Talking About Quality

Report of a Consultation Process on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

Written and Researched by
Maresa Duignan and Thomas Walsh

**Published by the Centre for Early Childhood
Development and Education**
The Gate Lodge,
St. Patrick's College,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.

Tel: 353 1 8842110
Fax: 353 1 8842111
Email: early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie
Website: www.cecde.ie

ISBN: 0954581547

© 2004 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

Printed by Profile Lithoprint Limited

List of Figures and Tables

Acronyms

ADM – Area Development Management

AR – Action Research

BA – Bachelor of Arts

B.Ed – Bachelor of Education

BCCN – Border Counties Childcare Network

CECDE - Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

DES – Department of Education and Science

DHC – Department of Health and Children

DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology

DJELR – Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

ECCE – Early Childhood Development and Education

EOCP – Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

IATSE – Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

IFA – Irish Farmers' Association

IMEB – Irish Montessori Education Board

INTO – Irish National Teachers' Organisation

IPPA – Irish Preschool and Playgroup Association (The Early Childhood Organisation)

NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children

NAMHI – National Association for the Mentally Handicapped in Ireland

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCCC – National Coordinating Childcare Committee

NCCRI – National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

NCNA – National Children's Nurseries Association

NDP/CSF – National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework

NFQ – National Framework for Quality

NQAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

OMEP - Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Prescolaire

RAPID – Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development

UCC – University College Cork

Chapter 1
Introduction

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) is delighted to present this report of our consultation process to the ECCE sector. This publication is a collation of the collective views and experiences of the sector as relayed in our series of consultative seminars in October and November 2003. The primary focus of the consultative seminars was to gain the insights and perspectives of all stakeholders in the ECCE sector in relation to quality. Consultation is a core value of the CECDE; as is stated in our Programme of Work, *"Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards."* (CECDE, 2001: 4)

The CECDE held six consultative seminars, located in areas where we could access the maximum number of people interested in participating and also to ensure a balanced geographical spread. Initially seminars were planned for Dublin, Cork and Galway. However, subsequent to the feedback from these events, we held additional seminars in Athlone, Monaghan and Carraroe in the Connemara Gaeltacht. The final seminar was conducted through the medium of Irish while all documentation was provided in both English and Irish at all seminars.

A facility was established on the Centre's website (**www.cecde.ie**) to allow stakeholders who were not able to attend the seminars to complete and submit the form on-line. Additionally, information templates were distributed to members of our Consultative Committee[1] to be completed by members of the organisations they represent. Students in the final year of the BA in Early Childhood Care and Education in the Dublin Institute of Technology also participated in the research.

1.1 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)

In 2001 the Minister for Education and Science asked the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra to jointly establish the CECDE. The Centre was launched in October 2002 to develop and co-ordinate ECCE in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper *'Ready to Learn'* (DES, 1999). This remit is comprehensive, focusing on all care and education settings for children birth to 6 years of age, bridging many of the traditional divides

---

[1] As part of its commitment to consultation, the CECDE formed a Consultative Committee in 2003 to advise and guide it in its work. At present, the committee is comprised of 48 stakeholders in the early childhood care and education sector.

between education and care and between the early years settings and the formal education system.

Within this context, the **objectives** of the Centre (CECDE, 2001) include:

- To develop a quality framework for early childhood education;
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs and
- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper.

Thus, the core objective of the Centre is to produce a **National Framework for Quality (NFQ)**. Within the NFQ, three distinct elements can be identified. First of all, the standards will **define** what we understand by quality for children in the Irish context.

Secondly, a system of inspection or **assessment** will be devised to ensure that quality is achieved and maintained. Last of all, an infrastructure will be devised and implemented to **support** all those working in the ECCE sector to accomplish the quality as prescribed in the standards. The Centre has also completed a number of additional research projects that feed directly into the devising of the NFQ. The consultative seminars represent an important element of the process that is being used to produce the NFQ. *'A Conceptual Framework of how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland'* (CECDE, Forthcoming) is in the final stages of revision. A number of pieces of research focusing on quality in Ireland and in the international context are being conducted and this will distil best policy and practice nationally and internationally in relation to quality.

Figure 1: Elements of Research underpinning the NFQ
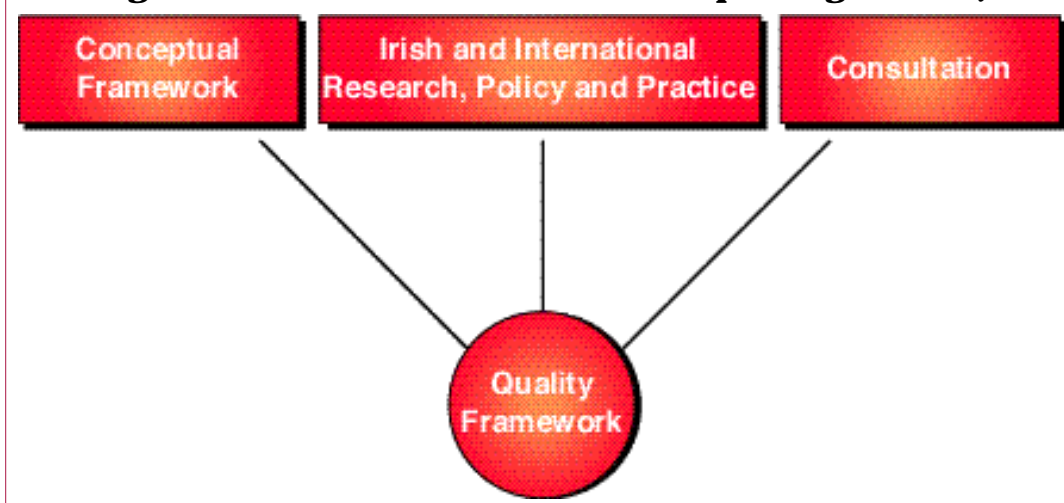
This report provides insights into the delegates who attended these seminars, including their demographic profiles, professional backgrounds and role within the ECCE sector. The core focus of the report relates to the three aforementioned elements of the NFQ and the answers provided to the questions posed:

1. What does the term **'quality'** in early childhood care and education mean to you?

2. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways of **assessing quality** in early childhood care and education?

