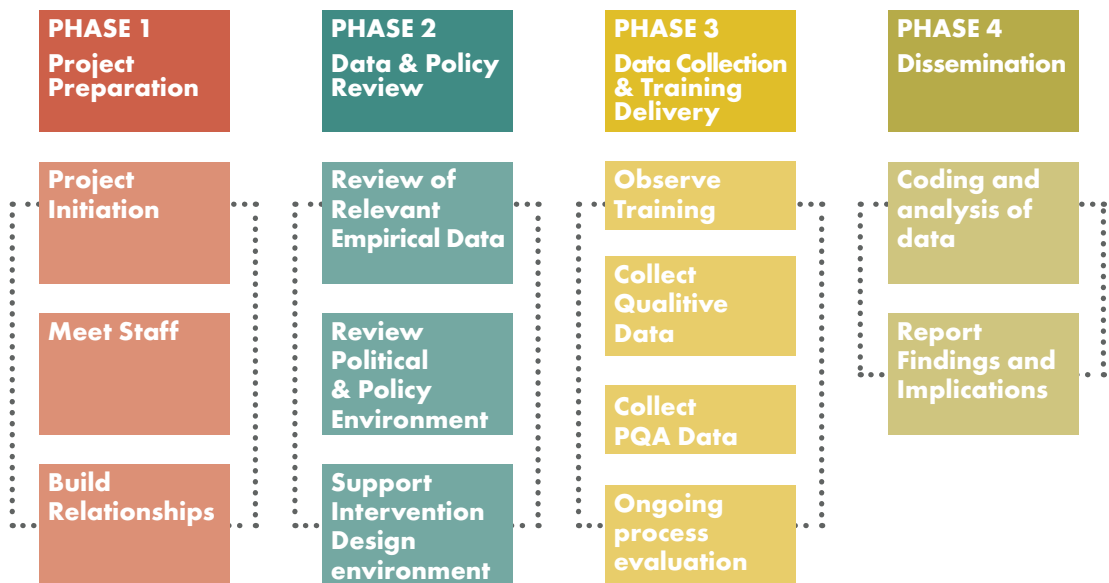


Figure 3 Overview of methodological approach for the Tallaght NEYAI local evaluation

### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

Five preschools were invited to participate in the local evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI, all 5 agreed to take part. The geographical spread of the preschools focused on Tallaght in South County Dublin. Each of the five preschools were individually managed. One preschool withdrew from the project in May 2014 due to the closure of the service. The geographical location of the preschools is mapped in Figure 4.

The Pobal Haase and Pratschke Deprivation Index (Haase and Pratschke, 2012) was used as a method to measure the relative affluence or disadvantage for each of the 8 geographical areas where the preschools were located. Using data compiled from various censuses a scoring was given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -35 (the most disadvantaged) to +35 (the most affluent). Data about lone parent ratio, third level qualification and unemployment rates were also collected.

The population of Tallaght is 72,251 (Central Statistics Office, 2011). Two preschools were located in areas of 'disadvantage', one preschool was located in an area marginally below average while two preschools were classified as being located in areas marginally above average. In the 5 geographical areas where the preschools were located the Haase and Pratschke scores for relative deprivation ranged from -15 to 8.3. Furthermore, the number of lone parents ranged from

4.5% to 71.3%, the unemployment rate ranged from 14.1% to 54.1%, significantly higher than the national average of 11.8% (May 2014) while the percentage of those with a third level qualification ranged from 10.8% to 46.9%.

### 3.3 MEASUREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative assessments. The benefits of the mixed method research design are many; this approach allows researchers to match the purpose of the method to the need in the study. For example gaining an understanding of the key issues relating to the subject before embarking on further development in a study can be very useful to triangulate the data and assure its validity and level of variance is advantageous (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Other benefits include the complimentary relationship between qualitative and quantitative data, one clarifying the other throughout the study. This addition of a supplemental dataset bolsters the effectiveness of the research (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Others attribute the ability to explain complex or contradictory findings as a benefit of using mixed methods research. Using the different processes can also lead to unexpected or emergent themes and information that would not have otherwise have come to light.

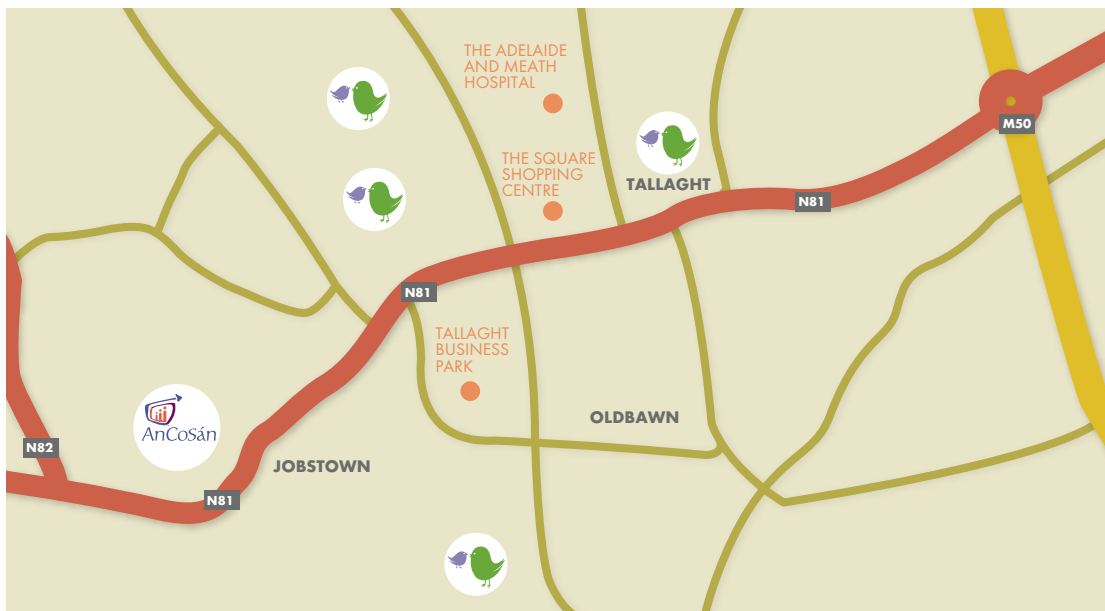


Figure 4 Geographical location of 5 preschools

### 3.3.1 QUANTITATIVE MEASURES

#### Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire

A bespoke preschool characteristics questionnaire was completed by each preschool manager at the beginning of the data collection phase (see Appendix 1). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the sample composition. Data was collected at the child, teacher and preschool level. Questions were asked in relation to the number of staff working within the preschool, their level of qualification and the number of years' experience they had. Questions in relation to the number of children attending the preschool were asked as well as they type of provision offered by the preschool.

#### Direct Observation of Programme Delivery

Observation checklists were used to document how the training was delivered to each of the training cohorts. Checklists included information on the training manuals that were used, how each session was delivered, how long the sessions took, and how the educators reacted, (observation of the delivery of the training usually required the researcher to be present on more than one day). While the researcher did not observe all of the training sessions, three or four visits were required to ensure that observations captured the various components of the training being utilised.

#### Quality of Preschool Environment

The Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs. The Preschool PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all centre-based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the

HighScope educational approach. The Preschool PQA is an all-in-one programme evaluation system that assesses key aspects of program quality, whilst reflecting research-based and field-tested best practices in early childhood education and care. The assessment tool provides a reliable, scientifically validated assessment proven in a wide range of early childhood programs and settings and can be used as a basis for program accreditation, reporting, monitoring, and training.

One endorsed HighScope trainer observed in the classroom and interviewed relevant staff to record objective notes and complete ratings on 39 items in four domains including learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interaction and curriculum planning and assessment. Items (n=33) on the parent involvement and family services, staff qualifications and staff development, and program management domains were not observed as they did not pertain to the aims and objectives of the overall programme. The trainer recorded supporting evidence for each row (component) of every item. They read the indicators (definitions and examples) for that row and checked the one box per row that best reflected the supporting evidence. Then, using the scoring rules they circled one item rating for the item as a whole. Figure 5 provides an example of this for the learning environment domain. The trainer used two tools when completing the PQA, these included the administration manual which is a book describing how to use the PQA and form A which is a form used to evaluate items on the classroom level.

The PQA was conducted during the months May – July, a period of time which is not representative of the regular routine as preschools are winding down for the summer

## I. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Circle one indicator level for this item based on the scoring rules on page 4.

I-F. Classroom materials are varied, manipulative, open-ended, and authentic and appeal to multiple senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste).

1 2 3 4 5  
 Check here if not observed or reported.

Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the materials in most of the interest areas lead to prescribed outcomes (e.g., art cutouts, lotto games, worksheets, coloring books, commercial toys—McDonald's figures).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some open-ended materials are available in some interest areas (e.g., boxes, paper, beads, paints).	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the available materials in all interest areas are open-ended (e.g., blocks, books, sand, water; corks, dolls, scarves, toy vehicles, paints, shells).	
<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom does not provide manipulative materials in any of the areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides some manipulative materials in some areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides many manipulative materials in all areas.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many toy replicas in place of "real" items (i.e., toy plates and cups in place of real dishes; small plastic tools).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include some toy replicas in place of "real" items (e.g., toy register, toy broom).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many "real" items in place of toy replicas (e.g., dog dish, firefighter boots, steering wheel, gardening tools, suitcases, briefcases, pots and pans, hammer and saw, telephone).	
<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials do not appeal to all the senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some materials appeal to multiple senses (e.g., stuffed animals, musical instruments, play dough).	<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials appeal to multiple senses and include both natural and manufactured materials (e.g., materials include items with hard and soft texture; snacks with many smells and tastes; objects made of wood, fabric, metal, paper, liquid).	

Figure 5 Classroom Items of the PQA is used to record supporting evidence and anecdotes in the Learning Environment domain – assessing a teacher's use of classroom materials.

and camps are underway. However, given the time restraints it was necessary that the PQA's were completed during this time.

### Individual Rating Scale

Individual rating scales (see Appendix 2) were contained within The Train the Trainers Manual. Educators individually completed these rating scales at the beginning of the training (session 1), during the training (session 4) and at the end of the training (session 7). The purpose of the rating scales was to ascertain any changes in knowledge, skills and competence gained during the training to implement Siolta and Aistear in HighScope settings. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale with 1 being the 'least amount' and 5 being the 'most amount'.

### 3.3.2 QUALITATIVE MEASURES

#### Interviews (Trainers)

In qualitative educational research, in-depth interviews are often used to explore what works (in terms of approaches, techniques, programme components, learning environments, understanding personal motivations, self-efficacy and competencies) within a particular programme and what can be improved. Two one-to-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the programme trainers (who were also managers at two of the participating preschools) after the programme had been delivered.

The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain each trainer's thoughts on the delivery of the intervention to date, to identify successful elements of as well as potential barriers to implementation. Programme sustainability and the challenges facing each trainer were also explored during the interview. The interview schedule for the trainer's interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

The researcher encouraged the managers to discuss issues pertinent to the research question by asking open ended questions during the interview. The researcher re-worded, re-ordered or clarified the questions when necessary. The interviews lasted 58 and 61 minutes respectively.

#### Focus Groups (Early Years Educators)

Following the completion of the training, staff were invited to participate in a focus group. In total two focus groups were conducted, one with each of the training cohorts. Focus groups were led by a trained moderator who also was the main researcher working on the programme. They took place within the preschools where the early years educators worked. The focus groups lasted 44 minutes and 45 minutes respectively and took place in a sufficiently comfortable and neutral room. At the outset the early years educators completed a written informed consent in which they agreed for the focus group to be audio-taped. To ensure standardisation, a structured protocol, including a semi-structured interview guide was developed and reviewed and used within all participating preschools.

The protocol consisted of guidelines for the taping of discussions, rules to be observed during the focus groups and guidelines for the moderator so that she could optimally lead the session. The moderator was very familiar with the interview guide so that the topics for discussion could be introduced. Furthermore, the moderator helped the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion. After each focus group the moderator reflected on the experience and noted the most important topics raised, different ideas, differences with previous focus groups, unexpected findings and main impressions of the session.

The semi-structured interview guide used within the focus group was developed in accordance with established guidelines (Greenbaum, 2000, Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The focus group was formulated to investigate the early years educator's perspectives on quality within early years settings, the training programme and their perceived impact of the training, and how they felt about implementing and sustaining what they had learned during the training. The early years educators were also invited to put forward any thoughts they had about the design of training programmes. The questions provided were broad and open-ended. More detailed optional questions were asked when the discussion did not start up or continue spontaneously. The focus group schedule for the trainer's interviews can be found in Appendix 4.

### **Interview (Project Coordinator)**

After the programme implementation had ceased, an interview was conducted with the project coordinator. At the outset the coordinator completed a written informed consent for the interview to be audio-taped. The interview questions focused on the background of the Tallaght NEYAI; the development of the An Cosán / Fledglings Manual and associated documents; the coordination and roll out of the Train the Trainers Programme and the Training Programme for the early years educators; the challenges and successes related to coordinating the programme and finally, the sustainability of the programme. The moderator was familiar with the interview schedule and encouraged the manager to talk about issues pertinent to the research question by asking open ended questions during the interview. The interview schedule for the coordinator interviews can be found in Appendix 5. The researcher re-worded, re-ordered or clarified the questions when necessary. The interview lasted 60 minutes.

### **Overall Course Evaluation**

An overall course evaluation was contained within the Train the Trainers Manual (see Appendix 6). Educators individually completed this evaluation at the end of the training (session 7). The purpose of the overall course evaluation was to assess how the learning outcomes were achieved and the impact of the training on the educator's daily practice. Educators were also asked to identify their own personal learning stemming from the training and to report their future training needs.

