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## The history and work of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) (2001-2008)

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## 7 The history and work of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) (2001–2008)

### Introduction

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was established in a context where, in Ireland, distinct traditions of ‘care’ and ‘education’ existed. State involvement in early childhood provision was uneven across the care and education divide. Apart from provision for children designated ‘at risk’ and in need of protection, the preschool sector had developed in a relatively ad hoc way with little State engagement with services at any level (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2004). Meanwhile, early childhood education in infant classes (children aged 4 to 6 years) was an integral part of primary schooling from the beginning of the national system of education in Ireland from its inception in 1831 (O’Connor 2010). This gave rise to a split system of ECEC. When, at the turn of the millennium ECEC in Ireland moved to the foreground of government policy, the Department of Health was responsible for children under four and the Department of Education and Science (DES) was responsible for children aged 4 to 6. Recognition of the need to address this split was one of the overarching factors that shaped the rationale for the CECDE, the way the Agency was structured and managed, and how it progressed the task of developing and coordinating early childhood education.

This chapter offers an account of the history and work of the CECDE. It begins by describing the import, for subsequent developments in Ireland, of international and national debate regarding the development of provision

for quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the final decade of the twentieth century. Against this background, the establishment of the CECDE is described. In chronological order, the chapter charts the work of the CECDE from its inception in 2001 until its closure in 2008. It documents the outputs of the Centre including major publications, funded PhD studies and international conferences. The significance of key outputs of the CECDE for the subsequent development of the ECEC sector are discussed. In particular, the process of the development of *Siolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (CECDE 2006a), is foregrounded. The continuing influence of the framework on subsequent sectoral developments is a key theme of the chapter. Tensions and struggles culminating in the eventual closure of the CECDE in 2008 are documented. Throughout, the authors offer an insider view on the history, work and management of the CECDE, while at the same time drawing on key publications of the time to include objective commentary.

## Background and context

In the decade 1990–2000, there was considerable international debate on ways of expanding the provision for ECEC, whilst ensuring an emphasis on quality (Moss and Pence 1995, Woodhead 1996). In Ireland, the 1997 programme for government, *An Action Plan for the Millennium* (Government of Ireland 1997), referenced early childhood education as an area for policy and for expenditure over the coming years. While the infant classes in primary schools provided ECEC for children aged 4 and 5 years, participation rates for children under 4 years were low compared to other European countries. A further 1,500 children availed of the DES Early Start Programme, established in 1994 in forty primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage. Early Start was a one-year preschool intervention designed to meet the needs of 3-to-5-year-old children deemed to be at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system.

There was also a limited but less visible number of personnel working in the preschool and childcare sector. This consisted mainly of part-time workers in small scale voluntary services with varying levels of formal qualifications, but many with rich experience of working with young children, often in disadvantaged circumstances (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR] 2002). Terms and conditions of employment were often low given that there was little understanding at that time of the significance and complexity of early childhood education issues and even less state support (Coolahan et al. 2017). However, due in part to the provision of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme funding for capital projects, and increased staffing from 2000 onwards, a sense of vibrancy then began to grow in the sector.

Arising from the *Report on The National Forum for Early Childhood Education* (Coolahan 1998), the *White Paper on Early Childhood Education: Ready to Learn* (Government of Ireland 1999) was published. This provided for the development of an independent Early Childhood Education Agency (ECEA), charged with implementing the provisions of the *White Paper*. It also provided for an Early Years Development Unit (EYDU) within the DES to promote coordination of provision and policy formulation and to ‘kickstart’ developments. It was envisaged that the DES would devolve executive functions and focus on broad policy issues and high-level coordination.

There was an evident reluctance by the DES to establish the Agency in 1999. An explanation may be discerned in the statement that ‘early childhood education is a relatively new area for the Department and is underdeveloped nationally’ (Government of Ireland 1999: 107). An integrated perspective on care and education was certainly not yet evident in key initiatives of government. However, the *White Paper* heralded opportunities for changes in orientation of the relationship between care and education. Childcare and early childhood education had long been considered separate endeavours, both in policy development but also on the ground, and that ambivalence within the DES to the idea of an integrated approach to ECEC continued into the next decade. This dichotomy was also addressed in later reports of both the OECD (2004) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2005).