3. What **supports** do you need to receive in order to achieve and maintain quality in early childhood care and education?

The CECDE is extremely grateful to all the participants who contributed their time and expertise towards the publication of this report. A special word of thanks is especially due to the facilitators at each seminar whose skills ensured that all delegates were afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions and have their insights shared. It is this sharing of expertise and involvement in discourse regarding quality that will inform the production of the NFQ.

1.2 Chapter Summaries

This report is divided into a number of sections, which address specific aspects of the consultative process.

Chapter 2 presents a rationale for the consultative seminars. It outlines the value of consultation and discusses the approach taken in this instance.

The Methodology is delineated in **Chapter 3** and this provides a detailed account of the seminars. Data is also included on the methods employed in disseminating information on the seminars and in relation to the selection of geographical locations. The information template design and content is also elaborated upon.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the data. This section extracts the major themes that emerged in the course of the seminars and in addition, demographic feedback and information on the background of the respondents. This information is presented in narrative and graphic form to enhance the illustration of the main findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings for the development of the three core elements of the NFQ i.e. quality

standards, assessment processes and a supportive infrastructure.

Conclusions, recommendations and the path forward are detailed in **Chapter 6**. This draws together the main findings and makes specific recommendations for the development of the NFQ.

A number of **Appendices** are contained at the end of the publication, including the flyers and letters disseminated, the information template utilised, the briefing notes distributed to facilitators, the presentations from the seminars and the evaluation sheet of the seminars completed by participants.

The Report is presented in both English and Irish. The verbatim responses of participants are quoted in the style and language in which they were elicited. We hope that this report will be a valuable and useful resource for the ECCE sector and we welcome any feedback you might have to offer on this publication.

Chapter 2
Rationale

2.1 Introduction

This section elaborates on the rationale for this consultation and also some of the issues we have considered in the development and implementation of our research method. Our work programme is unequivocal on the fact that we are engaged in a process of development, which must involve a broad range of interested parties:

"Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards. Such consultation will commence shortly after the establishment of the Centre and will be repeated at regular intervals, especially as draft documents (e.g., guidelines) are produced." (CECDE, 2001:4)

Here, we consider the implications of this commitment for the research process the CECDE is engaged in towards the development of an NFQ, including national quality standards and implementation mechanisms, for ECCE in Ireland. Underpinning this work programme is a constructivist theoretical perspective, which seeks to build future growth and development in the ECCE sector in Ireland on the collective wisdom and knowledge regarding effective policy and practice. This perspective necessitates the adoption of research methodologies, which are collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders in the future of the ECCE sector. These stakeholders include parents and families, teachers and carers, children and policy makers and practitioners from a wide range of professions and disciplines.

The rationale for our commitment to consultation is grounded in the bio ecological theory of child development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This proposes a theory of child development as a process, which is influenced by multiple variables that exist in the child's environment. This environment is conceptualised as a series of systems that are distinctive yet interrelated (see figure 2 below). The characteristics and interplay of these systems are experienced individually by each child. Therefore if we are to develop a national Framework for Quality (NFQ) in ECCE in Ireland, which

will ultimately impact on the well being of children, we must take account of the nature of these systems in the Irish context. Using this theoretical model as a reference point, we explore micro system issues related to the diversity of practice, philosophy and perspectives on quality in ECCE in Ireland as a further argument for the necessity and benefits of consultation.

It is interesting to note that in the early days of the 20th century, during a process of implementation of the Revised Programme (1900) in national schools in Ireland inspectors realised the error in not consulting with or supporting teachers adequately:

"The success or failure of education in a country depends largely, it will be admitted, upon the zeal and efficiency of the teachers. It seems hardly necessary to make so bald and trite a statement."[1]

But no revision of the Programme – however ideally well the operation may be carried out – will turn a bad school into a good one. The subjects taught are important enough in their own way, but it is the Teacher and his Teaching that make the school."[2] These lessons have been echoed repeatedly down through the years and provide a strong impetus and rationale for consultation with practitioners towards the development of the NFQ.

2.2 The Best Interests of the Child

It is essential that we keep in focus the fact that the ultimate objective of an NFQ for ECCE is to afford all children the positive nurturing experiences that are necessary to their optimal development. According to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory of Child Development, a wide range of systems influence the development of every child. Figure 2 below illustrates this theory.

[1] *The Irish School Monthly – A Magazine of Practical School Work*, "School, Systems, and a Solution - A plea for True National Education." Volume 3 No. 3 November 1902. Dublin: Blackie and Son Limited, p. 75.

[2] *The Irish School Monthly – A Magazine of Practical School Work*, "School, Systems, and a Solution - A plea for True National Education." Volume 4 No. 2 October 1903. Dublin: Blackie and Son Limited, p. 40.