### **3.3.3 PROCESS EVALUATION**

Process evaluation monitors the implementation of the programme and assesses the extent of programme delivery (compared to what was intended). Process evaluations explore what is done by the programme and for whom these services are provided. Ideally, process evaluations assist in the identification of active ingredients of treatment or intervention, and assess whether a programme is meeting accepted standards (WHO, 2000). In general, these evaluations pose questions in two areas: coverage and process. The evaluation of process can reveal a great deal about a programme or intervention in an educational setting (Suchman, 1967) and is often particularly useful in situations where a traditional summative evaluation may conclude that a programme did or did not work. In these situations, the process evaluation can help to ascertain what exactly made an intervention so successful or conversely why an intervention did not produce an intended effect or outcome. The process evaluation applied a variety of methods to gather a comprehensive and continuous record of the Tallaght NEYAI and combined both quantitative and qualitative assessments, providing data on the facilitators and barriers on the implementation of the programme.

A range of data sources were used to explore how the training was implemented and received. As described in detail above, these included interviews with trainers and staff coordinating the programme, self-reported personal learning from the educators, focus groups with the educators and direct observation of the training delivery. The process evaluation aimed to explain the quantitative findings through qualitative analysis of information under the headings reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance (Glasgow et al., 1999).



### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

#### Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was generated from the PQA, the preschool characteristics questionnaire, the individual rating scales completed by the early years educators and from some elements of the process evaluation, specifically information gathered during the direct observation in relation to attendance, number of sessions delivered and time spent on different elements of the manual. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were generated for all scale variables (e.g. questions generating open ended number responses), frequency statistics were conducted for all nominal variables (e.g. questions with a yes / no response or a closed category response) and interval variables (questions generating a rating response [e.g. on a scale of 1-5, rate your level of enjoyment]). For the individual rating scale data a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences within the sample from session 1, session 4 and session 7. The alpha level was set at  $p \leq 0.05$ . All quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS V.21.

#### Qualitative Data

Qualitative data was generated from interviews, focus groups and from elements of the process evaluation, specifically the direct observation and the overall course evaluations completed by the educators. Verbatim written transcriptions were produced based on the information in each of the audio tapes. Once the transcription was completed the researcher read each one in its entirety. A qualitative content analysis of the transcriptions was conducted using IBM SPSS Text Analytics Software. This software automates the categorisation process to eliminate the time and expense of manual coding and uses linguistics-based technologies to reduce the ambiguities of human language, helping to uncover patterns in the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of others. A data framework to code the data was used and was based on major topics of the interview guide. Major themes and sub themes were extracted from the analysis and all findings were summarised to include quotes and excerpts from the transcripts.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues arise in all aspects of research, and are particularly salient when studying members of society. Throughout the research process participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the project at any time without reason. Participants were continuously reminded that they could ask questions about the research process by contacting the researcher any time. All participants had access to the contact details of the researchers. Although this flexibility may appear unnecessary, it allowed the participants to become familiar with the research protocol and in turn helped to demystify the research process, empowering the participants rather than making them objects of research. The research team adhered to the core ethical principles of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children (2012). These include:

1. Minimising risk of harm to all participants
2. Obtaining informed consent and assent from all participants
3. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process
4. Ensuring child protection and well-being is at the core of the project
5. Adhering to legal requirements and policy commitments
6. Ensuring that children are participants in the research process.







# 04

## The Tallaght NEYAI Training Programme

# The Tallaght NEYAI Training Programme

## 04

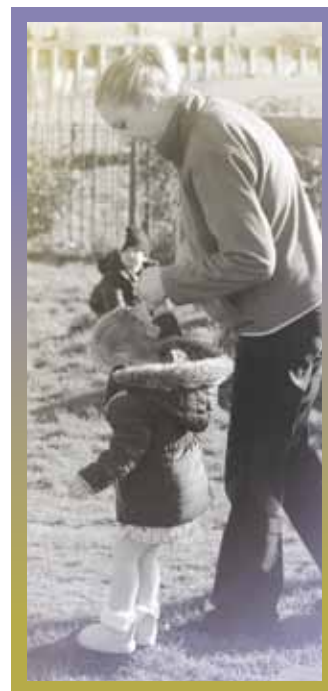
Prior to the establishment of the Tallaght NEYAI, an innovative early years manual was developed at An Cosán for use in Fledglings Early Years Centres.

### **4.1 BACKGROUND TO 'QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONALISATION' - THE TALLAGHT NEYAI TRAINING PROGRAMME**

This manual was developed by Dr Ann Louise Gilligan and Senator Katherine Zappone (The Centre for Progressive Change Ltd.). The manual was the first of its kind to ensure coherence of the HighScope approach with the national frameworks; Siolta, Ireland's national quality framework and Aistear, Ireland's curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years with a specific curriculum, namely HighScope. *"Aistear is a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others"* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2006, p. 6). *"Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. It was published in 2006, following a three-year developmental process, which involved consultation with more than 50 diverse organisations, representing childcare workers, teachers, parents, policy makers, researchers and other interested parties. Siolta is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education settings where*

*children aged birth to six years are present"* ([www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)). HighScope on the other hand is an educational approach which emphasises active participatory learning. Active learning means children have direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. Children's interests and choices are at the heart of HighScope programmes. They construct their own knowledge through interactions with the world and the people around them. Children take the first step in the learning process by making choices and following through on their plans and decisions. Early years educators, caregivers, and parents offer physical, emotional, and intellectual support. In active learning settings, adults expand children's thinking with diverse materials and nurturing interactions

The overall aim of this manualised programme was to upskill early years educators. Once the funding for the project was approved, the Tallaght NEYAI consortium commissioned the HighScope Ireland team at Early Years to develop a Train the Trainer Manual to support tutors deliver this programme to early years educators. The HighScope Ireland institute is one of many HighScope Institutes across the world. HighScope Ireland was established in 1999 and is a not-for-profit making body which aims to improve the quality of early childhood care and education through the implementation of the HighScope approach. HighScope Ireland is licensed through Early Years - the organisation for young children, and is based in Northern Ireland.



This chapter aims to describe the theoretical underpinnings of the Quality through Professionalisation programme and its subsequent development and implementation and outline the programme's future plans for sustainability. This comprehensive and accredited programme is anchored in a document entitled 'The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual'. Within this chapter the development of this manual and additional programme documentation will be described along with the training components which complement them namely; The Training of Trainers and Training Programme for Early Years Educators: Training of Early Years Educators in the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual.

## 4.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND EVIDENCE BASE

The Quality through Professionalisation programme was developed with both a local and national context in mind. Furthermore, the design and implementation of this programme was theoretically underpinned by a number of frameworks, principles and programmes including Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009), Siolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and HighScope (Farnworth et al., 1985). As well as being underpinned by these

theoretical frameworks, principles and approaches, the programme was developed within a local context. The submission to Pobal in 2010 described in detail these considerations, which included:

- A local needs assessment arising from An Cosán's annual consultation with stakeholders indicated that women were interested in gaining employment in the early years sector
- A local demand for part-time training courses for early years educators continues
- Research undertaken in 2004 by Unique Perspectives for An Cosán highlighted the positive relationship between quality within the early years sector and professional development
- Internal evaluation of An Cosán's FETAC Level 5 training led to consultation with graduates which highlighted the need for on-going professional development
- An Cosán's participation in the Tallaght West Community development Initiative has indicated a need for on-going professional development within the sector
- An Cosán's contribution to the Workplace Development Plan (2009) highlighted the lack of staff with basic qualifications working within the sector in the locality of South Dublin.

### 4.3 ACCREDITATION OF THE QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME

An Cosán, the lead agency of the Tallaght NEYAI consortium, promotes and enables quality service delivery by supporting staff to build competencies and confidence. An Cosán believes that they must provide continuous opportunities for early years educators to develop new skills and abilities to deliver a quality service to children and their families. The Tallaght NEYAI consortium believed that it was important for the staff participating in the programme to achieve an award that would assist them in their own professional development, creating a professional pathway. For this reason, the training has been designed to support early years educators achieve the outcomes for a FETAC Level 6 compulsory module entitled Early Childhood Curriculum. This award aims to equip early years educators with the knowledge, skills and competencies required to develop and implement a broad based curriculum within an early childhood care and education setting. To be awarded the module, each early years educator must complete a project and skills demonstration throughout the duration of the training as well as complete all assignments and relevant paperwork.

As well as the accreditation of the Level 6 module 'Early Childhood Curriculum', a special purpose Level 7 module which focusses on additional needs has been developed out of the Tallaght NEYAI. This special purpose award will be accredited through Carlow IT and virtualised through Carlow IT, An Cosán's third level partner institution. This module is not the focus of the evaluation and will not be discussed within the report. However, it is important to be aware of its existence within the overall Tallaght NEYAI.



Fledglings Brochure 210 x 210 mm 6 page

### 4.4 DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMME RESOURCES

A number of programme resources have been developed to support the implementation of the Quality through Professionalisation programme. These include:

1. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual
2. The Train the Trainer Manual
3. QQI Level 6 Module Descriptor
4. Fledgling's brochure
5. Special Purpose Award QQI Level 7 Additional Needs

#### The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual

This was the first document to be developed as part of the Quality through Professionalisation programme and was drafted prior to the application for funding to Pobal. The document was co-authored by Dr Mary Daly (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment), Dr Ann Louise Gilligan and Senator Katherine Zappone (The Centre for Progressive Change Ltd.) This manual was the first of its kind to align the Siolta standards, the Aistear themes and guidelines for good practice and the HighScope Wheel of Learning. The manual contains a series of tables which illustrates how specific Siolta Standards, Aistear learning goals and HighScope content areas are linked. Furthermore, the process of alignment contained within the manual considers the HighScope KDI and COR. Figure 6 gives an example of the alignment process. This manual plays a key role in the implementation of the training to the early years educators as it is a key resource for practical tasks and group work. The educators are encouraged to use this manual to challenge their thinking when completing evidence sheets, development plans and action plans.

## Appendix 2: The aims of Aistear's themes linked to HighScope's Pre-school KDIs & COR Theme: Well-being

**Aim 1:** Children will be strong psychologically and socially

The theme of Well-being is about children being confident, happy & healthy		HighScope Pre-school	
Learning goals	Readiness content areas	KDIs	COR
<b>In partnership with the adult, children will:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. make strong attachments and develop warm and supportive relationships with family, peers, adults in out-of-home settings and in their community</li> <li>2. be aware of and name their own feelings, and understand that others may have different feelings</li> <li>3. handle transitions and changes well</li> <li>4. be confident and self-reliant</li> <li>5. respect themselves, others and the environment</li> <li>6. make decisions and choices about their own learning and development.</li> </ol>	<b>Approaches to Learning</b>	<b>Planning:</b> Children make plans and follow through on their intentions. <b>Problem solving:</b> Children solve problems encountered in play. <b>Initiative:</b> Children demonstrate initiative as they explore their world. <b>Engagement:</b> Children focus on activities that interest them. <b>Reflection:</b> Children reflect on their experiences.	<b>Initiative</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Making choices and plans</li> <li>B. Solving problems with materials</li> <li>C. Initiating play</li> </ol>
	<b>Language, Literacy and Communication</b>	<b>Speaking:</b> Children express themselves using language.	
	<b>Physical Development and Health</b>	<b>Personal care:</b> Children carry out personal care routines on their own. <b>Healthy behaviour:</b> Children engage in healthy practices.	
	<b>Social and Emotional Development</b>	<b>Building relationships:</b> Children build relationships with other children and adults. <b>Conflict resolution:</b> Children resolve social conflicts. <b>Empathy:</b> Children demonstrate empathy towards others. <b>Cooperative play:</b> Children engage in cooperative play. <b>Sense of competence:</b> Children feel they are competent. <b>Emotions:</b> Children recognize, label and regulate their feelings. <b>Moral development:</b> Children develop an internal sense of right and wrong.	<b>Social relations</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Relating to adults</li> <li>E. Relating to other children</li> <li>F. Resolving interpersonal conflict</li> <li>G. Understanding and expressing feelings</li> </ol>

**Figure 6** An exemplar of the alignment process contained within the An Cosán/Fledglings Early Years Manual

### The Train the Trainer Manual

This document was the second document to be developed as part of the Quality through Professionalisation programme. The first version of this document was developed by the HighScope team at Early Years based in Northern Ireland. To date there have been 6 revisions of this document with various parties providing review at different times including members of the consortium and participants on the Training of the Trainers programme. Essentially this document is used to assist trainers delivering the programme to early years educators, it contains detailed schemes of work for each of the training days, copies of any hand-outs and templates required during the training days, copies of the PowerPoint slides and templates which the early years educators are required to complete during the training programme, these include:

- Individual rating scales
- Daily reflection
- Overall course evaluation
- Personal development plan
- Personal implementation plan

Originally, this document was designed to support the delivery of 10 days of training to early years educators, however due to organisational time constraints the training was reduced to 7 days. This had implications for the roll-out of the training, these implications were mainly time related as the trainers were required to reduce the content of the programme and restructure each of the days ensuring that the content was covered.

### QQI Level 6 module descriptor

The Quality through Professionalisation programme has been accredited as a Level 6 module entitled Early Childhood Curriculum. The module descriptor was been developed in-house at The Shanty Education and Training Centre at An Cosán and is accredited by FETAC (now Quality and Qualifications Ireland). The supplementary documentation accompanying this report contains a copy of the programme module descriptor which details the aims and objectives of the module, the indicative content and programme outcomes and details of the module assessment.

### Fledgling's brochure

An idea to create a Fledglings brochure arose from the Training of the Trainers programme in October 2013. Managers of Fledglings services identified the need for a short publication which would provide a brief history of An Cosán, highlight the use of Aistear, Siolta

and the HighScope within An Cosán and Fledglings. Additionally, the brochure profiles each service detailing contact details, service opening hours and the schemes that each service participates in e.g. ECCE, CETS or CCS. Figure 7 below gives an example of the front and back of the Fledglings brochure.



Figure 7 The Fledglings Brochure

### Additional needs Level 7 special award

Over the last number of years Rainbow House, the early childhood care and education service at An Cosán, has identified the need to upskill early years educators in topics relating to additional needs. In collaboration with Carlow IT, An Cosán have developed a Level 7 special award entitled 'Additional Needs' which will be credited and virtualised through Carlow IT. This element of the programme is not being evaluated as it has not been implemented yet, however it is worth noting as it is contained within the Quality through Professionalisation programme.