By 2001 there was increasing interest and consequent pressure in many countries to address issues related to ECEC. *Starting Strong*, an OECD thematic study on provision and policy in twelve European countries was launched. It offered perspectives and recommendations to guide member states in developing their integrated systems (OECD 2001). This, along with expectations within the ECEC community arising from *The National Forum* (Coolahan 1998) and the *White Paper* (Government of Ireland 1999), and developments in other aligned countries, no doubt exerted some pressure on the Irish government to make a tentative move in the direction of provision of State support for children below school-going age.

### Establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Care (CECDE)

In November 2001, the CECDE was announced and heralded as the forerunner of the proposed ECEA Agency. It was formally launched by the Minister for Education and Science in October 2002. A *Memorandum of Agreement* (CECDE 2001a) detailed the governance and structures of the Centre and outlined three objectives which were drawn from the 1999 *White Paper*:

- Develop a National Quality Framework (NQF) for all settings with children from birth to 6 years, including support mechanisms for staff and tools for assessment of quality
- Develop targeted interventions for children who are disadvantaged or have special needs
- Prepare the groundwork for establishment of the Early Childhood Education Agency as envisioned in the 1999 White Paper.

The Centre was jointly managed by St Patrick's College (now Dublin City University) and the Dublin Institute of Technology (now Technological University Dublin). This was a highly significant partnership which indicated willingness on the part of the two institutions, coming from two

different traditions, to come together to promote the integration of care and education within the sector. The two institutions brought their own perspectives on early childhood education and this melding of perspectives led to many robust and productive debates on how ECEC should be conceptualized, and the above objectives progressed.

An annual budget (c.€1 million p.a. including salaries) was granted for each of the years the Centre was in existence. However, tensions regarding the annual approval of this budget existed from the outset and was a source of constant frustration at all levels of governance of the Centre. Each year, timely reports and requests were submitted to the DES for budget approval and each year there were long delays in securing a response. Throughout the lifetime of the Centre, this had consequential impacts on employment contracts, funded projects and the day-to-day running of the Centre.

Governance was determined by the *Memorandum of Agreement* (CECDE 2001A). The Steering Committee was chaired by a succession of DES officials. Members included an international expert on ECEC, a DES inspector and two members of each of the two institutions engaged with the project. The Steering Committee met an average of four times a year. The Management Board consisted of three members drawn from each of the two institutions. It met about ten times each year from 2001 to 2008. It established subcommittees to support the CECDE team in relation to areas such as research, budget, recruitment and communication. Membership of these boards is detailed in Note 1 at the end of the chapter.

Staffing of the Centre consisted of a Director, an Assistant Director, three Development Officers, an Information Officer/Librarian, an Administrator and several fixed-term Research Assistants (see Note 2 at the end of this chapter), though it was 2003 before the full team was in place. Three priorities were identified in the *Programme of Work: Appendix to the Memorandum of Agreement* (CECDE 2001B). These were quality of provision, coordination of provision and research into issues of curriculum, teaching methodologies and parent involvement. In 2002, the European Council agreed the Barcelona objectives for childcare facilities (European Commission 2013) and targets were set whereby Member States were

to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 per cent of children between 3 years and the mandatory school age (6 years), and to at least 33 per cent of children under 3 years of age. This introduced a sense of urgency into developing a framework for the development of provision and policy in Ireland, and the CECDE set about putting in place the structures and processes required. The DES/Steering Committee worked closely with the Board and Director in determining how best to proceed and by mid-2002 the Centre was poised to play a central role in developments over the coming years.

The core objective of the CECDE was to develop a National Quality Framework (NQF) and initially preparing the groundwork for this was the major focus. The remit for the NQF was that it should have three elements:

- Standards that define what is understood by quality in the Irish context
- Assessment of quality
- Supporting quality in practice.

To do this the foundation of an agreed conceptual framework had to be laid, a collaborative process which proved to be challenging and lengthy, but which ultimately was very successful.

## CECDE research strategy

As indicated above, the themes of quality, access, inclusion and coordination determined the scope of the work of the CECDE and these reflected the themes government was most keen to address in the decade from 1999 onwards. The CECDE Work Programme (CECDE 2003), Implementation Strategies and outputs ensured that these themes were kept to the fore in the interactions between the CECDE and the DES in the years 2001–2008.