Figure 2: The Bio-ecological Model of Child Development
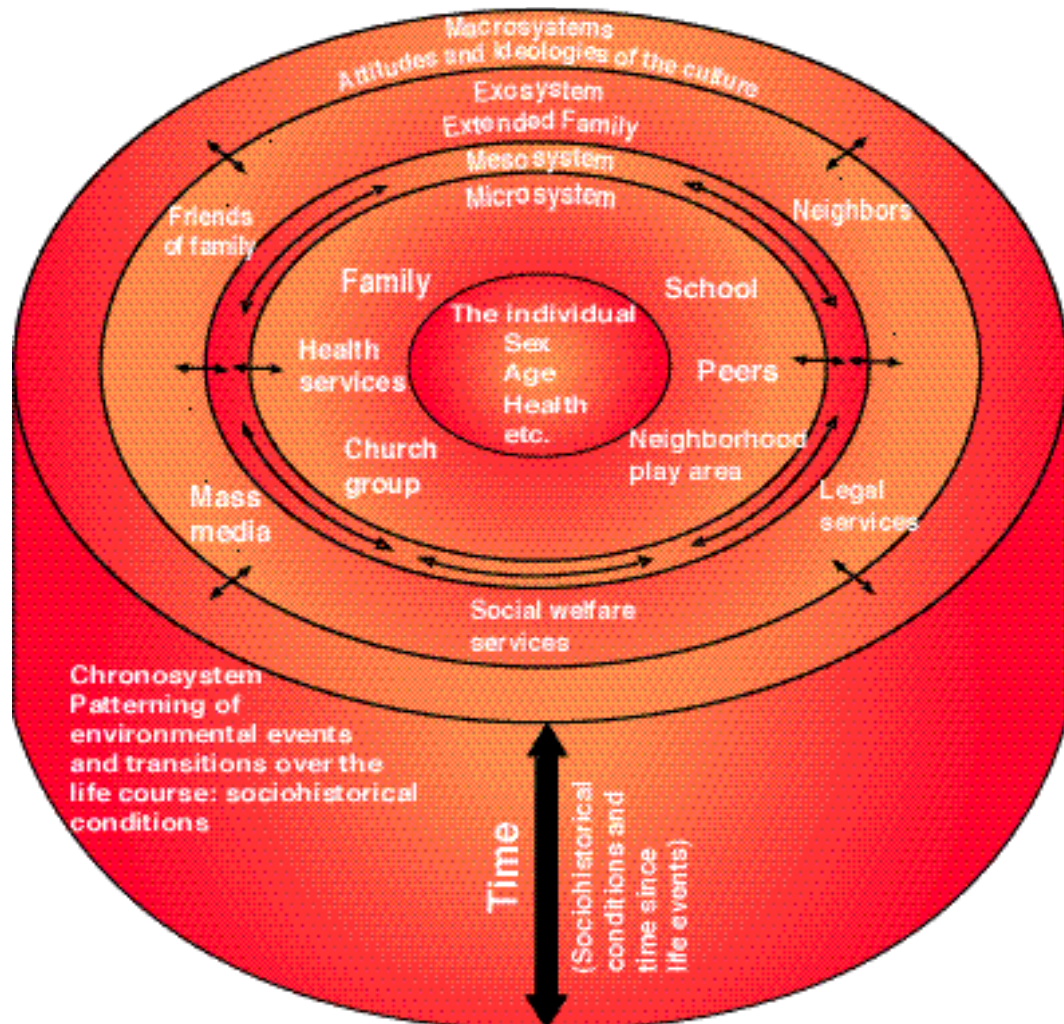
On the basis of this model Bronfenbrenner has outlined five critical processes for positive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). These relate to the systems outlined above. They are not proposed as a hierarchy, rather they reflect the 'nested' nature of the bio ecological systems model. Of particular relevance to our rationale for consultation are propositions four and five that articulate the optimal nature of relationships and conditions within the exosystem and macrosystem:

Proposition 4 - *"The effective functioning of **children rearing** processes in the family and other child settings requires establishing ongoing patterns of exchange of information, two way communication. Mutual accommodation and mutual trust*

between the principal settings in which children and their parents live their lives. These settings are the home, childcare programs, the school and the parents' place of work."

Proposition 5 - *"The effective functioning of **child rearing** processes in the family and other child settings requires public policies and practices that provide place, time, stability, status, recognition, belief systems, customs and actions in support of child rearing activities not only on the part of parents, caregivers, teachers and other professional personnel, but also relatives, friends neighbours, co-workers, communities and the major economic, social and political institutions of the entire society."* (Bronfenbrenner, 1997:38)

Putting these propositions into the content of developing an NFQ for ECCE therefore requires that ECCE policy and practice be embedded in a common set of understandings regarding the nature of quality. Furthermore these must be relevant for and to, the society in which the child is growing and developing, and also must take account of the

dynamic nature of systems which continue to evolve and change over time.

Consultation is the key to establishing this relevance and mutual understanding. However the nature of ECCE in Ireland is complex, dynamic and diverse (CECDE, 2004) and this presents particular challenges for such consultation processes.

2.3 The Challenge of Diversity

It has been acknowledged that a large proportion of ECCE service provision in Ireland evolved in isolation and without direct State support, a situation that ultimately resulted in the existence of a wide and diverse range of unconnected services, philosophies and practice. (DJELR, 1999, 2002; CECDE, 2004). Despite this historical and cultural context, however, it has been argued that ECCE in Ireland has an emerging identity (DJELR, 2002; Duignan, 2003). A rapid and continuing process of change in terms of policy and practice has been influencing the nature of both ECCE service provision and practitioners since the mid 1990s. This process presents challenges for the natural diversity that exists

within the ECCE sector as it is driven by policy characterised by a holistic vision of child development (DES, 1999; DJELR, 1999; DHC 2000). It has resulted in a number of initiatives, which have catalysed the development of connections, common language and consensus on key issues related to policy and practice in early years service provision (DJELR, 2002; NDP/CSF, 2003). The establishment of the CECDE is one such initiative and our brief to, *"...have relevance for all settings where children birth to six years are present..."*(CECDE, 2001) in itself has the potential to contribute to further development of a unique sectoral identity for ECCE in Ireland.

Whilst much progress has been achieved on the establishment of common values and principles underpinning policy and practice in ECCE, a great deal remains to be done. Developing an NFQ for ECCE presents the CECDE with many challenges. A key challenge is to bring together the views of stakeholders that have multiple and sometimes competing objectives. In addition, giving a 'voice' to some stakeholder groups such as staff within early years settings, parents and indeed children who have traditionally been marginalized and excluded from the development of policy which directly impacts on their lives, is a further challenge. The CECDE is charged with managing a process of change within the ECCE sector. The cooperation and involvement of those affected by change is acknowledged as a prerequisite for successful change management. Simply providing information on proposed change is not deemed to be enough:

"Informed change is political, just like any other change and people will not commit to it without engagement in its invention." (McTaggart, 2001: 5)

2.4 Meeting the Challenge

The CECDE has taken a multi-layered approach to addressing these challenges through the establishment of three principle work strands: *'A Conceptual Framework of how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland,'* (CECDE, Forthcoming) a review of Irish and international research and a process of consultation with parents, practitioners and children

across the diverse range of settings, which is the subject of this report. (See figure 1). In addition we are also represented on a number of key committees including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Coordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC), the National Children's Office and the Educational Disadvantage Committee. We have established a Consultative Committee that comprises representatives of 48 different organisations and stakeholder groups (see Appendix 6) and we have set up a website (www.cecde.ie) to facilitate dissemination of all documents produced by the centre and to enable dialogue with all stakeholders.