### 4.5 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

There are two phases of training associated with the Quality through Professionalisation programme:

1. Training of Trainers
2. Training of Early Years Educators

For the purpose of describing the development and implementation of the training, we will discuss both phases of training separately.



### Training of Trainers

The Train the Trainer Manual was drafted by HighScope Ireland and was originally designed to train future trainers to implement the programme to early years educators. Participants for this training were identified through the Tallaght NEYAI consortium and included Early Childhood Specialists, Quality Specialists and service managers from services in Dublin and Cork. Individuals were invited by email to attend the Training of Trainers programme by the Programme Coordinator. The information conveyed to the potential participants was brief as the programme and training manual was still in draft. The Programme Coordinator also attended the training in a supportive capacity.

The training was delivered by the HighScope Ireland Team at Early Years in Northern Ireland. A minimum of 10 participants were required to ensure that the training took place. Two waves of Train the Trainers took place, one in June 2013 and the other in October 2013. Both waves were delivered by different accredited HighScope trainers. The training of trainers programme lasted 6 days and was delivered over two weeks (3 days each week). Each training day was of 5 hours duration.

Given that the manual was still very much under development, the training not only served to upskill the trainers in the implementation of the programme, it also served as a consultative environment to revise the programme documentation, for example the Train the Trainers Manual which would be used in subsequent training with educators. This process is elaborated on within Chapter 5.

### Training of Early Years Educators

The original funding application to Pobal proposed that An Cosán, 4 Fledglings services in Dublin and 4 NCNA (now

Early Childhood Ireland) services in Cork would undertake the Training for Early Years Educators. All early years educators were invited to participate in the training, however only staff who were HighScope trained were eligible. On this basis the services in Cork were not eligible to undertake the training and consequently Pobal approved the reallocation of funding to allow the early years educators based in Cork to undertake HighScope Training.

Two managers one from An Cosán and one from a Fledglings service who had completed the Training of the Trainers in October 2014 delivered the training to the early years educators from the five participating preschools. Two cohorts of early years educators undertook the training with one cohort completing the course from January to April 2014 and the other cohort completing the course between January and July 2014. Figure 8 graphically depicts the scheduling of training delivered to the educators from January to July 2014.

The original training schedule was designed to be delivered over 10 days, with each day lasting 5 hours. However, the 10 day training programme was reduced to 7 days due to time restraints. The reduction of days required the trainers to reorganise the content and re-structure the schedule. The implications of this is elaborated on with Chapter 5.

The training received by the early years educators was based on **The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual** and guided by the **Train the Trainers Manual**. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual is a resource for early years educators which aligns HighScope, Aistear and Siolta whereas the Train the Trainers Manual guides the trainer's in the overall aims and objectives as well as providing direction for the daily schedules. The trainers used long agendas and power

## SCHEDULING OF TRAINING OF EDUCATORS TRAINING



Figure 8 Scheduling of Training of Educators Training

point presentation slides to guide their delivery, these support documents are contained within the Train the Trainers Manual. Other documents were used during the delivery of the training, these included:

- Siolta user manual for full and part-time day-care
- Siolta Research Digest
- Aistear Principals and Themes Curriculum Framework
- Childcare Regulations 2006
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children
- HighScope Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool
- Preschool Quality Assessment A and B

A variety of training methods were utilised throughout the delivery of the training with an emphasis on 'active training'. Active training is recognised as a suitable and effective approach within an adult learning environment where the participants do most of the work, in order to acquire knowledge and skills as opposed to receiving them (Silberman and Auerbach, 2011). Some of the training delivery methods promoted within the Quality through Professionalisation programme include:

- Workshops
- Small group work
- Large group work
- Discussions
- Practical demonstrations

### Structure of training session

- Each session starts with an opening circle activity. The opening circle is a period of quiet time which allows the early years educators gather, reflect and prepare for learning. This time allows participants to acknowledge and name how they are feeling. Additionally, this allows the trainer to gauge the mood of the training cohort which may inform their approach throughout the day. **The opening circle embodies the ethos of An Cosán which respects and supports each individual on their educational, emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey.**
- Each early years educator is provided with a short agenda to the day, in which the aims, objectives and learning outcomes for the day's training are described. The trainer also uses this time to recap on the previous days training session and answer any questions that may have arisen since the last day.
- The trainer is expected to deliver the training whilst adhering to the long agenda and the timing of each session. Each training day is different and incorporates a variety of methodologies; discussions, small group work and large group work. During group work, the trainer supports discussions and activities by providing verbal or visual directions. This element of the training was further developed by the trainers who developed activity packs detailing the steps to support the completion of specific tasks during the training.
- It is recommended that during breakout activities, trainers should circulate between the groups, listen to the discussions and check in with the early years educators to see if they have any specific questions and ensure the group are still on task. During this time the trainer should distribute their time evenly to ensure that they don't spend too much time with any one group, whilst keeping track of the time allocated to the task to ensure it doesn't exceed the allotted time.
- It is recommended that there is sufficient time for idea sharing and concluding discussions and activities.
- At the end of each day, the trainer should ensure that clear links are made between each part of the agenda to ensure that the learning outcomes of the day are achieved. The trainer should ensure that each of the early years educators reflect and capture their thoughts each day using the daily reflection template.



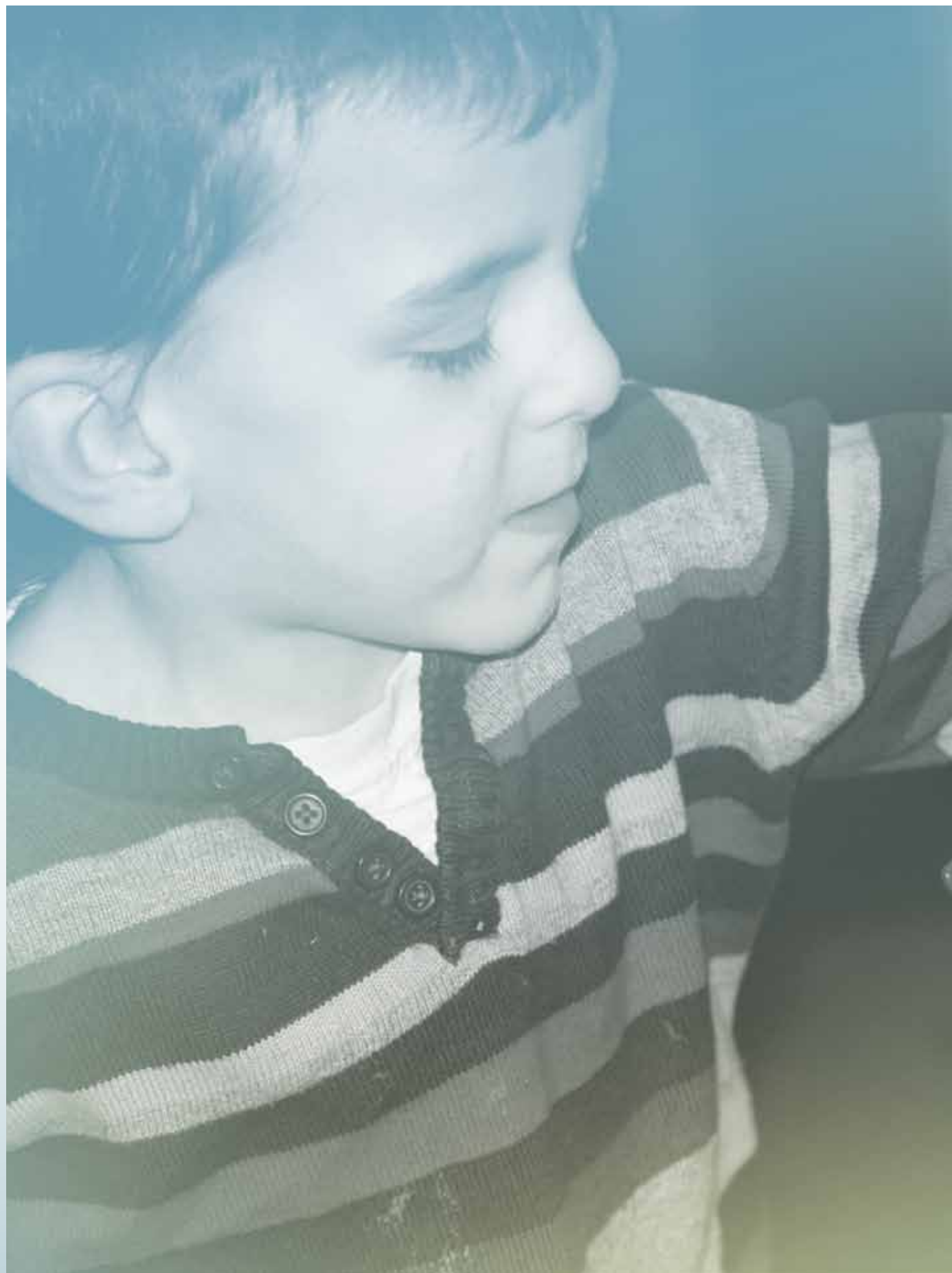
## 4.6 FUTURE PLANS AND SUSTAINABILITY

While the provision of training was the cornerstone to the Quality through Professionalisation programme, the managers in each of the services who have also been trained in the programme during the Training of the Trainers, are expected to be vigilant and constantly monitor the implementation of the programme within the service, providing support to the early years educators as required. This support is expected to embed the programme and positively impact on the quality of service provision.

**A number of other actions are being implemented to ensure that the programme is sustained into the future, these include:**

1. The on-going delivery of the Quality through Professionalisation programme to early years educators in Cork and Dublin who have not yet received the training
2. Supporting the professional development of the early years educators by supporting staff who are undertaking the assignment requirements for the Level 6 module
3. The programme is developing on an on-going basis with the most recent development being a *Level 7 special purpose Additional Needs module at Carlow IT*. In the future, early years educators undertaking the Quality through Professionalisation programme will be encouraged to undertake the Additional Needs component of this
4. Using *preschool quality assessment (PQA) data* to identify areas for development within each preschool
5. The emergence of a *community of practice* arose from the Training of Trainers programme. This group initially came together to share their experience and knowledge in a creative way which fostered new and improved approaches to delivering services and programmes e.g. identifying the need for a brochure profiling the Quality through Professionalisation Programme and each of the services. It is envisaged that this group will remain intact to support the implementation of the programme, ultimately improving practice and programme delivery.

This chapter aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of the breadth of the Tallaght NEYAI Quality through Professionalisation programme and the range of training and resources used to support the delivery of the programme. This chapter sets a context for the next chapter which presents the research findings from the evaluation.



# 05

## Findings



# Findings

# 05

This chapter outlines the findings from the qualitative and quantitative measurement procedures as well as the process evaluation which specifically focused on the observed delivery of the training.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Section 5.2 describes the quantitative findings in relation to sample descriptives for preschools and staff. Section 5.3 describes the quantitative findings from the cross-sectional preschool quality assessments and the findings from the Staff Individual Rating Scales which were completed before and after the training course and relate to changes in knowledge, skills and competence when implementing Aistear and Siolta within HighScope settings. Section 5.4 describes the qualitative findings from the evaluation, these include interviews with those who delivered the training programme as well as focus groups with early years educators who attended the training programme. Section 5.5 describes the findings from the process evaluation in relation to reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the intervention (Glasgow et al., 1999).

## 5.2 SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVES

The descriptive data relating to the preschools, children and staff can be found in Table 2. The findings generated from the Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire report that 80% of services operated a sessional service while 60% offered full day-care. All services provided care and education for preschool children while 40% and 60% offered services to babies and wobblers and toddlers, respectively. All of the services operated a HighScope Curriculum while none of the services were Siolta

validated. A total of 270 children were enrolled in the five participating preschools ranging from 29 to 106. A total of 55 staff were employed within the five services with an average of 11 per service. There were marginally more part-time staff employed across the five services with 31 part-time and 24 full-time. At the time of data collection, two staff working within one service were employed under the Community Employment (CE) scheme.

A Level 5 qualification was the dominant qualification obtained by staff working within the preschools, with 80% having achieved a Level 5 at the time of data collection. These findings resonate somewhat with the National NEYAI report (McKeown et al., 2014) which report that 91.2% of staff working within the Tallaght NEYAI services had obtained a Level 5 award or above. The reason for discrepancy may be due to lapse in time between national and local data collection. It is also worth noting that the national evaluation only included staff working with children, however the local evaluation asked for information on all staff working within the preschool. Eighteen percent of the staff working within the preschools had a Level 7 or Level 8 qualification (ordinary degree or honours degree), whilst a very low percentage (4%) of staff working within the services had no childcare related qualification.

**Table 2 Sample descriptives**

	n	%
<b>Preschool Characteristics</b>		
Number of preschools	5	100
Siolta validation	0	0
Sessional	4	80
Full day-care	3	60
Baby room	2	40
Wobbler room	3	60
Toddler room	3	60
Preschool room	5	100
High-scope curriculum	5	100

**Child Characteristics**

Number of children	270 ± 31
--------------------	----------

**Preschool Staff Characteristics**

Number of staff	55 ± 5	
Average number of staff per service	11.0 ± 4.3	
Number of full-time staff	24	43.6
Number of part-time staff	31	56.3
Number of CE staff	2	3.6
Number of staff with level 4	5	9.0
Number of staff with level 5	44	80
Number of staff with level 6	18	32.7
Number of staff with level 7/8 (Ord./Hons. Degree)	10	18.2
Number of staff with level 9/10 (Mas./ PhD)	1	1.8
Number staff with no qualification	2	3.6

## 5.3 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

### 5.3.1 QUALITY WITHIN THE PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Descriptive statistics were computed using the observation scores for each of the items to generate average scores and ranges for each of the domains. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare scores across each of the 4 domains observed during the PQA, these domains included Learning Environment, Daily Routine, Adult-Child Interaction and Curriculum and Planning. It is important to note that the rating scale for the PQA ranges from 1-5, with one being the lowest score achievable and 5 being the highest.

It is not possible to infer from the PQA scores the impact of the training programme, as only cross-sectional data was collected meaning that data was collected at one point in time. In the case of this evaluation, the observations were completed once the early years educators had completed their training. However, what can be utilised from the data collected is the level at which the services were operating before implementation of the training began.