The Research Strategy published in early 2003 was ambitious, wide-ranging and comprehensive (CECDE 2003). It sought to implement the

initial CECDE Programme of Work, but also incorporated work related to the gaps and deficits that were identified in the audit of research (Walsh 2003). Its work was progressed from 2002 by the Director and staff of the Centre and by the Research Sub-Committee of the Management Board, established in early 2003. The Strategy comprised of several strands which included overarching research on how young children develop and learn in the Irish context; a national and international overview of good practices, policies and research in ECEC; quality-related research interrogating the meaning of quality in the Irish context; the key characteristics of a quality curriculum for the early years and the values underpinning the existing primary school curriculum. It also sought to investigate good practices across a range of issues central to ECEC and to examine research on aspects of educational disadvantage, particularly the need for targeted responses for children in the birth to 3 age group and research on ways of engaging parents of children often marginalized in consultative processes. Special needs education was also a focus of the Strategy, as were issues such as the transition of children from preschool to formal schooling, children's experiences of second language acquisition, and practitioners' perspectives about play and learning in the Irish context.

The Work Programme Implementation Strategy drawn up by the Centre for the period October 2006–December 2007 (CECDE 2006b) gives some sense of the considerable progress made in relation to its remit. It detailed the range of areas that the Centre was targeting at that point. Areas of work included, for instance, the updating of the research audit; commissioning of targeted projects; further recruitment of PhD students; procedures and mechanisms for inspection and evaluation; assessment materials and processes; testing and evaluation of *Siolta*; resource materials; support issues; professional development and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)<sup>1</sup> survey and support.

1 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) was the Department of Education's action plan for educational inclusion (DES 2005).



## NQF research and publications

A significant step in the development of the NQF (subsequently known as *Stolta*) was the commissioning of a literature review of the domains of learning by the CECDE. It focused on five developmental domains (physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, moral and spiritual). The review was unpublished but was reported in detail in Fallon (2005). She reported that two further sections were added to the literature review to site the domains in their historical and contemporary context. The first focused on the historical and cultural context of ECEC in Ireland from the end of the nineteenth century to 1990, and the second addressed perspectives on ECEC in Ireland from 1990.

This review was seminal to the development of the NQF. It provided the evidence base for the publication *Early Childhood in Ireland: Evidence and Perspectives* (Fallon 2005). There it was noted that issues regarding usage of diverse terminology for adults working in the sector were not resolved at that time, and indeed remain unresolved today.

The evidence from the review was presented thematically:

- Child-centred learning and development
- Holistic learning and development
- Environments for learning and development
- Relationships in learning and development
- Diversity in learning and development
- Communication in learning and development
- Play in learning and development.

These themes formed the nucleus of the NQF, augmented by insights from several key pieces of research conducted by the CECDE.

Two reviews of national and international policy, practice and research relating to quality in ECEC were undertaken: *Insights on Quality. A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research relating to Quality in ECEC in Ireland 1990–2004* (Duignan and Walsh 2004) was closely followed by *Making Connections. A Review of International Policy, Practice and Research* (Schonfeld et al. 2004.) These reports and other research reports

were published in both Irish and English. The reports are available on the *Síolta* website, <[www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)>.

*Insights on Quality* recommended that the NQF take multiple perspectives on quality into account and should be flexible enough to take account of the changing needs of children, families and Irish society. In addition, it asserted that the framework should be child-centred and have a children's rights focus. The standards should cover indoor and outdoor environments, promote parental involvement, ensure appropriate levels of professional qualifications and ensure that an appropriate curriculum and suitable resources were in place. The importance of acknowledging existing expertise and quality assurance procedures was also recognized. *Insights on Quality* proposed that provision be made for the establishment of a national registration system for ECEC providers. It stressed that the implementation of the NQF should be the responsibility of a centralized agency for ECEC, fully supported by a coordinated infrastructure at national, regional and local level. Adequate and sustained funding was recommended as an overarching principle, as was a national data strategy on ECEC provision.

*Making Connections* reviewed policy, practices and research on ECEC in six countries and made recommendations relevant to the Irish context. The key recommendation was the importance of a coordinated and integrated policy framework for ECEC, either based within a single government department or through other coordinating structures (Schonfeld et al. 2004). A broad-based definition of quality was required to cater for multiple perspectives and an advisory and empowering support system was deemed necessary as well as an evaluative approach to assessment. The report concluded with a plea for a wide-ranging framework of initiatives to support quality in ECEC in Ireland.