2.5 Perspectives on Quality

A further dimension to the complexity of establishing an NFQ is the fact that quality itself is an abstract concept, which is very difficult to define. Some of the possible perspectives include:

- Quality as perfection – the achievement of consistent, flawless outcomes – attainable by all.

- Quality as exceptional – something special of distinctive – relative to notions of excellence and unattainable by most.
- Quality as fitness for purpose – meeting specific needs or desires.
- Quality as value for money – giving a good return on investment.
- Quality as a transformation – change and improvement e.g. in terms of service provision or professional practice
- Quality as accountability - e.g. ensuring child welfare, safety.

It is very probable that stakeholders in ECCE and therefore participants in the consultation process, will bring one or more of these perspectives to this research. The opportunity to engage in discussion regarding this complex issue will hopefully support the resolution of these differing perspectives towards a consensual view of quality that places the child at the centre of policy, provision and practice.

2.6 Research Method

It has been argued that:

"Outcomes (of research) that are consistent with existing knowledge

are more easily accepted by the existing community of knowledge creators..." (Fannin, 2002: 6)

Our objective of accessing the accumulated knowledge within the ECCE sector regarding the development of national quality standards could only be met if our approach to information gathering elicited relevant knowledge in all its dimensions.

Our concern in developing a methodology for these consultation seminars, was to elicit knowledge relevant to the issues in all its forms. Our challenge was to find a research methodology which fulfilled this objective.

Our constructivist perspective naturally led us to consider congruent research methodologies. Of particular relevance was the Action Research (AR) approach, which has gained status within the social and educational research community in recent times. AR has been defined as *"...a systematic, reflective, collaborative process that examines a situation for the purpose of planning, implementing and evaluating change."* (Garner, 1996 cited in Borgia and Schuler,

1996: 1).

One of the defining characteristics of the AR approach is the fact that it is primarily concerned with effecting change. This change, it is argued, is largely dependent upon the fact that participants in the research process experience a learning cycle, which helps to make the transfer from research theory to practice. Despite the fact that our research objectives do not seek at this point to identify or quantify the 'learning' acquired by participants during the research process, we still identify the benefit of such a characteristic in the achievement of our ultimate goal of developing national quality standards to inform and support best practice in ECCE. Taking an AR approach would afford participants the opportunity to gain new information, knowledge and perspective on the key issue of quality and crucially would promote 'ownership' of the knowledge created through such debate and dialogue. Ultimately, this experience might improve the potential success of any proposed change in practice stimulated by the introduction of the NFQ.

AR also 'fits' with our view that we

are co constructors of knowledge leading towards the development of the national quality standards for ECCE rather than presenting ourselves as 'expert' in the knowledge creation process. AR is premised upon the conceptualisation of research as the means by which 'communities of practice' can *"..mobilize information and knowledge resources as one part of their broader strategies for community empowerment."* (Sohng, 1995: 2). In this instance the community of practice is ECCE. Furthermore all 'actors' in the research process are considered to be 'practitioners' who will be affected by the outcomes of the change engendered in the research process and are therefore on equal footing in terms of the control and ownership of knowledge created in the research process:

"In action research approaches there is a genuine sense of partnership, where practitioner and supporter recognise that there might be a difference in responsibilities and professional expertise, but no difference in value. They are equal as practitioners. Both are there to improve their work by acting as challenging and supportively critical colleagues, each for the other. This is a creative dialogue of equals in which both are trying to find the best way forward for themselves and each other." (McNiff, 2002:2)

2.7 How Action Research Principles have been Applied Here

Whilst the mechanisms and structures outlined above do allow a broad range of stakeholder opinions to be shared with us, we are especially concerned that the views of those directly providing or availing of care and education are given equal opportunity to be expressed. This concern informs all the work of the CECDE and was the primary rationale for the series of six public consultation seminars at the heart of this report.

The key characteristics which distinguish AR from other forms of research include:

- Collaboration between researcher and practitioner;
- Solution of practical problems;
- Change in practice; theory development;

- Publicising the results of the inquiry (Adapted from Zuber-Skerritt, 1992: 14).

Within the paradigm of AR there are a number of different approaches or methodologies (Mc Niff, 2002, Dick, 1997, Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 2000). We have taken what has been described as a practical or participatory approach.

Practical:

This type of AR involves the researcher and practitioner coming together in order to identify potential problems, underlying causes and possible solutions or interventions. The researcher encourages participation and self-reflection of the practitioner (Hatten et al, 1997:3)

Our objective for this program was primarily to tap into the accumulated knowledge of stakeholders in ECCE regarding the development of national quality standards. Additionally, we hoped to use the occasion of the seminars to disseminate information regarding the work of the CECDE and provide a forum at which the

diverse perspectives and opinions of participants could be voiced, shared and discussed.

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A total of six public consultation seminars were held during the months of October and November 2003. This section outlines the process of these consultation seminars. It addresses the seminar locations, format, recruitment of participants and facilitators and data collection.

3.2 Locations

As we were limited by time and resources, our consultations were located in areas where we could afford access to the maximum number of people interested in participating and also to ensure a balanced geographical spread. The following venues were used:

- 20th October - Sheldon Park Hotel, Kylemore Road, Dublin 10
- 23rd October - Rochestown Park Hotel, Douglas, Cork
- 29th October - Galway Bay Hotel, Salthill, Galway
- 24th November - Hillgrove Hotel, Monaghan
- 25th November - Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone
- 27ú lá de mhí na Samhna - Óstán Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe

3.3 Recruitment of Participants

From the outset it was decided that the seminars would be open to all those interested in the education and well being of children in the birth to six age range. A number of strategies were put in place to publicise the events. These included:

- Publication of flyers (see appendix 2 and 3);
- Notification on website (www.cecde.ie);
- Circulation of flyers to targeted groups, CECDE Consultative Committee members (see Appendix 6) and other relevant stakeholders (see Appendix 7), internal databases and personal contacts;
- Media advertising and public relations.