The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and range scores) for each domain are presented in Table 3 along with the significance levels for differences between domains. The data presented has been accumulated for all 4 services who participated in the PQA observations.

**Table 3 Descriptive statistics for preschool quality assessment observations**

	Learning Environments	Daily Routine	Adult Child Interactions	Curriculum Planning and Assessment	Overall Score
Mean (SD)	3.4 (0.4)	3.2 (1.0)	2.8 (0.4)	3.5 (1.0)	3.2 (0.6)
Minimum	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.4
Maximum	3.7	3.6	3.2	4.2	3.6
p-value	0.07	0.06	0.01 **	0.1 *	0.06

Levels of significance:\*\*\* p≤0.001 = very significant; \*\*p≤0.01 = moderately significant; \* p≤0.05 = significant

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that curriculum planning and assessment scored highest however a large standard deviation of 1.0 suggests that there was a great variation in scores between all four services. This is confirmed with a minimum score of 2.0 and a maximum score of 4.2. The adult child interaction domain scored lowest with an average score of 2.8 across services, however the standard deviation of this domain was low, indicating that all services scored consistently low in this domain and there was little variation in scores from one service to the next. There were no significant differences within the domains of the learning environment domain and the daily routine. Figure 9 graphically depicts the observation scores across the 4 domains.

### Preschool Programme Quality Assessment Stores

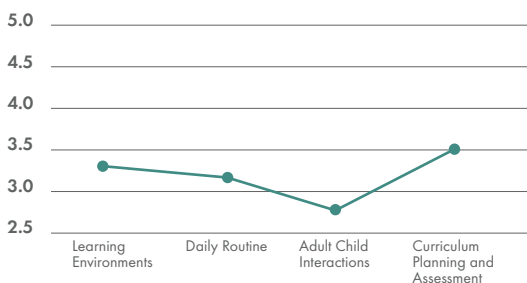


Figure 9 Graphical depiction of the preschool quality assessment observations

Overall, the results revealed areas of strength and areas where more focus is required. The adult-child interactions domain was an area which consistently scored low across all services. Factors which related to low scoring on this domain included:

- Adults asking children too many closed ended questions
- Adults not encouraging communication between English and non-English speaking children
- A lack of strategies to promote interactions with children whose first language was not English
- No observation of early years educators taking anecdotal notes
- No observation of any child calling an early years educator by name
- Observing adults solve problems for children without explanation; children not involved in conflict resolution
- No encouragement of child-child interaction; no evidence of adults referring children to one another
- Adults observed controlling or disrupting children's conversations
- Adults observed directing play rather than being partners in children's play.

**Curriculum planning and assessment was the highest scoring domain. Factors which contributed to that included:**

- Evidence of HighScope curriculum being used to guide teaching practices
- All literature on the walls inside and outside of the rooms were derived from the HighScope Curriculum model
- Staff observed maintaining records on children and families

- Staff sometimes use a team teaching model and share responsibilities for planning and implementing programme activities
- Staff use observation as a method to assess children's developmental progress.

### 5.3.2 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF TRAINING ON EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS

Staff were asked to complete an individual rating scale before, during and after the training. This meant that on day 1, day 4 and day 7, staff took some time to rate how knowledgeable, skilful and competent they were to implement Siolta and Aistear in HighScope settings. Twenty-three staff completed the rating scale at the start on day 1 and on completion of day 7. Due to non-consistent completion of rating scales at the mid-point, day 4 data was not included in the analysis.

Table 4 outlines the mean scores and standard deviation for each of the domains. It is evident that the early years educators perceived an increase in their knowledge, skill level and competence after the training, with the largest increase attributed to an increase in their perceived knowledge of Aistear and Siolta. This is logical as the early years educators must return to their settings to really implement their learning to impact their skills and competence. It must also be highlighted that these results relate to perceived changes and not actual change, a more objective measurement tool is required to investigate the actual impact of the training programme on the early years educator's knowledge, skills and competence. Observation of practice or video feedback is the most reliable way to measure this.

**Table 4 Mean scores, standard deviations and difference between the perceived knowledge, skills and competence of early years educators before and after the training programme**

	Before Training (Mean, SD)	After Training (Mean, SD)	Difference	p-value
Knowledge	3.09 (0.43)	3.86 (0.64)	0.77	0.000 ***
Skills	3.14 (0.35)	3.81 (0.61)	0.67	0.000 ***
Competence	3.18 (0.50)	3.77 (0.53)	0.59	0.001 ***

Levels of significance: \*\*\* p≤0.001 = very significant; \*\* p≤0.01 = moderately significant; \* p≤0.05 = significant



The results from the individual rating scales suggest that staff had a positive experience of the programme, with all staff reporting that participating in the Tallaght NEYAI had a positive impact on their knowledge, skills and competence in relation to delivering a broad based curriculum incorporating Aistear, Siolta and HighScope. Some of the comments made by early years educators after they had completed the programme included:

**"I feel more confident implementing this learning within my setting. We already have elements of all three implemented but this training has highlighted how to further develop and work with Aistear, Siolta and HighScope. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual will help hugely with this process".**

**"This training has been of most benefit to me in learning about Siolta and Aistear. I know we have these in my setting but I didn't really know much about them and always tried to avoid them but now I am way more confident in using them".**

It was clear from the individual rating scales that the early years educators enjoyed and benefitted from the training, however a common theme throughout the comments suggested that with practice, more time and the possibility of revisiting some of the training the early years educators could implement the learning from the training in a more confident and fluid way.

**"As the training has been completed, there is more familiarity with the required aspects of Siolta, Aistear and HighScope to fill in a Development Plan in comparison to when I began the training programme. However we need more practice and more time to cement our familiarity with the Development Plan".**

**I have enjoyed learning about Aistear and Siolta and would be grateful for more time to put it into practice as it could fizzle out quite quickly. A refresher course later down the line would be something that would benefit us as we implement all this change in our setting".**



## 5.4 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative findings describe the experiences of the co-ordinator, trainers who were also managers in the participating services, and educators during the Tallaght NEYAI. Systematic reviews of qualitative research show that key aspects of study design are often not reported, and for that reason we have adopted the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) to report the qualitative findings. These criteria comprise of a formal reporting checklist for in-depth interviews and focus groups; the most common methods for data collection in qualitative educational research (Tong et al., 2007). (See Appendix 7 for the COREQ for the trainer's interviews, Appendix 8 for the COREQ for the staff focus groups and Appendix 9 for the COREQ for the co-ordinator interview).

### 5.4.1 TRAINERS EXPERIENCE OF THE TALLAGHT NEYAI

In total 2, one-to-one interviews were conducted with 2 trainers who delivered the programme to the early years educators. Both trainers were also managers at two participating preschools. The questions focus on both their role as a trainer on the Tallaght NEYAI and a manager of a preschool setting. The interviews took place at the end of July 2014. Four key domains were explored during the interview, these included:

- Delivery of training of trainers
- Delivery of training to early years educators
- Implementing learning within preschool settings
- Sustainability of the programme

The findings presented outline higher and lower order emerging themes as well as supporting quotes for each of the domains investigated.

### DELIVERY OF TRAINING OF TRAINERS

#### Expectations

Although two rounds of 'Training of Trainers' were delivered, both trainers interviewed attended the same training in October 2013. Findings suggest that the expectations of the training differed between participants of the training cohort, mainly given that some participants were more involved in the development of

the programme than others. Participants of the training of trainers expected that the training would equip them to support their staff in the implementation of this programme, however most attendees on the training were not aware of the expectation that they may become a trainer following completion of the training of trainers.

*"On the first day, there were some comments about being expected to deliver the training to the early years educators. Most of the managers weren't aware of this and this was the first we heard of it. We hadn't a chance to think this through, so it was a big shock".*

All of the participants attending the Training of Trainers during this time were aware that the training would use HighScope as a curriculum and Aistear and Siolta frameworks to guide their practice. The participants commented on the development plan, and how this would be used as a tool to guide developments within the service. However, there appeared to be some ambiguity around the use of the development plan as one service was already using this tool within their planning prior to any delivery of training. The implementation of the development plan prior to the training was never linked to the training which would commence over the following months.

*"There wasn't ever a connection made, there was talk about a development plan and there was talk about improving quality, but it was never explicitly said to the managers that it would be linked to training that we would go on later down the line, so that was a surprise as well".*

Despite the participants not being fully aware of what the training aimed to achieve, it was very clear that all participants had a choice to become a trainer or not and that there no mandatory requirements to take on a specific role. Regardless of what path the training participants took, participants were expected to support their staff implement the learning once their staff had undertaken the early years educator training.

*"The lady leading the training went around the room and she was probably a bit surprised that not everyone knew what was expected of them, but it was given to you as a choice; you could either take on a supportive role and support your staff or you could undertake the training to become a trainer and you didn't have to decide there and then. It was just like, we did the training and either way you'd support the staff".*

## Equipping participants with the skills needed to deliver training to the early years educators

There were mixed feelings within the training cohort about how confident the potential trainers felt about delivering the programme. Some participants felt that the training had equipped them to deliver the training to a group of early years educators, while others didn't feel fully confident. All participants thoroughly enjoyed the training and felt the trainer and the teaching style was very appropriate, however it was the changes made to the manual during the training that caused some participants to feel a little bit confused.

*"When it finished, I felt a little bit confused around the content and the reasons why particular changes were being made. Now it wasn't that much, it was just certain pages were being developed or excluded as we went and I understood that was really good, rather than just being handed a manual and told to deliver it, but it was a bit confusing and difficult to keep up sometimes so I couldn't say I was 100% clear on what I was going to be doing, but I trusted the process and felt it would be OK by the time I would be delivering".*

As mentioned previously, the participants on the Training of Trainers enjoyed the training and felt they gained a lot of new knowledge from participating. The enjoyment of the training was linked to a number of elements including; the effectiveness of the tutor and her knowledge and expertise, the structure of the training and the cohesiveness of the training cohort. The participants felt that the structure was very engaging and enjoyed how the tutor selected elements of the manual to focus on rather than going through it from start to finish. The participants commented that they were provided with helpful strategies that they could use in their own delivery, should they decide to become a trainer. However, the element of the training that the participants most enjoyed was the opportunity they were given to modify the manual. The training participants agreed, that despite causing a bit of confusion as well as not expecting to undertake this type of task, they appreciated that their views were welcome and the opportunity to become familiar with the content of the manual.

*"It was great to be able to be part of modifying the manual, it didn't feel like this is it and there was no room for improvement; it was almost like a consultation process the whole way through. It was just unfortunate because*

*the training was only 6 days long and if you were planning on becoming a trainer afterwards, you may have left a little bit confused".*

## By-products from participating in the training

Aside from gaining new knowledge and skills from the training, other benefits were also experienced by some participants. These benefits were rooted in the building of new relationships between service managers who proceeded to work together after the training to compile information about the project which would be later designed into the Tallaght NEYAI brochure as described previously in Chapter 4.

*"Three of the managers participating in the training have built quite a good relationship during the last year participating in this training and we have really come to rely on each other a bit more, a sub-committee to make a brochure was formed and three of us were on that, so that idea really came out of the training".*

## DELIVERY OF TRAINING TO EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS

### The structure and scheduling of the training programme

The original training programme for the early years educators was designed to be delivered over 10 days, however this was reduced to 7 days after the Training of Trainers programme. Both trainers agreed that this was a positive modification as the 10 days were particularly long, specifically the days dedicated to the alignment of HighScope, Siolta and Aistear. The trainers both felt that the participants would become disinterested on these days and therefore welcomed a chance to reduce them. Furthermore, given the way in which the trainers received their training they felt that it was straight-forward to reduce the days. The Training of the Trainers was not delivered in a Day 1 through to Day 10 order, which made it easier for the trainers to reduce the content.

*"On the 10 day training there were four days allocated to the alignment process, and I just felt that was very long and originally it was planned that this training would be held in the evenings, so that would be eight evenings of alignment, if that was the case I don't think we would have people coming back".*

Although the reduction of days were welcomed by the participants, the redesign of the programme meant that a significant amount of work had to be completed to reduce the content. Furthermore, the level of preparatory work the trainers had to commit before each delivery day was also significant, with trainers spending hours in the evening preparing material and resources for the following day, this involved the allocation of times to some activities which were omitted from some days but not others and the design of materials for group activities.

*“Although I was so tired from delivering, I spent all evening preparing for the next day as well, so that was a lot and the resources weren’t made so I was having to make them and put times on them – the times were all over the place, some activities had far too much time allocated to them while others had hardly nothing. I found not having times very difficult. I found the preparation huge, but then again if I hadn’t put in that time I don’t think the training would have been a success as I wouldn’t have known the content as well as I did”*

In terms of the scheduling of the training for the early years educators, the trainers felt the way in which the training was structured was very intense for the participants. The trainers felt that scheduling a training day once every fortnight or once every month would be more beneficial as it would allow the early years educators return to their setting and implement the learning. Furthermore, this proposed way of structuring the training is similar to HighScope Training, with which staff are familiar. Given that there is a Level 6 QQI award linked to the completion of the training, the academic year should be considered when scheduling training as participants are expected to submit an assignment.

*“This training was all about implementation, which like HighScope Training, requires you to learn x amount, go back to your service and reflect on how the learning affects your work and then implement or modify as required, then return to the training and discuss how that effects your work; it’s very like action research”*

The trainers agreed that there were challenges and benefits to mixing the services for the training. However, overall it was agreed that mixing staff was most beneficial for sharing ideas and working within communities of practice. The trainers agreed that challenges have to be managed well for example differences in operations at a service level or

confidentiality of information shared at the training. Additionally, the trainers who were also managers at the participating services felt that there were no issues delivering the training to their own staff.