The rights of children living in disadvantage and children with special needs were the focus of *On Target* (Duignan and Fallon 2004), an audit of services for children in these circumstances. The report recommended that a national protocol for targeted interventions be developed by the relevant government departments and that a national data strategy for the ECEC sector should also be designed. In addition, it advised that flexible and integrated structures across government departments and agencies should be initiated.

The research reports discussed above supported the development of the NQF. Indeed, the NESF report of 2005 referenced the publication of reports *Insights on Quality. A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research relating to Quality in ECEC in Ireland 1990–2004* (Duignan and Walsh 2004) and *Making Connections. A Review of International Policy, Practice and Research* (Schonfeld et al. 2004) as some of the ‘landmark initiatives’ of the preceding fifteen years (NESF 2005: 10). It perceived the CECDE as pivotal to ongoing quality development in policy, infrastructure and service provision. Likewise, the OECD Report of 2004 commented favourably on the progress made by Ireland in relation to ECEC policy in the years from 1999 to 2004. That report gave special mention to the establishment and work of the CECDE while at the same time it identified a range of issues that provided a blueprint for policy. Many of those issues were contained in the initial *Programme of Work* of the Centre (CECDE 2001b) and were subsequently identified by the OECD (2004) as central to the realization of government policy in the years that followed.

The functions of the CECDE related to quality, coordination and the identification of best practice in curriculum, teaching methodologies and parental involvement, with a particular emphasis on the experience of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs. The enormous volume of work generated by these functions was further augmented by several doctoral studentships, which were funded by the Dublin Institute of Technology, St Patrick’s College and the CECDE (see Note 3 at the end of this chapter). The commissioning of these studies was significant in the field of ECEC at the time when academic scholarship at this level was only just beginning to flourish.

## Consultation and networking

Consultation was the expectation of stakeholders who sought involvement in the development of ECEC initiatives. The CECDE was guided in its work by its Consultative Committee which comprised of over forty representatives of organizations active in the ECEC sector (see Note 4 at

the end of this chapter). This group represented the views and aspirations of the range of educators and policy advocates in the ECEC sector. The detailed consultation process that took place during the development of the NQF was particularly significant in that it promoted agreement by the ECEC sector on the future direction of quality provision. Consultation meetings with practitioners and other stakeholders were held nationally, including one in the Irish language in An Cheathrú Rua, Co. Galway.

The findings from the consultative process, published as *Talking about Quality* (Duignan and Walsh 2004), indicated a huge diversity of perspectives and philosophies regarding quality and the need for quality standards to be flexible enough to accommodate this diversity. Minimum standards were to be set down for environments in all types of ECEC settings and the best interests of the child should inform all policies and practice in ECEC. Children's voices should be heard on all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of quality in ECEC. The NQF should support national developments regarding standard setting for qualifications, mechanisms for access, transfer and progression and quality assurance procedures on education and training programmes. The NQF should facilitate the development of infrastructure to facilitate the representation of parents' perspectives in the development of policy and practice in ECEC and on parental involvement in services. *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2009a) was in the process of development at this time (NCCA 2004) and the stakeholders believed that the NQF should support the development and dissemination of this initiative. On a broader note, clear guidelines in relation to the development of policies, procedures and practice in a wide variety of ECEC settings was also to be included in the NQF. Government policy and initiatives should be aligned with the NQF and embedded in coordinated policy and provision of financial support.

Throughout its existence, there was a great deal of national and international interest in the work of the CECDE. The Centre staff were frequently invited to address national bodies and organizations. International recognition for the work of the Centre followed and team members regularly collaborated with colleagues and agencies at home and abroad, sharing expertise and disseminating the work of the CECDE. The Centre's website

and the publication of the quarterly newsletter *Alana* ensured a very visible presence for its work.

Two very successful international conferences were organized by the CECDE in Dublin Castle. The first, on *Questions of Quality*, was held in September 2004 and the conference proceedings were published in 2005 (Schonfeld et al. 2005). The CECDE continued to pursue issues of quality provision, and in February 2007 the Centre hosted its second international conference *Vision into Practice: Making Quality a Reality in the Lives of Young Children*, aimed at stimulating exchange of ideas in relation to ensuring quality provision of ECEC. These conference proceedings were published in 2008 (O'Brien et al. 2008).