Flyers

Initially seminars were planned for Dublin, Cork and Galway. As the additional three seminars, which took place in Athlone, Monaghan and Carraroe, were decided upon once the first three seminars were already underway, two separate flyers were printed to reflect the two different sets of locations (see

Appendix 2 and 3).

Mail campaign

We identified a number of stakeholder groups that we felt would be able to help in promoting attendance at the seminars (see Appendix 6 and 7). We also sent information to all those listed on internal CECDE databases (e.g. subscribers to our newsletter Alana) and personal contacts.

All of the above received a flyer for both sets of seminars and a letter requesting that the information be circulated to their membership/students (where appropriate) or displayed in relevant and prominent locations. A total of 6,000 flyers were sent out.

After the first three seminars, it became apparent that attendance by primary school teachers was lower than expected. It was therefore decided that for the second set of seminars, flyers would be sent to all primary schools in the county and adjacent counties where the seminar was being held. These were addressed directly to the teachers of junior and senior infant classes. A total of 1,200 flyers were distributed in this way.

Advertising and Public Relations
For the Dublin seminar, we relied solely upon the distribution of flyers as outlined above. For the Cork seminar, we contacted national regional and local media including local radio stations; West Cork News 103FM and SLR FM. For the consultation in Galway we again made contact with national regional and local media including local radio stations Galway Bay FM, Clare FM, Mid West and North West Radio FM.

For the second series of consultations, we decided to try to publicise the seminars more and we renewed our efforts in this area. Various newspapers including the Leinster Express, Leinster Leader, Longford Leader, Roscommon Herald, Midland Tribune, Laois Nationalist and Sligo Champion were contacted on several occasions about the seminars. Radio ads were placed with Midlands Radio FM, Northwest Radio and Raidió na Gaeltachta were also contacted. Interviews were also conducted by staff members with various radio stations.

3.4 Group Facilitation

We were concerned that all those attending the seminars were given equal opportunity to participate in the discussion and have their views and opinions recorded and therefore the seminars devoted the majority of the time allocation to facilitated small group discussion. Facilitators were recruited from organisations who represented those working with children in the birth to six age range; National Children's Nurseries Association, (NCNA) An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo, IPPA the Early Childhood Organisation, Séirbhísí Naíonraí Teo and the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) and through the City and County Childcare Committees in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Roscommon and Monaghan. Facilitators were sent, where possible, information on facilitation skills and briefing notes about the process of the seminar prior to each evening (see appendix 4). They were invited to attend fifteen minutes prior to the commencement of registration to enable a short introductory/briefing session to take place. After each seminar, facilitators were invited to join the CECDE staff for an informal debriefing session to share experiences and information.

3.5 Seminar Format

As has been already been stated, our objective in staging the public consultation seminars was to maximise the opportunity for participants to engage in discussion on key issues regarding the development of an NFQ for ECCE in Ireland. To this end the format of each seminar was as follows:

Time	Activity
6.45pm	Briefing session for facilitators (Appendix 4)
7 – 7.30pm	Registration for participants
7.30 - 7.50pm	Introduction and overview – two short presentations (Appendix 8 and 9)
7.50 – 8pm	Break up into groups (Appendix 10) / introduction of group members
8 – 8.10pm	Distribution of information template and completion of demographic details
8.10 – 8.55pm	Group discussion. Small, facilitated groups of approximately 10 persons consider three key questions and complete an information template (15 minutes per question).
8.55 - 9pm	Complete information template
9 - 9.15pm	Feedback session – each facilitator gives a brief summary of key issues raised in group discussion
9.15 – 9.25pm	Closure of session
9.25 - 9.30pm	Fill in Evaluation Sheet (Appendix 12) Collect and hand up information template, Evaluation Sheet and Facilitators notes

3.6 Information Template

Whilst we understood that many of these issues would emerge from the consultation process, we decided to use the three core elements of the NFQ identified within our Programme of Work as a framework for this discussion. These are; defining and setting national quality standards, measuring or assessing the implementation of the standards and development of a support infrastructure to assist with the implementation and maintenance of the standards. On this basis therefore we articulated the three elements as 'Defining', 'Assessing' and 'Supporting' quality. In order to facilitate data collection an information template was developed around these three issues. The template also recorded selected demographic information, which we felt would deepen our understanding of the perspectives of participants. (see Appendix 11).

3.7 Other Methods of Consultation

In addition to the public consultation sessions we employed a number of other methods to encourage as broad a range of participants as possible to engage in the consultation.

Web based

To complement the public consultations and offer another means to contribute to the debate regarding the issue of quality in ECCE, it was decided to host an information template to this end on our website at www.cecde.ie. This interactive feature was promoted on the homepage of our website, at the seminars, in the newsletter, in the flyers and indeed in all correspondence to do with the seminars, and it was hoped that this would provide an opportunity for those who couldn't attend the seminars in person to have their say. It was also envisaged as a way to make our recently-launched website more dynamic and engaging for users.

After consultation with expert advice, we decided to use a self-service tool that enables the creation of HTML forms using only a web browser. This tool is available at the following web address www.formsite.com. An online version of the feedback form was created which replicated exactly the version distributed at the public consultations. It was available through the CECDE website from the second week in October 2003

throughout the consultative process.

Forms to Consultative Committee
We sent ten information templates to each of the members of our Consultative Committee. (see Appendix 6). A letter asking them to encourage their members/ colleagues to complete the template and return to us was also included.

Student consultation
We approached the early education faculty of our two parent colleges, Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra regarding the possibility of getting third year students to participate in the consultative process. Unfortunately the B.Ed students from St. Patrick's College were unable to participate due to timetabling difficulties. However we were able to conduct two consultation sessions with final year BA students in the DIT. The format was similar to the public consultations however as we were constrained by timetabling, we did not have a feedback session to close.