*“I think it’s a really good idea to mix up the services for training because they don’t usually get an opportunity to meet and do community of practices. That is something that Fledglings is looking into, but currently they don’t do that. So it’s great to meet and get ideas; what you are doing in your service, how does your service work, it’s just an opportunity to enable staff to network”*

### Using the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual

Both trainers agreed that the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual was a worthwhile document and contained useful information. They felt that there was a lot of content in there pertinent to the course, specifically examples of aligning HighScope, Aistear and Siolta. It was felt that the manual must be accompanied by the training and early years educators could not be expected to implement the learning from the manual without training. A common point around the manual related to the look and feel of the document, the trainers felt that the manual needed to be well-designed and interesting looking, that it needed background information on how it was devised and what its purpose is. Furthermore, it was suggested that some of the content was out of date and needs to be updated.

*“I think the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual is a great document for staff to have but it needs updating. There is old and incorrect content in the manual relating to HighScope and it definitely needs a facelift. In my opinion there isn’t enough information about Siolta in it either – many of the components are missing”.*

There were many supporting resources developed to support the implementation of the training e.g. guidance for specific break-out activities. It was felt that these type of resources greatly aided the delivery of the programme and it was important to incorporate these resources into any other planned training. The trainers expressed that they would welcome a comprehensive training programme, which incorporated all of the material a trainer requires to deliver the programme effectively e.g. the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual, Aistear

handbook, Siolta handbook, PQA A and B, required templates and instructions for breakout activities. A comprehensive 'toolkit of resources' which included a document listing 'what's in your toolkit' would reduce the preparation time and alleviate any stress for trainers.

## IMPLEMENTING LEARNING WITHIN PRESCHOOL SETTINGS

### All we need is time!

The trainers who also act as managers in their respective services feel passionate about implementing the learning from the Tallaght NEYAI and are willing to support their staff during this new piece of work. Both managers believe that the templates, with which they became familiar during the training (the action plan and the development plan) will be instrumental in implementing the learning within the preschool rooms. Both of these documents are useful as they provide logical pathways towards implementing change and allow for the delegation of specific tasks to specific members of staff. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual alongside Siolta and Aistear will be used to some degree in completion of the development plan, but more so as an auxiliary tool.

*"I like the idea of the development plan and so too do the staff, they can see it, and everything is recorded, so if there are specific people delegated to a specific task, it's very clearly there in black and white and everyone knows who is responsible for what".*

Managers will discuss the development plans within team meetings with one service allocating 20 minutes at the beginning of every month to discussing the work pertaining to the development plans. Managers feel that time will be the biggest challenge when it comes to implementing this new way of planning within their services. Managers agree that they must keep staff motivated to work off the development plans.

*"Time is a huge issue. Like even when I think of it now, they have one afternoon a week, they have to write up their observations for the COR and all their individual child observations, so realistically how much of that time can be given over? I think I need to be strict with myself and motivate the girls to work on this outside of team meetings, otherwise I just can't see it working"*

### Translating the learning to others

Approximately two-thirds of the staff from across the five services completed the training. The managers agreed that it is important for all staff to become fully trained in the implementation of the programme and that a whole service approach would be important for the long-term success of the programme. In the meantime, managers suggested that staff meetings would be a good place to induct those who have not attended the training. Both managers felt that it was their responsibility to introduce the staff to the programme by providing them with an overview of the An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual Fledglings Manual, how to complete an action plan and a development plan and log the progress of the task. One manager felt that the implementation of the programme was logical and she could not envisage any difficulty translating the learning to other members of staff. Furthermore, it was discussed that it would be advantageous to have at least one member of staff in each room who had been trained. This member of staff would act as a mentor for those who may not feel completely confident or who haven't yet attended the training.

*"I think that team meetings are a good place to start, there you can explain the process of aligning HighScope, Aistear and Siolta. You would not deliver the whole training but as a manager who has delivered the training I could give an overview to the programme. It would be important that any staff who haven't completed the training would complete it once they have completed their HighScope".*

## SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME

The sustainability of this programme is core to the project and was therefore deemed an important topic to investigate within the interviews. The managers felt that time was a key consideration when contemplating sustaining the learning from the Tallaght NEYAI. Time is essential to allow those participating in the programme find their place and enter into a space which facilitates change. Allocating time each week to work on action plans and development plans was noted as being essential, managers felt that once the staff became more familiar and confident with the process, the 'doing' would become more natural and part of their everyday practice. Furthermore, managers mentioned that the establishment of a community of practice would assist

them overcome challenges and share ideas with other managers. The coordination of this community would need to be considered. Finally, the managers felt that revisiting the programme on an annual basis would allow participants from the training to recap on the learning and see how well the programme is being implemented.

*"I know I have mentioned it a few times, but it's like any type of change process, people need time to adjust and adapt. If we don't have the time, we can't dedicate ourselves to the change. I know it's not that easy with budgetary cuts but maybe if senior members of staff are to expect change, then bedding in time must be factored into the design of programmes such as these".*

#### 5.4.2 STAFF PERSPECTIVES OF THE TALLAGHT NEYAI

In total, 2 focus groups were conducted with 12 members of staff from 5 preschools. The focus groups were organised in line with the training cohort the early years educators attended. The focus groups took place during June and July 2014. Four key domains were explored during the focus group, these included:

- Knowledge of training prior to commencement
- Staff perception of quality within early years settings
- Fondest memories of the training programme
- Impact of the training programme on practice
- Necessary ingredients for training programmes targeting early years educators.

The findings presented in this section outline higher and lower order emerging themes as well as supporting quotes for each of the domains investigated.

##### Knowledge of programme prior to commencement

The early years educators heard about the programme approximately one year before it commenced. Some staff had a basic idea of what the training would entail with the general understanding being that Aistear, Siolta and the HighScope curriculum would be used in conjunction with each other to implement a broad based curriculum. For others, they had very little understanding of what the training would entail. Some staff were anxious about the

scheduling of the programme and were relieved they were informed that the training would take place during the holiday period (Christmas, Easter and Summer). For most staff there was a feeling of discontent about the level of work that this new training programme would involve, this was particularly relevant for the assignments attached to the Level 6 accreditation. Most staff enrolled in the training programme not knowing that they would be awarded a Level 6 module upon successful completion of the assignments, it was on the first day of training that this element of the training programme was understood by the participants. Participants who had already completed their Level 6 qualification were confused about having to complete this additional module. During the middle of the training, it was realised by the trainers that it was not necessary for participants who had previously achieved a Level 6 to complete the assignments. Generally, participants who had not completed a Level 6 were excited at the thoughts of furthering their qualifications, despite the workload that accompanied this professional development. Findings from this domain suggest that clear messages outlining the training aims, structure, content and outcomes must be conveyed by the training organisers to the early years educators prior to the commencement of the training.

*"I was just really interested in what this training would be all about. I knew there would be something on Aistear and something on Siolta but I wasn't sure if the training would incorporate HighScope, so I suppose there was a bit of confusion around that. We had no idea that the training would be linked to a Level 6, this came as a big shock to all of us and made me quite anxious. Really, we weren't very well informed going into this and for that reason we didn't know what to expect".*

##### Perception of quality within early years settings

There was a strong consensus from all focus group participants about what they believed influenced quality within early years settings. Furthermore, the predictors of quality didn't work in isolation – there were many elements of the early years setting that must be in place for quality to be maintained. Firstly, staff agreed that the qualifications of staff were a predictor of quality, linked to this were comments about how a workplace must foster an ethos of continued professional development. Staff agreed that a quality setting places children at the centre

of all of their work and maintains a child focused approach in their practice. Additionally, it was agreed that open lines of communication are very important to understand the needs of the children and be informed of how they are doing at home and at preschool. Staff felt strongly about the use of a well-established curriculum, which everyone is trained to implement. Staff also felt that having a curriculum with which they were all familiar with would lend itself to a calm, relaxing environment for children. In addition to these points, other themes which emerged and which staff believed impacted quality included the maintenance of low staff child ratios and a good manager (who is a leader, well organised and schedules regular appraisals with staff). Along with discussing what enables quality within an early years setting, staff discussed the barriers they currently faced. The most dominant theme was a lack of funding within the setting which has resulted in the availability of less materials and resources with some staff commenting that on occasion they themselves would purchase materials for activities. The lack of funding has also resulted in a cut in hours for most staff. Staff members no longer have additional planning time and often have to plan in their own time or during contact time with the children. The cut in hours has impacted the amount of preparation that can be done and, this is particularly salient for the children's return to preschool in September, where in the past staff would spend August setting up their environments and planning for the children's entry. A number of staff mentioned that the lack of acknowledgement for hard work caused them to lack motivation and become despondent within their role. The lack of funding and time has caused some staff to feel stressed within their jobs which they agree is not conducive to providing a high quality care and education setting for young children.

*"There are so many elements that make up a high quality service; happy staff, well qualified staff, a service that promotes professional development, good communication with parents, a relaxed calm environment, low ratios, a good manager, the list goes on... but you need all of these things to be at play - there's no use in one or two. You'll know a high quality service as soon as you walk in the door - the children are happy, they love being there, the staff are happy and they love being there - there is a certain atmosphere and you just know. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding quality is slipping - that age old saying - if you pay peanuts, you'll get monkeys".*

### **Fondest moment of the training programme**

All participants agreed that the second half of the training programme was their favourite part. This was for a number of reasons; there were more group activities and participation from the early years educators which made the programme more engaging. Additionally during the second phase of training, staff felt that the trainers were more comfortable with delivering the content which resulted in clear messages being shared and less ambiguity about the programme outcomes, particularly in relation to the Level 6 module. Staff also enjoyed the opening circle activities in particular the relaxation and meditation, they felt that these activities promoted relaxation and allowed them to refocus before starting the training. Furthermore, the participants felt that the trainers were very effective, they enjoyed their teaching style and their supportive, approachable and down to earth disposition. Finally, staff reported that they really enjoyed working in groups; working in groups involved completing action plans and development plans, sharing ideas and learning from each other and staff felt that those type of activities were beneficial in terms of broadening their knowledge base and getting to know the other participants.

*"I had lots of fond moments in the training - I enjoyed it thoroughly but I think my favourite would have to be the group activities. I enjoyed talking to the other girls and getting ideas, it's only through talking it through with others that the theory makes sense. I remember one time talking in groups discussing different curriculums and thinking this is very interesting and a great opportunity for me to learn new things".*

### **Impact of the training programme on practice**

At the time of the focus group, most staff were on summer holidays and so did not have much time to put the learning from the training programme into practice. Staff reported they have planned to incorporate their learning into their practice when they return to their service in September. The perceived impact of the training was consistent across all participants with the most commonly reported impact relating to the increased knowledge of Aistear and Siolta, with staff now feeling that they had the knowledge to incorporate both of these frameworks into their daily planning. Now that the staff had undergone the training and in particular the alignment





activities, they felt less daunted about using these frameworks within their practice. Approximately half of the staff felt more confident using Aistear going forward, while the other staff felt more confident using Siolta. The reason behind these differences was linked to previous training received by staff. Working more as a team was another impact of the training noted by staff, staff felt that learning about action plans and development plans would help them focus as a team on the changes that needed to be made within their setting and work together to achieve positive outcomes for the children. Although staff felt that the training programme would have a positive impact on their practice, they felt that they needed time specifically allocated to working together, completing action plans and building development plans. Staff strongly voiced their concerns that if time was not allocated to the implementation of the learning they could not see how it would become embedded and part of the usual practice at their service.

*“The training enabled us to understand where all the alignments are and how we were going to use this information when completing our development plans. However, I think the most important factor in all of this is time; time must be allocated to working specifically on this new approach – we can’t be expected to undertake all of this extra work with no extra time – it wouldn’t make sense”.*

### **Necessary ingredients for training programmes targeting early years educators**

It was clear from all staff that a good training programme is well organised and well planned. In the first instance, the participants of the programme must enrol on the programme with a clear understanding of what the training involves and what the outcomes are. Clear lines of communication between the training organisers and the participants is necessary. Staff agreed that the programme tutor must be prepared, knowledgeable, well-respected and confident, the learners must look up to the tutor and believe that they are the correct person for the role. Staff reported that they were happy to receive training from their managers, however they noted that this may not be the case for all services attending a training of this nature. Staff noted that to receive training from your manager, you would need a very trusting relationship where staff can be open and honest during group discussions. In the opinion of the participants, another essential element of a training programme which must be considered is the scheduling of it. Staff felt that ideally the participants would receive some time off in between each session to put some of the learning into practice, for example in the instance of this training which includes 7 days of training, staff felt that if the training was run over 7 weeks it would allow the participants return to their settings and try some of the

knowledge that was imparted to them during the training day. When asked about the content of the training, the staff agreed that interactive, stimulating activities were paramount to embedding the theory. Such activities gave the participants an opportunity to discuss their ideas and learn from each other. In terms of the composition of the training cohort, the majority of participants agreed that mixing services was beneficial for group dynamics. There were a small number of participants who felt that mixing the groups would not be beneficial as it would jeopardise the confidential nature of the learning community.

*“I think it’s good to mix up services because you learn from everybody or maybe they’ll say something and it’s that light bulb moment in your head when something will click for you. They might be doing something a different way in their service, so it’s a great way to share ideas”*

## 5.5 PROCESS EVALUATION

Process evaluation is a valuable approach to assess variations in how the project and aspects of the project were experienced by a broad range of stakeholders and can shed light on why an intervention may or may not be effective. The information reported in this section is discussed under the domains of the RE-AIM Framework (Glasgow et al., 1999). RE-AIM was developed by Glasgow and colleagues (1999) to help evaluators attend to specific implementation factors essential for success in the real and complex world of educational, healthcare and community settings. It is an acronym that focuses attention on five key domains related to successful impact, specifically: Reach; Effectiveness; Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance. RE-AIM provides a very appropriate framework to anchor the process evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI. The process evaluation findings mainly pertain to the delivery of the training programme during April and July 2014.

Although delivery of the training programme commenced in January 2014, the evaluators were not involved at this time and therefore did not experience the first phase of programme delivery. Process evaluation data was captured for each of the training cohorts representing the five participating services. The process evaluation involved consultation with the project co-ordinator, training programme deliverers, service managers and early years educators in addition to a review of programme implementation documentation e.g. The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual and associated documentation, rating scales, overall training course evaluation, direct observation notes and sign in sheets.