### *Stolta. The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*

*Early Childhood in Ireland. Evidence and Perspectives* (Fallon 2005) synthesized the implications for the NQF under the key headings of Defining Quality, Assessing Quality and Supporting Quality (Fallon 2005). Key areas included recognizing the agentic child, reciprocal relationships, assessment, diversity, staff qualifications and parental involvement. The NQF, now entitled *Stolta* (from the Irish for seeds) to signify potential for growth, was published in 2006 (CECDE 2006a), with twelve principles of quality, sixteen standards and seventy-five components of quality. This was based on a national consensus on quality indicators in all settings that cater for children from birth to 6 years (Early Years Policy Unit 2014). It was published in four manuals, one for full and part-time care, sessional care, childminders and infant classes in primary schools.

The NQF applied to a wide range of early years settings, including childminders, preschools, playgroups, crèches and infant classes in primary school. They could be state-funded, community-based or private enterprises. It was envisioned that the NQF would:

- support individual professional practice and development
- act as a focus for teamwork and team development

- act as a tool for management, strategic planning and policy development
- provide a common base for the interactions of a varied team of professionals.

It would also support formal and informal assessment processes and common understandings amongst the broad range of adults who influence the early experiences of young children (CECDE 2006a). This assessment would be primarily internal to the setting and parents.

The principles cover twelve broad areas, all integrated and inter-dependent (Duignan et al. 2007). These were:

- The value of early childhood
- Children first
- Parents as partners
- Relationships
- Equality
- Diversity
- Environments
- Welfare
- Role of the adult
- Teamwork
- Pedagogy
- Play.

Working out from these principles, a framework of sixteen standards in practice was developed as follows:

1. Rights of the child
2. Environments
3. Parents and families
4. Consultation
5. Interactions
6. Play
7. Curriculum
8. Planning and evaluation
9. Health and welfare

10. Organization
11. Professional practice
12. Communication
13. Transitions
14. Identity and belonging
15. Legislation and regulation
16. Community involvement.

Explanatory notes accompanied each principle and standard and the standards were further delineated by components and signposts for reflection to facilitate self-study. Guidance was also given on how the standards were interlinked with each other.

With the publication of *Síolta*, the first objective of the Centre was met.

## Targeted interventions

The second objective, the implementation of targeted interventions on a pilot basis for educationally disadvantaged children and those with special needs was fast tracked in 2002 with the preparation of proposals for the provision of early childhood education targeted at children experiencing disadvantage. *On Target? An Audit of Provision of Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs among Children aged Birth to Six in Ireland* was published (Duignan and Fallon 2004). This gave rise to several CECDE-commissioned large-scale research projects which focused on a range of related areas including effective ways to identify children at risk of disadvantage, parental involvement and representation among parents experiencing disadvantage, and structures to ensure their participation in decisions about ECEC. These were published as executive summaries (see Note 5 at the end of this chapter). In 2006, the CECDE-commissioned research on the nature of the ECEC provision available in Ireland. Provision available to children with special needs and effective early interventions for these children was a particular focus of the study and an executive summary was published as *Early Years Provision for*

*Children from Birth to Six Years with Special Needs in Two Geographical Areas in Ireland* (Kelleher et al. 2006).

## Structures

The third objective of the Centre, that of preparing the way for the ECEA, was to all intents achieved by 2006. The NQF was in place, the Implementation Strategy was ready and there was a wealth of research now available on which to base policy and practice in developing the sector in an effective, integrated and coordinated way.

In retrospect, however, warning signs about the future of the CECDE were becoming evident. DES ambivalence towards the establishment of the ECEA was apparent as early as May 2004. There was some procrastination in the offering of contracts, but a new three-year contract was signed by the Director and Assistant Director in the summer of 2005. However only one-year contracts were offered to other employees from that point onwards, including those seconded to the CECDE. Also, no new Memorandum of Agreement with the DES was forthcoming despite the best efforts of the Management Board and Steering Committee. All of this left the CECDE in somewhat of a precarious position. Nevertheless, the work continued, and a new Implementation Strategy was agreed (CECDE 2006b).

At this point, pressure was building to address the issue of integration of policy and services. This pressure was exerted by, for example, the observations in the OECD Report of 2004 and those of the NESF Report of 2005. Both reports were adamant in their insistence that what was required at this point was a National Plan, leading to a coordinated system of policy implementation and the development of an effective and coordinated system of ECEC. The Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU), first mooted in the White Paper (Government of Ireland 1999), was finally established in 2006. Its remit was to oversee the development of an integrated, coordinated system of early childhood education. It assumed responsibility for the preparation of plans for a phased implementation of the early childhood education dimension of DEIS, the Department's action plan for educational



inclusion (DES 2005). Several of the early education initiatives supported by the DES, such as Early Start and Traveller Preschools, came within the remit of the new unit. Significantly, the EYEPU assumed responsibility for oversight of the CECDE, previously under the remit of the Central Policy Unit of the DES. It was assigned several functions related to policy development issues. The establishment of the EYEPU was the first real effort at government level to integrate the early childhood sector into the broader educational sphere. By 2007, it appeared that continuance of the Centre in this new order within the DES was again under review. This was despite earlier indications that the future of the CECDE was secure.