Data Analysis
Following the consultative process,

the completed information templates were coded and analysed by Red C Research. Demographic data was collated and thematic analysis was conducted on the three open-ended questions of defining, assessing and supporting quality.

Chapter 4
Presentation of Findings

This section details the findings of the Consultative Seminars. Firstly, demographic data is presented on all participants, drawing attention to points of interest within this information. This is followed by an analysis of the data gathered at the seminars relating to the three main open-ended questions regarding quality; namely **Defining Quality**, **Assessing Quality** and **Supporting Quality** (see appendix 11). The results of the analysis of the information template are not cumulative in nature due to the fact that participants were encouraged to give multiple responses under each question. For example in Question 4, *"I am responding as..."*, a participant may

be a parent, work as a practitioner and be involved in adult education.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Gender of Respondents
A total of 387 delegates participated in the consultative process. As Figure 3 below reveals, the vast majority of the respondents were **female** (366/95%), there were 17 (4%) **male** participants while 4 (1%) delegates did not answer this question.

Figure 3 - Gender of Respondents
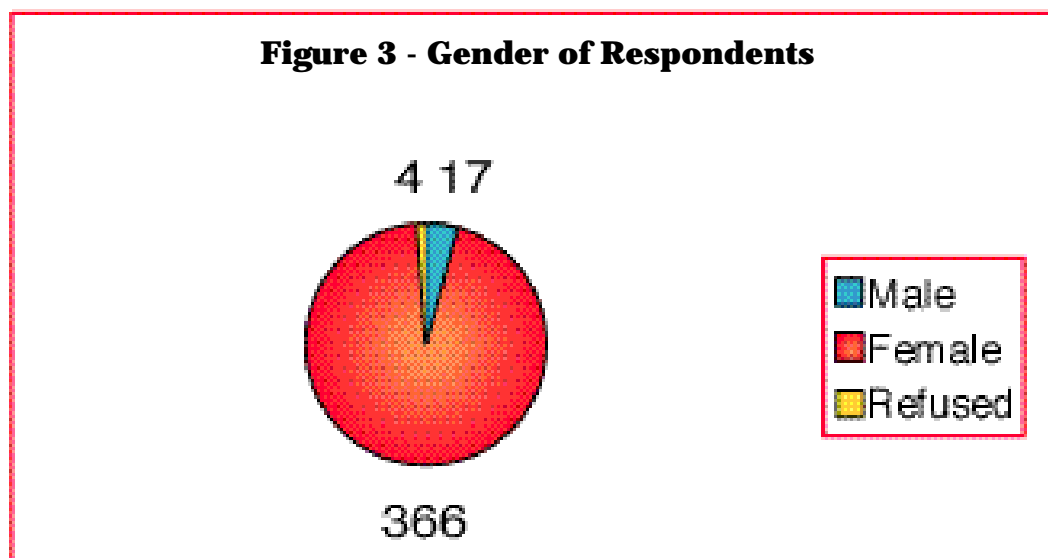
Age Profile of Respondents

Figure 4 below illustrates the age profile of the participants at the consultative seminars. The largest proportion of respondents was in the 25-54 age category.

invited to participate. The success of this rationale is evidenced in the vast number of counties represented. In addition, participation by means of the Centre's website transcended geographical boundaries and

Figure 4 - Age Profile of Respondents
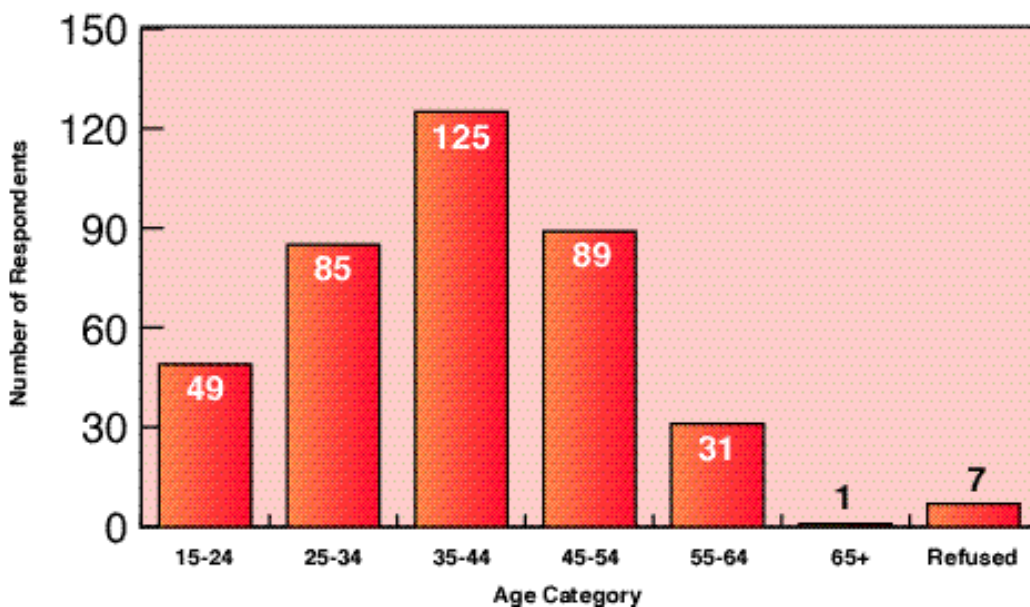
Counties in which Respondents Lived

The seminars were held in an array of geographical locations to facilitate the participation of the maximum number of delegates. In the process of disseminating information on the seminars, stakeholders in the surrounding areas and counties of the locations chosen were also made aware and

widened participation even further. There was higher participation rate in the urban areas of **Dublin** (108/28%), **Cork** (68/18%) and **Galway** (52/13%). A total of 44 (11%) participants did not reply to this question. This data is represented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Counties in which Respondents Live:

County Respondent Resides in	Number of Respondents	County Respondent Resides in	Number of Respondents
Armagh	3	Louth	11
Carlow	2	Mayo	3
Cavan	4	Monaghan	19
Cork	68	Offaly	10
Down	1	Roscommon	3
Dublin	108	Sligo	1
Galway	52	Tipperary	4
Kerry	1	Waterford	3
Kildare	12	Westmeath	3
Laois	3	Wicklow	10
Leitrim	11	Refused	44
Limerick	11	**Total**	**387**