### Overall reach of the training programme

According to the findings from the Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire, there were 55 people working between the five participating services at the time of data collection (February 2014). From the sign in sheets at the training days, it is evident that 13 early years educators signed up for training cohort A while 18 early years educators signed up for training cohort B. An additional 5 managers and 6 Quality Specialists and Parent Support Co-ordinators signed up for the Training of Trainers Programme. This indicates that a total of 42 (76.4%) staff enrolled on the programme, however only 32 participants completed all elements of the training programme indicating that 58.2% of the staff working between the 5 services have fully completed the training.

Table 5 describes the reach of the training for the early years educators. It is evident to see that there was a greater attendance at Training Cohort A in comparison to Training Cohort B. It is not very clear what the reasons for this is, however it may be related to the scheduling of training. Some of the delivery to Training Cohort B took place during July which is a popular time for summer holidays and many staff are not working during this time.

**Table 5 Intervention reach**

	Number of preschools	Number of training days	Total Number of staff signed up	Total Number of staff attending	% of staff attending
Training Cohort A	5	7	13	12	92.3%
Training Cohort B	3	7	18	12	68.5%



## Effectiveness

It is not possible to report on the effectiveness of the training on practice within the preschool setting. A longer-term evaluation which incorporates the implementation of the programme within the preschools is recommended for that purpose. Rather, the impact of the programme can be reported, which relates to the shorter term effects. It was evident from the staff feedback on the rating scales as well as during the focus group that the training programme had positively impacted them in terms of knowledge, skills and competence in relation to implementing Siolta and Aistear within their HighScope settings. This was also evident during the direct observation of the training programme, where the participants displayed feelings of being clearer about the alignment process. During the check-in at the beginning of the days training, the participants acknowledged that they found the content challenging but they were motivated and looking forward to building on their learning from the previous day. It was evident that the training stimulated the staff, on occasion some participants were observed walking around to other groups to see how they did in a task. Lively discussion and debate occurred several times during a training session. Discussions which focused on practice within settings were most effective at engaging the participants, it was clear that the staff preferred to use real-life examples in the sessions.

## Adoption

The actual adoption of this programme is another element of the RE-AIM framework which is difficult to measure in a short-term evaluation. Feedback from the focus group and the manager interviews suggest that all staff are keen to adopt the principles of the programme in their respective settings. Staff see the value of using evidence sheets and development plans to guide their work and managers believe that using Aistear and Siolta within their services is a valuable way of operating their service. Despite managers and staff willingness to adopt the programme, time will play a key role in the success of the programme. It was clear that staff do not have much time for daily plans at the moment but felt that if they were to adopt the learning from the training programme, more time would be required to roll it out within the preschools. It is also advised that the remaining 41.8% of staff receive the training to ensure there is a whole service approach when adopting this programme.

## Implementation

The training programme reached staff in 58.2% of the services, and there were few variations across both training cohorts in terms of the fidelity of the implementation. Both trainers delivered the training using the same resources and overheads and therefore there was a consistency in the sequence and content of delivery. There were slight variations between training cohorts in terms of the dose of specific parts of the programme, for example one trainer spent 2 hours on one task relating to development planning around components while another trainer spent 1 hour on the same task. The discrepancy can be most likely explained by the absence of time allocation for this particular task in the Train the Trainer's Manual. The style of delivery differed between both trainers with one trainer utilising much more small group work, which was observed to work very well. One trainer also used group discussions significantly more which generated interesting and upbeat discussion after the completion of tasks. Both trainers recapped on the days training, however one trainer spent more time on this. Furthermore, one trainer asked participants to make any comments or questions on a post-it and they would be answered the following day. This strategy worked well for both the trainer and the participants, particularly to link the participants into where they left off the previous day.

## Maintenance

The first aspect of maintenance relates to the on-going delivery of this training programme. Managers reported that they could give early years educators who have not received the training an overview of the programme but full training would be required to ensure all staff were upskilled in aligning Aistear, Siolta and HighScope. The second aspect of maintenance relates to the resources, the early years educators agree that the An Cosán/ Fledglings Early Years Manual is a useful document and will be beneficial when completing evidence sheets, action plans and development plans. The trainers reported that going forward the programme documentation and resources must be finalised, this includes the The An Cosán / Fledglings Early Years Manual, the Train the Trainers Manual and all supplementary documentation. Finally, the last aspect of maintenance relates to the time required to put the learning into practice, all of the early years educators and managers agree that time will need to be allocated to this programme to fully ensure its sustainability. This was also evident from the PQA feedback where it was noted that staff need to set aside time for planning and meetings with each other to ensure that a quality service is provided for all children.



A photograph of a laboratory setup, possibly a microfluidics or cell culture station. It features a grey metal frame with a clear plastic tray containing several small, clear plastic wells. A large, bold green number '06' is overlaid on the top right of the image. The background is a light-colored wall with a white electrical outlet.

06

# Key Learning & Legacies

# Key Learning & Legacies

## 06

The overarching aim of this evaluation was to document the implementation of the Tallaght NEYAI Quality through Professionalisation programme and investigate the impact of the programme on the knowledge, skills and values of the early years educators.

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The evaluation focused on the process related to developing and implementing the programme, the findings from this investigation offer a valuable insight into the challenges and successes of a professional development programme targeting early years educators. The following points highlight the key learning, recommendations and implications arising from this evaluation. The chapter concludes with the legacy left from the Quality through Professionalisation programme.

#### 6.1.1 ENGAGING IN CHANGE – THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ‘LEAD-IN’ PHASE

Changing practices within early childhood care and education settings, to support changes in knowledge, skills and competencies of early years educators and positively impact on the quality of care and education delivered is undeniably challenging. The way in which organisational change is approached by services and their leaders may have a significant impact on how staff within those settings respond to change. From this evaluation, it was clear that the supports needed to enable positive change to occur at either an individual or organisational level, are often underestimated, or not considered at all. The findings from this evaluation found that for change to be successful a number factors must be considered, these include:

- Time to prepare for change – participants need to be given adequate time to absorb the programmes

aims and objectives and get ready for programme participation. This time is critical to ensure that the expectations of the training participants are managed

- Excellent planning – change introduced in a sudden, piecemeal, or inconsistent manner can create a range of emotional responses from programme participants
- Commitment to the programme outcomes – staff need to believe in the programme they are about to engage in. If staff do not value the programme, a shift in anticipated outcomes will be difficult to change
- A shared vision within the consortium - a novel element of all NEYAI projects was the emphasis on consortium working. Consortium working brings both challenges and successes. It was evident from the Tallaght NEYAI that a shared vision among consortium members would aid the future success of the programme
- Delivery of consistent messages – from the beginning, programme developers must be clear in terms of the key messages used to describe or promote the programme. There must be an agreement to only use the key messages when describing the programme
- Effective leadership – is essential for the provision of quality early childhood care and education programmes. The leadership style of an individual also relates directly to the quality of relationships at a service. Effective leaders will promote team work and joint decision making, as well as being role models for their colleagues.

### 6.1.2 IMPACT OF STAFF TRAINING

The Quality through Professionalisation training programme, which is based on the specific content of evidence based programmes, was effective in enhancing the knowledge, skills and competencies of early years educators immediately after the training programme had finished. This project demonstrated that the training received by staff enhanced the connection between theory and practice, as well as acting as an incentive for the early years educators to take more pride in their work, and gain a better understanding of their practice. However, this evaluation was short-term in design (i.e. there was no follow up data collection phase), and it is therefore not possible to demonstrate whether the training programme had any effect on practice within preschool settings. A long-term follow up is required to ascertain the full impact of the training programme.

The evaluation team consulted with programme trainers, service managers, early years educators and the programme co-ordinator, from these consultations a number of key learning points arose with regard to training programmes targeting early years educators:

- Ensure the timing of the training is acceptable to those participating
- Ensure that there is adequate time between training sessions to observe and allow for the transfer of learning into practice
- Factor in time in lieu or additional payment for staff attending training
- Develop and utilise internal expertise as it is cost-effective and builds individuals confidence
- Consider quid-pro-quo arrangements between organisations whereby one organisation provides expertise or training to another, on the basis that this will be reciprocated
- Provide ongoing booster training to consolidate the initial training and allow staff to revisit core elements of the training and remind them of the intended outcomes and rationale of the programme
- Ensure programme trainers have undergone specific training and have the prerequisite knowledge and experience to deliver the programme
- Ensure programme trainers meet the needs and expectations of the participants

- Active training methods are recommended when providing training to adult learners
- While there are a number of considerations with regard to rolling out the training, it is equally important that there is on-going contact between the programme developers and co-ordinators to support programme fidelity.

### 6.1.3 TRANSLATING LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

The evaluation of the programme focused on the development and implementation of the training programme. The evaluators strongly recommend that a follow up evaluation is conducted in the future to assess the long-term effectiveness of the training programme on quality within the services. The findings from the focus groups in particular generated some key learning with regard to putting the training into practice, these key learning points include:

*Time to plan for practice* – if a training programme is to be sufficiently and effectively implemented within settings, staff must be provided with non-contact time to plan this implementation. The Quality through Professionalisation programme requires staff to complete a series of planning and documentation, the time required to work on this is significant and must be acknowledged if the programme is to be implemented as planned

*Time to plan for training delivery* – the trainers delivering the programme to the early years educators also require time to prepare for delivery. The programme is resource heavy and requires a substantial amount of organisation to ensure all materials are ready for the training days. This preparation time must be factored into the overall time spent delivering the programme

*Communities of practice* – rather than working in isolation, trainers expressed the usefulness of a community of practice dedicated to the delivery of the training programme; this structure would function to assist trainers in the preparation and delivery of the programme as well as provide opportunities for information sharing and the discussion of ideas and concerns

*Informed by evidence* – the collection of objective observational data using the preschool quality assessment tool offers the services participating in this programme a great opportunity to inform their future plans. The data identifies areas of strength and areas in





need of development. Going forward, services can use this information to draft action plans and development plans as well as using it as a comparison should future PQA data be gathered. It is recommended that future waves of data collection utilise the same data collector to ensure the maximum amount of inter-rater reliability.

#### **6.1.4 INVOLVING THE USERS OF THE PROGRAMME**

Involving those who will use the programme in the design of programmes, as well as being ethically preferable, has important practical advantages. A novel element of the Quality through Professionalisation programme was the engagement of users of the programme (e.g. trainers) and early years educators in the development of the programme resources. Recruitment and retention are likely to be better if the intervention is valued by potential participants, concerns about fairness are addressed and, in the case of community-based interventions, buy-in, which supports the implementation of the programme, is achieved. Involving stakeholders may also contribute to a better understanding of the process by which change is achieved. Appropriate 'users' of the programme should be involved at all stages of the development, process and outcome analysis of the programme, as this is likely to result in better, more relevant outcomes and a higher chance of producing implementable data.

## **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE PRESCHOOL QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Each individual service received a comprehensive feedback session from the assessor who conducted the Preschool Quality Assessments. The overarching recommendations arising from all of the observations are as follows:

1. It is recommended that **anecdotal daily notes** are recorded by each early years educator up to the last day of the preschool year, regardless of the type of provision being offered. Approximately 3 to 5 anecdotal notes per child per week should be recorded. These notes provide important information for individual child assessment using the Child Observation Record (COR) as well as contribute to the early years educator's daily plans
2. **Daily planning** is required by all of the early years educators together after the delivery of a session. Using all of the anecdotal notes will assist in planning the daily routine for the following day. Daily planning is essential for quality outcomes for the child based on their interests. It is recommended that daily plans stem from the child's interests, key development indicators (KDI's) and local traditions and customs

3. It is recommended that the service engages in **in-service training days** with a particular focus on adult-child interactions, child-child interactions, conflict resolution, anecdotal note-taking and transition times
4. The formulation of **Cluster Groups** are recommended; these are professional development sessions and are part of the HighScope professional development process. In a Cluster Group, early years educators meet every 6 weeks. This group session is supported by a HighScope Trainer. Topics are given to the trainer in advance who prepares material to share with the group. The Cluster Group takes the structure of a mini-workshop where discussion and information sharing is promoted by the HighScope Trainer.
5. **Implementing HighScope Approach (IHA) training** is recommended for relief staff to ensure that the HighScope curriculum is being consistently implemented across settings.

Given that one sweep of PQA observations took place in each of the services, it is also recommended that a longer term follow up is adopted to track the progress of the services which will lead to a greater opportunity to investigate any effectiveness of the training programme. Going forward, it is envisaged that the services will begin to incorporate Aistear and Síolta into their practice and it is therefore recommended that these frameworks be considered in any follow up observations within the services.

## 6.3 SIGNPOSTING FOR POLICY

### REMUNERATION FOR STAFF

The success of early childhood care and education programmes rest to a large extent on getting teacher qualifications and compensation policies right. To date, policies addressing the former have been more promising than those focusing on the latter. Low pay remains the norm for early years educators. Substantial increases in early years educators remuneration packages are required to improve the educational effectiveness of early childhood care and education programmes.

### ALLOCATION OF CHILD-FREE HOURS

Staff working within early years settings are expected to plan and reflect during contact time with children. For planning and reflection to be effective, staff must be given child-free hours. Two child-free hours per week, ensure all early years educators access non-contact time in meaningful blocks, the minimum being 30 minutes at once, however, aiming for 60 minutes.

### CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing professionalisation of staff is a key element in guaranteeing children's positive outcomes, however it is apparent from the research evidence that it is not professional development per se that has an impact on children's outcomes; the content and delivery of professional development opportunities as well as in relation to their effective contribution in addressing the current challenges faced by early years services requires careful consideration.

### INVESTMENT IN LEADERSHIP

Managers of early years services must show good effective leadership by creating and sustaining a shared vision, motivating others to change, fostering shared responsibility and facilitating solutions to everyday problems. Providing effective leadership through a change process requires skill and thoughtfulness. Support for managers of early years settings which would offer an opportunity to engage in management and leadership training is necessary for managers to take ownership of the change process.

### SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Taking into account the need for well-trained early years educators, and strong and engaged managers, investment in resources for the successful implementation of Síolta and Aistear is essential in the mainstreaming of these important national frameworks.