## Closure of the CECDE

Throughout 2007/2008, members of the Management Board of the CECDE were increasingly concerned about issues that had been simmering for a considerable time. First, there were tensions between the Management Board, the Steering Committee and the DES in relation to the pension position of staff for which the Board was seeking a resolution from the DES. Second, there was the lack of employment certainty past September 2008 for staff who were on rolling contracts. Third, there were ongoing difficulties in planning the work programme arising from continued delays in confirming a budget for the Centre. The programme included providing on site mentoring services to 300 preschools, most of which were in disadvantaged areas.

In June 2007, the Board Members representing St Patrick's College and the Dublin Institute of Technology, the two Institutions managing the CECDE met with the DES Chairperson of the CECDE Steering Committee to discuss these matters. They were reassured somewhat when it was stated that the DES was in favour of putting pilot projects such as CECDE onto a statutory basis. However, it was also stated that the CECDE should move to a more operational role, particularly in relation to the early years component of DEIS. In essence, this signalled plans for a change in the role and remit of the Centre.

The closure of the Centre was announced in October 2008, effective from the end of November 2008. It was an enormous shock to all involved, including the officials of the DES who had supported and advocated for the work of the Centre within the DES. The reason given by the then Minister for Education and Science was the economic crisis that had just struck the country. It is quite likely that the issues outlined above also contributed to the decision to bring this ECEC satellite home to within government offices. Six members of staff immediately became unemployed. Two were redeployed within the DES. The ECEC community that had invested such faith in the promise of a developing and consolidating force for the sector was dismayed. There were many protests and appeals. The significant value offered by the Centre was a point frequently made by those who publicly objected, as was the loss of expertise and momentum in advancing care and education services in the early years. The government's commitment to ECEC was once again questioned publicly, as was its appreciation of the critical nature of the work that the Centre was doing.

## Conclusion

The work output of the Centre was impressive by any standards, and its quality in terms of coherence, cohesiveness and relevance was to prove itself in the years that followed. The large body of rigorous research it carried out in the period 2001–2008 (see Note 5 at the end of this chapter) gives an insight into provision, policy and practice as it was during those years. Strengths as well as concerns were identified. Areas for development were highlighted, as were aspects that required further investment. CECDE research and development provided the evidence base on which recommendations for the future of the sector were made.

The *Siolta* framework, designed to assist the process of defining, assessing and supporting quality improvements in ECEC contexts, provided the basis for a major quality assurance initiative. The CECDE developed the *Siolta Quality Assurance Programme* (QAP) at the end of 2008, just as the Centre was being closed. This was a combined project between the

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), the DES and the NCCA, and was subsequently managed by the DES from 2010.

In order to address an initial lack of clarity about the interface between *Aistear* and *Siolta*, the two frameworks were aligned. This led to the publication of the comparative document on similarities between the two frameworks (NCCA 2009b). A decade after the launch of *Siolta*, the National *Siolta/Aistear* Initiative (NSAI) was established in 2016. Its purpose was to support the implementation of both frameworks with trained mentors and other resources. *Siolta* itself is now published as one consolidated manual (DES 2017). *Siolta*, along with *Aistear*, is now a crucial component of the criteria for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, the Better Start Mentoring Programmes and the Early Years Education Inspections. It continues to provide a key platform from which quality provision in the early years is viewed and enjoys widespread recognition both nationally and internationally.

Despite developments since the closure of the CECDE, including the establishment of a full ministerial position for Children and Youth Affairs in 2011, the fragmentation of policy development and service delivery in the sector continues. Walsh (2016) outlines the complex web of entanglement of government departments and agencies which continue to be responsible for the development and implementation of early childhood education policy. There is still no one department or agency with overall responsibility for the development of early childhood education policy and for driving a comprehensive vision. As a result, there exists an ongoing lack of coherence in terms of policies. In some instances, manageability difficulties have arisen for those seeking to implement disparate policies, with policies in health, safety and early childhood education sometimes contravening each other. For instance, it is regrettable that the Department of Health did not align with the NQF (*Siolta*) in the work that led to the publication of the *Tusla Quality and Regulatory Framework* (QRF) in 2018 (Tusla 2018).