Professional Background of Respondent

Figure 5 details the professional backgrounds of the delegates who participated in the consultative process. Many of the respondents

Figure 5 - Professional Background of Respondents
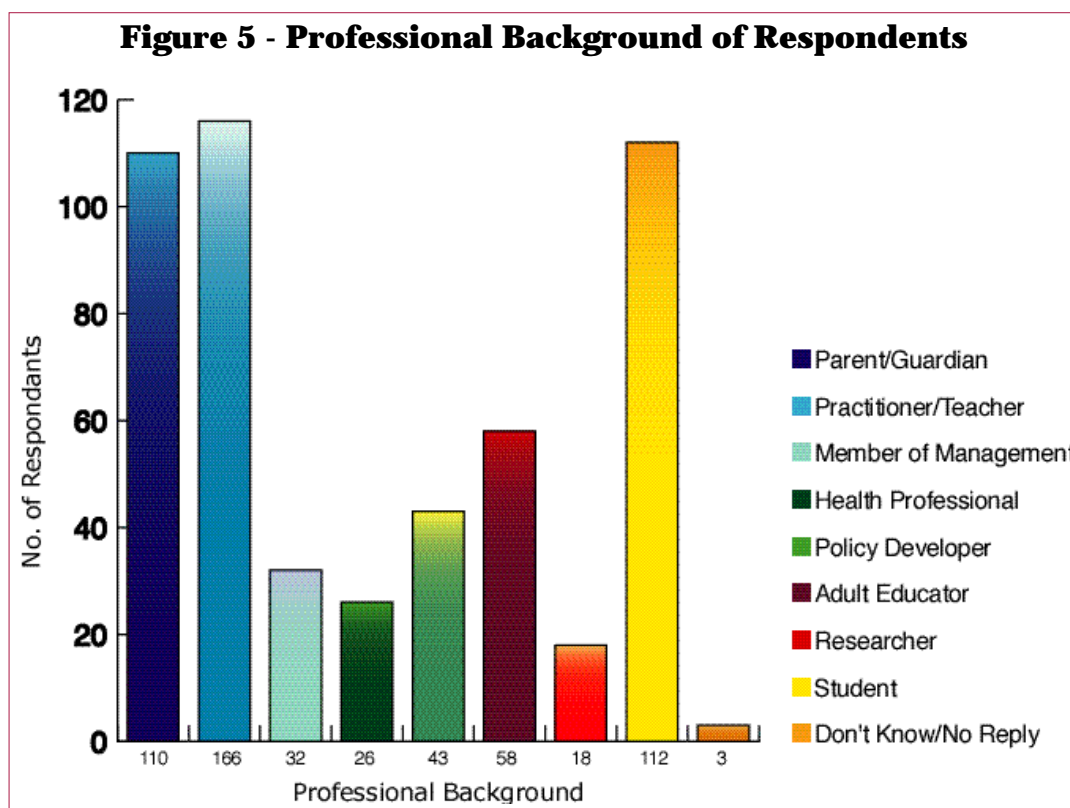
fulfilled multiple roles within the ECCE sector, the majority ticking in excess of one box. The largest cohort of participants (166/43%) was **practitioners** and **teachers**. In total, 110 (28%) respondents identified themselves as **parents**, while there was also a high representation of **students** (112/29%). Other categories include **adult educators** (58/15%), **policy developers** (43/11%), **members of management** (32/8%), **health professionals** (26/7%) and **researchers** (18/5%). Three participants (1%) did not respond to this question.

Early Childhood Setting

Question 5 explored the early childhood setting to which the respondent's answers related. The majority of these comments referred to out-of-home ECCE provision. This included 173 (45%) relating to a **pre-school**; 111 (29%) pertaining to a **crèche**; 102 (26%) working in a **Montessori** setting, while 84 (22%) delegates spoke regarding their experiences in a **playgroup**. Figure 6 below details the diverse array of settings that the perspectives of the participants related to, providing valuable

Figure 6 - ECCE Setting of Respondents
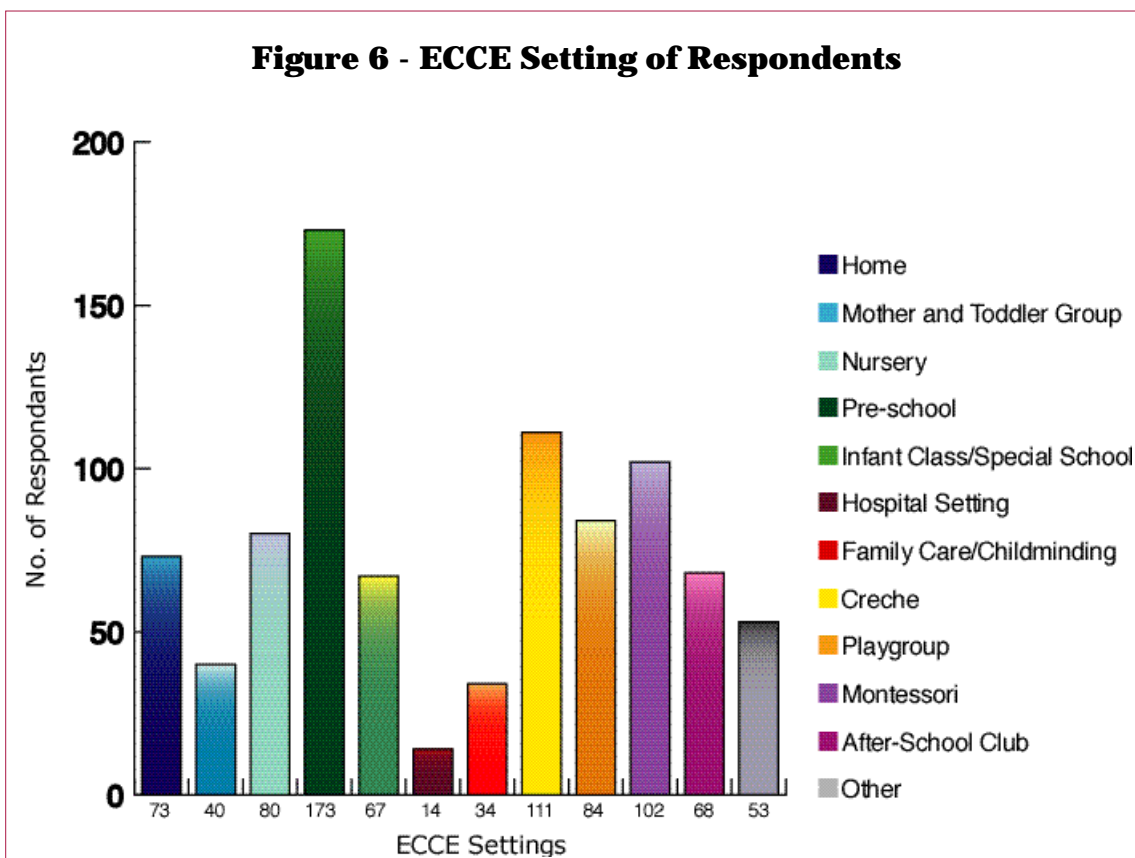
insights into the nuances of the provisions in the various contexts. Other settings that featured prominently were **nurseries** (80/21%), the **home** context (73/19%), **after-school clubs** (68/18%), **infant classes and special schools** (67/17%). A total of 53 (14%) respondents did not reply to this question.