## 6.4 THE LEGACY OF THE QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME

An important aim of the Quality through Professionalisation programme was to ensure that at the end of the project there would be a body of evidence that would not only inform professional development plans for those working within the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland, but also that the legacy of the programme would include a conveyance of learning to other early childhood care and education services in Ireland.

The evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI demonstrated the positive short-term impacts of a training programme

targeting early years educators. Further investigation is required to ascertain the long-term effectiveness of such a programme on the professional development of those working within the sector. However, a strong legacy has been put in place to ensure that the programme continues to grow and have an impact over a longer period of time. There were three main legacies stemming from the Tallaght NEYAI, these include the implementation of Aistear and Siolta within services, building staff capacity through participation in Level 6 and Level 7 accredited modules and providing parents and staff with the resources to embed the programme aims and objectives over a longer period of time. These three main legacies are illustrated in Figure 11.

### LEGACY OF THE QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME

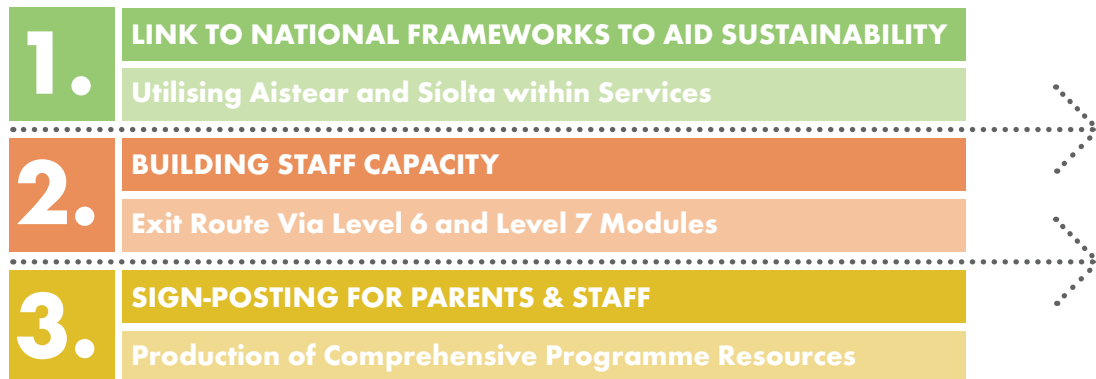
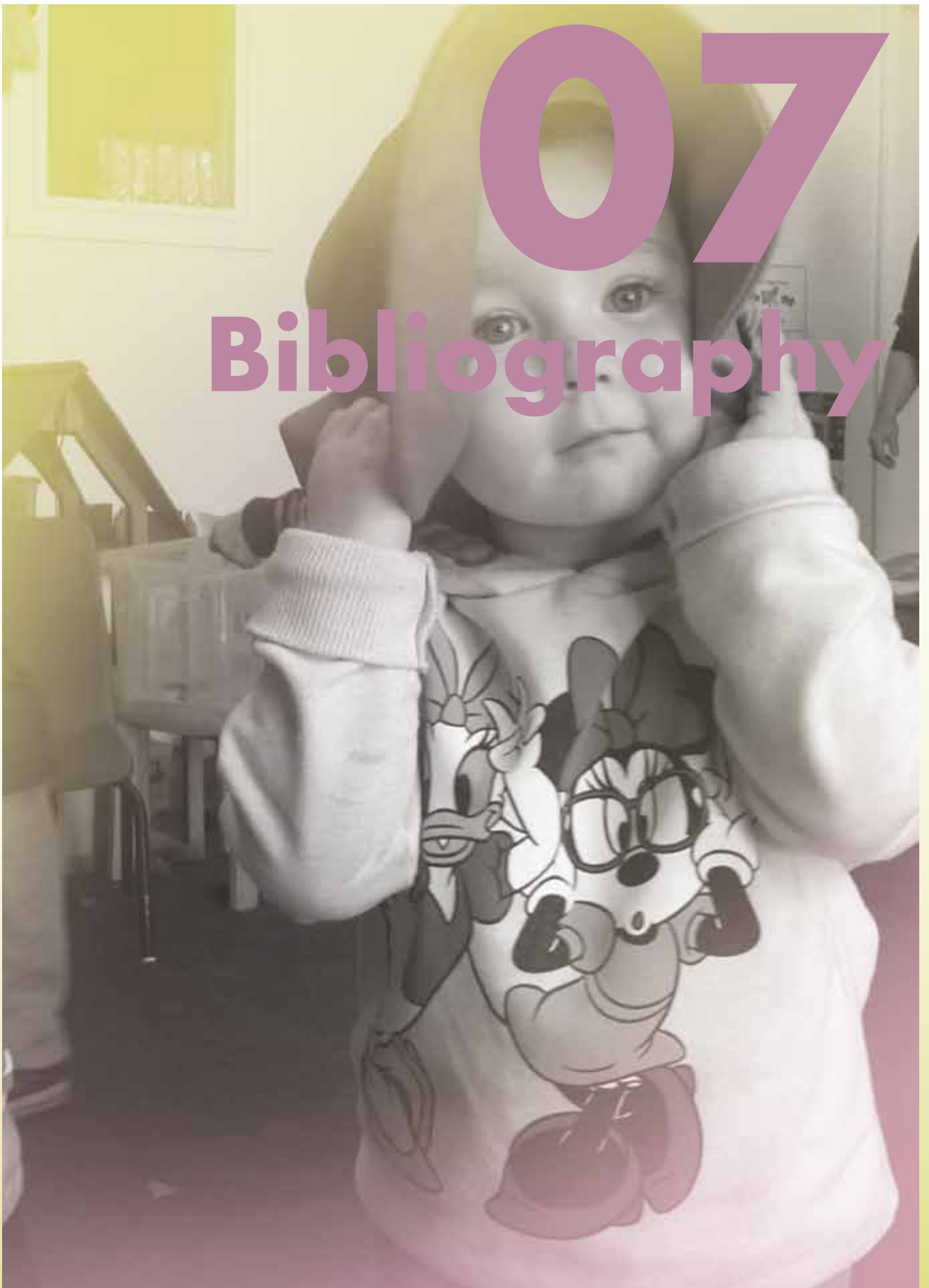


Figure 10 The Legacy of the Quality through Professionalisation programme



07

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# 07

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## APPENDIX 1: PRESCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS QUESTIONNAIRE



Preschool Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of childcare staff at the moment (incl. management)		
Total number of years spent working with children <small>see note A below</small>		
How many staff are full-time?		
How many staff are part-time?		
How many staff are CE or Job Bridge or equivalent?		
How many staff have completed level 4?		
How many staff have completed level 5?		
How many staff have completed level 6?		
How many staff have completed level 7? (e.g. Ordinary bachelor degree)		
How many staff have completed level 8? (e.g. Honours bachelor degree)		
How many staff have completed level 9? (e.g. Master's degree)		
How many staff have completed level 10? (e.g. Doctoral degree)		
In total, how many staff have completed a degree?		
In total, how many staff have completed a post-graduate qualification?		
How many staff have completed no formal childcare qualification?		
At the moment what is the total number of children on roll for the whole service?		
Is the programme full day-care? (please circle)	Y	N
Is the programme part-time sessional? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you have a baby room? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you have a wobbler room? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you have a toddler room? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you have a preschool room? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Play-based curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Montessori curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Highscope curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Friedrich Froebel curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Steiner curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run a Na Naionrai curriculum? (please circle)	Y	N
Do you run an after school service? (please circle)	Y	N
If you use another curriculum, please state it in the box here: →		
Once your service is closed in the evening, is it used for another purpose?	Y	N
If yes, what is this other purpose?		





## APPENDIX 3: SCHEDULE FOR TRAINER / MANAGER INTERVIEW

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### Tallaght NEYAI Early Years Trainers Interview Schedule

#### Introduction

Good morning, I would like to thank you all for participating in this interview, we really value the opinion of staff and we are very grateful to you for taking the time out today to meet with me.

My name is Mareesa and I am a researcher at Early Childhood Ireland, who is responsible for the local evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI. The topic we will be discussing today is your experience of being trained to deliver this programme and the actual delivery of the programme. We are confident that the information you provide will be very valuable and help shape the future development of this programme.

We will be talking with both of the trainers who delivered the programme. This will give us a great insight into the implementation of the programme.

Just a few things to note before we start...

- There are no right or wrong answers to anything I ask. Please feel free to share your point of view regardless of whether you think it's the right or wrong things to say. Please keep in mind that we are just as interested in all types of comments, so the more detailed you can be – the better
- If you have a phone on you, can you just make sure to switch it off
- My role as interviewer is to guide the discussion rather than participate in it
- Lastly, you probably notice the microphone on the table. We are taping the session because we don't want to miss any important comments. People often make very useful comments in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to get everything down. We will be on a first name basis during the session, but just to reassure you we won't use any first names or service names in the report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality.

So, let's begin.

#### Questions

##### **Section 1 Train the Trainers**

*The first part of this interview will focus on the training you received in preparation for the delivery of training to the early year's educators.*

1. Can I just clarify who delivered your training and how long did it last?
2. In terms of the training you received, what were your expectations in advance of attending that training?
3. Can you tell me about the training that you received to enable you to deliver this manual to the educators?
  - What were the challenges and enablers!
4. Tell me more about the development of the manual/ resources during the train the trainers?
5. What about the tutor that you had during the Train the Trainers? Did you feel she was effective?
  - Their experience of Siolta and Aistear?
  - Their knowledge of the Fledglings manual

## APPENDIX 3: SCHEDULE FOR TRAINER / MANAGER INTERVIEW

PAGE 2 OF 3

- Their level of confidence in terms of delivering training
- 6. Once the training was over did you feel confident about delivering the training to the educators?

### **Section 2 Manualised Training for Educators**

*This next section moves on to discuss the training you delivered to the educators.*

7. Do you feel you had all the necessary skills and resources to deliver the training?
8. The manualised training was reduced from 10 days to 7 days – what were your thoughts on this? Did it affect your delivery?
9. The training was delivered over two phases with a significant gap between phases (about 5 months), do you think this was a good idea?
  - What would your ideal training model be?
10. What are your thoughts on mixing staff from various services for the training?
11. How did the manual work for you as a trainer?
12. What teaching techniques did you find useful?
  - The opening circle?
  - Small group work?
  - Large group work?
  - Flip chats? Post-its?
13. Thinking about the resources you used during the training (Fledglings manual, Aistear and Siolta and Highscope documents, PQA, overheads, hand-outs, etc.), did you feel you had everything you needed to deliver the training effectively?
14. Tell me about the level of preparatory work you had to do for each of the training days?
15. You are also the manager of a service and some of your staff attended the training, how did you feel about this?
16. How do you think the training could be improved for you as the trainer and for staff as the learners?

### **Section 3 Implementing Change in your Setting**

*You are also the manager of a preschool involved in the programme, the following questions seek to find out how you plan to implement the learning within the preschool?*

17. Do you think the Fledglings manual is a useful tool for your service?
18. Have you thought about how you will put the training into practice?
19. The training is very much focussed on the use of a development plan within the service? A live document so-to-speak. Do you think this is a worthwhile tool? Tell me how you see you and your staff implementing the development plan?
  - If time is an issue, do you think this is a valuable enough programme for you to find the time within the schedule?
20. Not all staff for all of the Fledglings services attended the training, how do you think the messages and learning from the training can reach those staff?

### **Section 4 Looking Forward**

21. What do you think are the necessary elements of a training programme that must be in place to support the effective delivery of that programme?

## APPENDIX 3: SCHEDULE FOR TRAINER / MANAGER INTERVIEW

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22. What do you think are the necessary ingredients for training programmes targeting early year’s educators?
23. Do you see the feedback from the PQA observations informing your future work?
24. Finally, do you feel that you and your staff having everything necessary to implement the vision for this programme?

### Probes and pauses

- Adopt a 5 second pause
- Would you please explain that further?
- Would you give me an example of that?
- I don’t understand, could you please tell me a bit more?

### Consent to participate in Tallaght NEYAI Trainers Interview

You have been invited to participate in this interview because you played a significant role in the programme as a whole and we are really interested in hearing your views of many aspects of the programme. We are really grateful for your participation. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about the training you received, the training you delivered and the next steps in terms of implementing the learning within your preschools. The information learned in this interview will be used to inform the development of future training.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the interview and stop at any time. Although the interview will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. We want to hear as many different perspectives as possible. For reasons of confidentiality, you are asked not to discuss the interview outside of this session.

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 4: SCHEDULE FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS FOCUS GROUPS

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### Tallaght NEYAI Early Years Educators Focus Group Schedule

#### Introduction

Good evening. I would like to thank you all for participating in this focus group, we really value the opinion of staff and we are very grateful to you for taking the time out today to meet with me.

My name is Mareesa and I am a researcher at Early Childhood Ireland, who is responsible for the local evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI. The topic we will be discussing today is your experience of the programme, what you liked, what you didn't like, how training programmes such as the one in question might be improved. With your feedback and opinions we hope to be able to inform future training programmes.

You have been randomly selected to participate in this focus group after we had 9 early years educators say that they were interested in taking part, however we required 6 so we had to pick from a hat.

We will be holding another focus group with the early year's educators who are completing their training in July.

Just a few things to note before we start...

- There are no right or wrong answers rather different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please keep in mind that we are just as interested in all types of comments, so the more detailed you can be – the better
- You don't need to agree with others, but I would ask you to listen respectfully as others share their views
- If you have a phone on you, can you just make sure to switch it off
- My role as moderator is to guide the discussion rather than participate in it
- Lastly, you probably noticed the microphone on the table. We are taping the session because we don't want to miss any important comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to get everything down. We will be on a first name basis during the session, but just to reassure you we won't use any first names or service names in the report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality.

So, let's begin.

#### Questions

##### Section 1 – General thoughts and Quality within Early Years settings

1. How did you feel when you first heard about the Tallaght NEYAI programme?
2. What do you believe high quality childcare and education is?
3. What do you think influences high quality childcare and education?
4. What do you think are the barriers to high quality childcare and education?

##### Section 2 – The training programme

1. Thinking back over the training, what was your fondest memory of the training?
2. Has the programme had any impact on you and the work you do? What were your personal learning experiences?