Nevertheless, the CECDE made a major contribution to the ongoing project of developing quality in ECEC in its short lifespan and its work continues to influence policy and practice today.

## Note 1: Membership of CECDE Committees

### *Steering Committee Members*

Lesley Abbot, Manchester Metropolitan University (chair)  
Richard Byrne, Department of Education and Science  
John Donovan, Dublin Institute of Technology  
John Fanning, Department of Education and Science  
Deirdre Liddy, Department of Education and Science  
Nóirín Hayes, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Liam Mac Mathúna, St Patrick's College  
Anne McGough, St Patrick's College  
Breda Naughton, Department of Education and Science  
John Quinlan, Department of Education and Science  
Alan Wall, Department of Education and Science  
Margaret Whelan, Dublin Institute of Technology

### *Board of Management Members*

Siobhán Bradley, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Elizabeth Dunphy, St Patrick's College  
Nóirín Hayes, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Marie Kennedy, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Anne McGough, St Patrick's College  
Máire Mhic Mhathúna, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Lorna Ryan, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Martin Ward, St Patrick's College

*Expert Working Group on CECDE's Irish Output*

Máire Mhic Mhathúna, Dublin Institute of Technology  
Anne Nolan, Department of Education and Science  
CECDE staff.

## Note 2: CECDE Staff

*Director*

Heino Schonfeld

*Assistant Directors*

Maresa Duignan  
Gemma Kiernan

*Education Officers*

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Note 3: PhD Scholarships

<i>Author and completion date</i>	<i>Title of thesis</i>
O’Kane, Mary, 2007	The Transition from Preschool to Primary School for Children in Ireland
Brennan, Carmel, 2008	Partners in Play: How Children Organize their Participation in Sociodramatic Play
Dillon, Anna, 2011	The Acquisition of Additional Languages in the Early Years
Boyle, Anne, 2014	A Study of the Involvement of Traveller Parents in Traveller Preschools in Ireland
O’Driscoll, Sharon, 2015	The Early Years in Irish Multi-grade classes

Note 4: Membership Organizations of the CECDE Consultative Committee

Ballymun Partnership  
Barnardos  
Border Counties Childcare Network  
Childminding Ireland  
Children’s Research Centre

Children's Rights Alliance/Children in Hospital Ireland  
 Combat Poverty Agency  
 Department of Education and Science  
 Department of Health and Children  
 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform  
 Department of Social and Family Affairs  
 Disability Federation of Ireland  
 Dublin Institute of Technology  
 Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)  
 Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)  
 Forbairt Naíonraí Teo  
 Forum of People with Disabilities  
 Higher Education & Training Awards (HETAC)  
 High/Scope Ireland  
 Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE)  
 Irish Farmers' Association (IFA)  
 Irish Montessori Education Board (IMEB)  
 IMPACT: Sheila Carroll  
 Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)  
 Iris Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA)  
 Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association  
 Mary Immaculate College  
 National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland  
 (NAMHI)  
 National Children's Office  
 National College of Ireland  
 National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism  
 National Disability Authority  
 National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

National Forum of Preschool Inspectors  
National Parents and Siblings Alliance (NPSA):  
National Parents Council – Primary  
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)  
National Children’s Nursery Association (NCNA)  
Organisation Mondial d’Education Préscolaire (OMEP)  
Pavee Point  
RAPID  
Seirbhísí Naíonraí Teo  
Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly  
St Nicholas Montessori Society  
St Patrick’s College  
Traveller Preschool Teachers Association  
Treoir  
University College Cork (UCC)  
Vision in Childcare  
WITH/Cúram

Note 5: CECDE Publications (available at: <[www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)>)

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- Schonfeld, H., O'Brien, S. and Walsh, T. (eds) (2005). *Questions of Quality. International Conference 2004. Conference Proceedings*. Dublin Castle, 23–25 September 2004. Dublin: CECDE.

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- Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2006a). *Síolta. The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Handbook / Síolta. An Chreatlach Náisiúnta Cáilíochta d'Oideachas na Luath-Óige. Lámbleabhar*. Dublin: CECDE.
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