## APPENDIX 4: SCHEDULE FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS FOCUS GROUPS

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- a. *Prompt: Knowledge*
  - b. *Prompt: Skills*
  - c. *Prompt: Values*
3. What are your thoughts on aligning Highscope with Aistear and Siolta?
    - a. Prompt: Is it beneficial?
    - b. Prompt: Is it something that will prove difficult?
  4. Have any of your services started using the development record? Can you tell me how this is going?

### Section 3 - Looking forward

5. What do you think are the necessary ingredients for training programmes targeting early year's educators?

### Probes and pauses

- Adopt a 5 second pause
- Would you please explain that further?
- Would you give me an example of that?
- I don't understand, could you please tell me a bit more?

### Consent to participate in Tallaght NEYAI Focus Group

You have been invited to participate in this focus group because you said that you were interested in doing so. We are really grateful for your participation. The purpose of this group is to understand more about how you felt about participating in the Tallaght NEYAI Training. The information learned in the focus group will be used to design future programmes which are intended to impact quality in early year's settings.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear as many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one person speaks at a time and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 5: SCHEDULE FOR COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

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### Tallaght NEYAI Early Years Co-Ordinator Interview Schedule

#### Introduction

Good morning, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview, we really value the opinion of the coordinator and we are very grateful to you for taking the time out today to meet with me.

My name is Mareesa and I am a researcher at Early Childhood Ireland, who is responsible for the local evaluation of the Tallaght NEYAI. The topic we will be discussing today is your experience of being trained to deliver this programme and the actual delivery of the programme. We are confident that the information you provide will be very valuable and help shape the future development of this programme.

Just a few things to note before we start...

- There are no right or wrong answers to anything I ask. Please feel free to share your point of view regardless of whether you think it's the right or wrong things to say. Please keep in mind that we are just as interested in all types of comments, so the more detailed you can be – the better
- If you have a phone on you, can you just make sure to switch it off
- My role as interviewer is to guide the discussion rather than participate in it
- Lastly, you probably notice the microphone on the table. We are taping the session because we don't want to miss any important comments. People often make very useful comments in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to get everything down. We will be on a first name basis during the session, but just to reassure you we won't use any first names or service names in the report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality.

So, let's begin.

#### Questions

##### Section 1 General information about the Tallaght NEYAI

Can you describe to me the organisational structure of An Cosan and Fledglings?

Can you describe the vision for the Tallaght NEYAI?

Can you describe the rationale for the Tallaght NEYAI?

Can you please tell me about the consortium?

- a) How it came about?
- b) The agencies/ organisations represented on the consortium?
- c) Can you please draw it?

This project started with an application to Pobal in 2010, there has been many milestones since then, can we try and plot some of these milestones on a timeline?

##### Section 2 Development of the Fledglings Manual

There have been a number of documents created to support the implementation of this programme,

## APPENDIX 5: SCHEDULE FOR COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

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Can you tell me about the development of the Fledglings manual and associated documents?

- a) Who? Ownership?
- b) When?
- c) Revisions?

This programme has been accredited as a Level 6 module (Curriculum Design), can you just give me some details around that?

Also, in relation to that L6 module, is there a module descriptor for that?

Can you describe to me the vision for the Fledglings manual and associated documents?

I believe that there is a special needs element to the Fledglings manual, can you tell me a bit about this?

### Section 3 Train the Trainers

Can you please explain how people were identified for the Train the Trainers?

Once the participants were identified, how was the training communicated with the trainers?

Do you believe that the trainers knew what the training was about?

Can you describe who delivered the training?

- a) Highscope Ireland/ Early Years Northern Ireland – their relationship?

What was the rationale behind training ~25 trainers to deliver the training?

Some managers were involved more in the programme than others, is there a plan to bring the other managers 'up-to-speed'?

### Section 4 The training for the early years educators

Originally, there was a plan for some Cork services to be involved and also some NCNA services (now ECI), can you describe why this changed? Were the Cork services the NCNA services?

Can you tell me about how early year's educators were made aware of this training?

Not all Siolta standards were covered in the manual or the training. Can you tell me more about this?

Not all staff received the training. Can you tell me about any plans to train those staff?

### Section 5 Challenges and Successes

Over the course of this programme, can you tell me about:

- a) The factors that challenged the development of the Tallaght NEYAI

*ITT closing*

*Trainer availability*

*Rescheduling of training*

*Restructuring of training*

*Consortium working (were any supports leveraged from the members of the consortium?)*

*Revisions of manuals*



## APPENDIX 5: SCHEDULE FOR COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

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b) The factors that promoted its development

In terms of the project aims and objectives, there has been some deviation from the original proposal to Pobal in 2010 – can you describe why this happened?

Maura, your role on the project has been extraordinary. Can you tell me about some of the challenges you faced?

Furthermore, can you describe to me what assisted you in doing your job?

### Section 5 Looking Forward

What do you think are the necessary elements of a training programme that must be in place to support the effective delivery of that programme?

What do you think are the necessary ingredients for training programmes targeting early year's educators? So in other words, what should the training look like?

### Probes and pauses

- Adopt a 5 second pause
- Would you please explain that further?
- Would you give me an example of that?
- I don't understand, could you please tell me a bit more?

### Consent to participate in Tallaght NEYAI Trainers Interview

You have been invited to participate in this interview because you played a significant role in the programme as a whole and we are really interested in hearing your views of many aspects of the programme. We are really grateful for your participation. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about the training you received, the training you delivered and the next steps in terms of implementing the learning within your preschools. The information learned in this interview will be used to inform the development of future training.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the interview and stop at any time. Although the interview will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. We want to hear as many different perspectives as possible. For reasons of confidentiality, you are asked not to discuss the interview outside of this session.

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 6: OVERALL COURSE EVALUATION

### Overall Course Evaluation (using daily reflections) The 7 Day Training Programme for Early Years Educators Training of Early Years Educators in the An Cosán/Fledglings Manual

#### Course Aim:

To equip EYEs with the knowledge, skill and competence required to develop and implement a broad based curriculum in an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) setting.

1. How were the learning outcomes met?

2. What impact will it have on your daily practice?

3. Identify your personal learning?	
1.	2.
3.	4.

4. What are your future training needs?

*THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS EVALUATION FORM*

## APPENDIX 7: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – TRAINER / MANAGER INTERVIEW

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No.	Item	Description	Response
<b>Domain 1: Research Team and Reflexivity</b>			
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>			
1.	Interviewer/ facilitator	Who conducted the interview?	Mareesa O’Dwyer
2.	Credentials	What are the researcher’s credentials?	PhD
3.	Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	Researcher
4.	Gender	Was the researcher male or female?	Female
5.	Experience and training	What experience did the researcher have?	7 years’ research experience with young children and in preschools
<i>Relationship with participants</i>			
6.	Relationship established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	Yes
7.	Participant knowledge of interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher?	They knew the researcher for 9 months and were aware of the reasons for conducting the research
8.	Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer?	The reasons and interests in the research topic were reported.
<b>Domain 2: Study Design</b>			
<i>Theoretical Framework</i>			
9.	Methodological orientation and theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study?	Thematic analysis
<i>Participant selection</i>			
10.	Sampling	How were the participants selected?	Purposive sampling
11.	Method of approach	How were the participants approached?	In person
12.	Sample size	How many participants were in the study?	2
13.	Non-participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Give reasons.	None
<i>Setting</i>			
14	Setting of data collection	Where was the data collected?	Researchers workplace
15.	Presence of non-participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and the researcher?	No
16.	Description of sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample?	Two females who delivered the training programme and were also managers at two of the participating preschools

## APPENDIX 7: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – TRAINER / MANAGER INTERVIEW

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<i>Data Collection</i>			
17.	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	Yes there was an interview guide. No it was not pilot tested
18.	Repeat interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out?	No
19.	Audio/ visual record	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	Yes, a dictaphone was used.
20.	Field notes	Were field notes made during and/ or after the interview?	Field notes were taken after the interview to record the experience.
21.	Duration	What was the duration of the interview?	58 and 61 minutes
22.	Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	No
23.	Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment?	No
<b>Domain 3: Analysis and Findings</b>			
<i>Data Analysis</i>			
24.	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	1
25.	Description of coding tree	Did authors provide a description of coding tree?	Yes, this can be accessed through software package
26.	Derivation of themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from data?	Themes were derived from data.
27.	Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	IBM SPSS Text Analytics V.4
28.	Participant checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No
<i>Reporting</i>			
29.	Quotations presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/ findings? Was each quotation identified?	Yes quotes were used. Quotes were non-identifiable
30.	Data and findings consistent	Was there were a consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes, there is consistency between data presented and the findings.
31.	Clarity of major themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes, these were identified by using headings within the text
32.	Clarity of minor themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes, as with major themes these were identified and discussed.

## APPENDIX 8: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – STAFF FOCUS GROUP

PAGE 1 OF 2

No.	Item	Description	Response
<b>Domain 1: Research Team and Reflexivity</b>			
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>			
1.	Interviewer/ facilitator	Who conducted the interview?	Mareesa O’Dwyer
2.	Credentials	What are the researcher’s credentials?	PhD
3.	Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	Researcher
4.	Gender	Was the researcher male or female?	Female
5.	Experience and training	What experience did the researcher have?	7 years’ research experience working with young children and in preschools
<i>Relationship with participants</i>			
6.	Relationship established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	Yes
7.	Participant knowledge of interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher?	They knew the researcher for 8 months and were aware of the reasons for conducting the research
8.	Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer?	The reasons and interests in the research topic were presented prior to the focus group
<b>Domain 2: Study Design</b>			
<i>Theoretical Framework</i>			
9.	Methodological orientation and theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study?	Thematic analysis
<i>Participant selection</i>			
10.	Sampling	How were the participants selected?	Purposive sampling. Where we had more than 6 staff members from the one service interested in participating in the focus group, we randomly selected 6 from the group
11.	Method of approach	How were the participants approached?	In person following the completion of their training programme
12.	Sample size	How many participants were in the study?	12
13.	Non-participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Give reasons.	14 participants said they were not interested in taking part as they had prior engagements, were on holidays or could not find childcare.

## APPENDIX 8: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – STAFF FOCUS GROUP

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<i>Setting</i>			
14	Setting of data collection	Where was the data collected?	Researchers workplace
15.	Presence of non-participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and the researcher?	No
16.	Description of sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample?	Female early years educators working within preschools situated in areas of high to very high deprivation.
<i>Data Collection</i>			
17.	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	Yes, there was a focus group schedule. No it was not pilot tested.
18.	Repeat interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out?	No
19.	Audio/ visual record	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	Yes, a dictaphone was used.
20.	Field notes	Were field notes made during and/ or after the interview?	Field notes were taken after the interview to record the experience.
21.	Duration	What was the duration of the interview?	44 and 45 minutes
22.	Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	No
23.	Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment?	No
<b>Domain 3: Analysis and Findings</b>			
<i>Data Analysis</i>			
24.	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	1
25.	Description of coding tree	Did authors provide a description of coding tree?	Yes, this can be accessed through software package.
26.	Derivation of themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from data?	Major themes were derived from data.
27.	Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	IBM SPSS Text Analytics V.4
28.	Participant checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No
<i>Reporting</i>			
29.	Quotations presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/ findings? Was each quotation identified?	Yes quotes were used. Quotes were non-identifiable.
30.	Data and findings consistent	Was there were a consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes, there is consistency between data presented and the findings.
31.	Clarity of major themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes, these were identified by the number of respondents who referred to them.
32.	Clarity of minor themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes, as with major themes these were identified and discussed.

## APPENDIX 9: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

PAGE 1 OF 2

No.	Item	Description	Response
<b>Domain 1: Research Team and Reflexivity</b>			
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>			
1.	Interviewer/ facilitator	Who conducted the interview?	Mareesa O’Dwyer
2.	Credentials	What are the researcher’s credentials?	PhD
3.	Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	Researcher
4.	Gender	Was the researcher male or female?	Female
5.	Experience and training	What experience did the researcher have?	7 years’ research experience with young children and in preschools
<i>Relationship with participants</i>			
6.	Relationship established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	Yes
7.	Participant knowledge of interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher?	They knew the researcher for 9 months and were aware of the reasons for conducting the research
8.	Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer?	The reasons and interests in the research topic were reported.
<b>Domain 2: Study Design</b>			
<i>Theoretical Framework</i>			
9.	Methodological orientation and theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study?	Thematic analysis
<i>Participant selection</i>			
10.	Sampling	How were the participants selected?	Purposive sampling
11.	Method of approach	How were the participants approached?	In person
12.	Sample size	How many participants were in the study?	1
13.	Non-participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Give reasons.	None
<i>Setting</i>			
14	Setting of data collection	Where was the data collected?	Participants workplace
15.	Presence of non-participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and the researcher?	No
16.	Description of sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample?	Female coordinator of a national preschool quality improvement initiative

## APPENDIX 9: CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

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<i>Data Collection</i>			
17.	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	Yes there was an interview guide. No it was not pilot tested.
18.	Repeat interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out?	No
19.	Audio/ visual record	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	Yes, a dictaphone was used.
20.	Field notes	Were field notes made during and/ or after the interview?	Field notes were taken after the interview to record the experience.
21.	Duration	What was the duration of the interview?	60 minutes
22.	Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	No
23.	Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment?	No
<b>Domain 3: Analysis and Findings</b>			
<i>Data Analysis</i>			
24.	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	1
25.	Description of coding tree	Did authors provide a description of coding tree?	Yes, this can be accessed through software package
26.	Derivation of themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from data?	Themes were derived from data.
27.	Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	IBM SPSS Text Analytics V.4
28.	Participant checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No
<i>Reporting</i>			
29.	Quotations presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/ findings? Was each quotation identified?	Yes quotes were used. Quotes were non-identifiable
30.	Data and findings consistent	Was there were a consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes, there is consistency between data presented and the findings.
31.	Clarity of major themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes, these were identified by using headings within the text
32.	Clarity of minor themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes, as with major themes these were identified and discussed.



For further information on the  
Tallaght NEYAI Evaluation  
– Quality through Professionalisation

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