we were fortunate to attain a balance of rural and urban cohort of participants. The participants were composed of 156 (40%) **rural** and 215 (56%) **urban** delegates, while 16 (4%) participants did not respond to this question. This is detailed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7 - Rural/Urban Origins

16

158

215

Rural
Urban
Refused
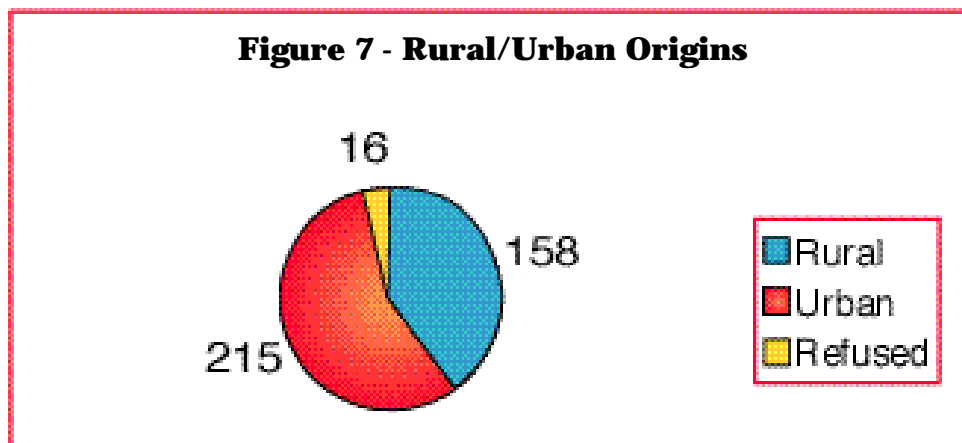
Rural and Urban Participants

Owing to the geographical spread of the seminar venues, and the facility to return the information template by post or via the CECDEs website,

Ages of children

As outlined in Figure 8, the majority of respondents (321/83%) identified themselves as working with **Young**

Figure 8 - Ages of Children

31   112

321   164

Babies (0-12 months)
Young Children (3-6 years)
Toddlers (14-3 years)
Refused
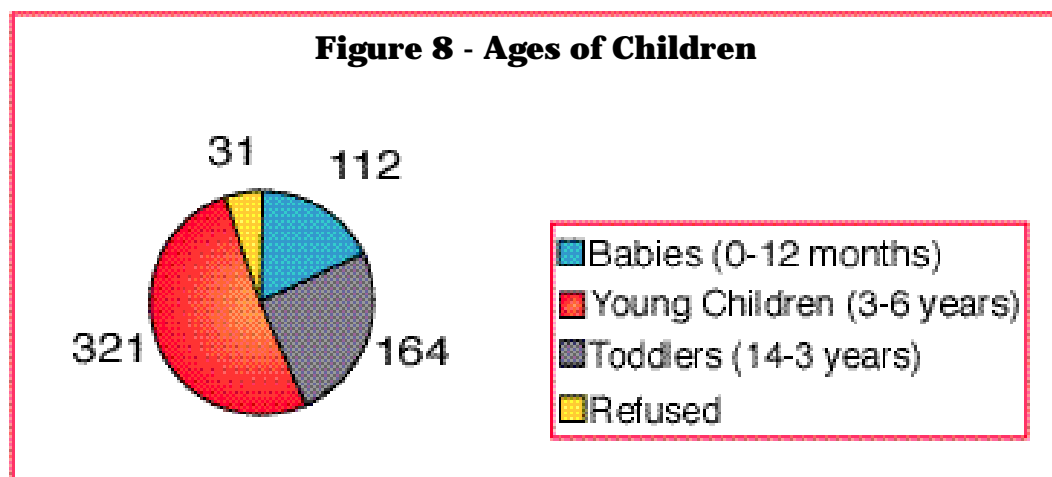
Children (3-6 years old), 164 (42%) classified their work as related to **Toddlers** (1-3 years old) while the smallest cohort (112/29%) worked with **Babies** (0-12 months). There was no reply to this question from 31 (8%) respondents.

Pedagogical Approach/Philosophy

Respondents identified a wide variety of pedagogical approaches and philosophies as used by them in their daily practice with children. Thematic analysis revealed 10 categories as shown below in Figure 9.

It is evident that the **Montessori** approach was most popular, cited by 76 (20%) respondents. The other main categories mentioned include a **play-based curriculum** (65/17%), **High Scope** (57/15%) and a **child-centred approach** (52/13%). In addition, 113 (29%) delegates did not respond to this question.

Figure 9 - Pedagogical Approach/Philosophy
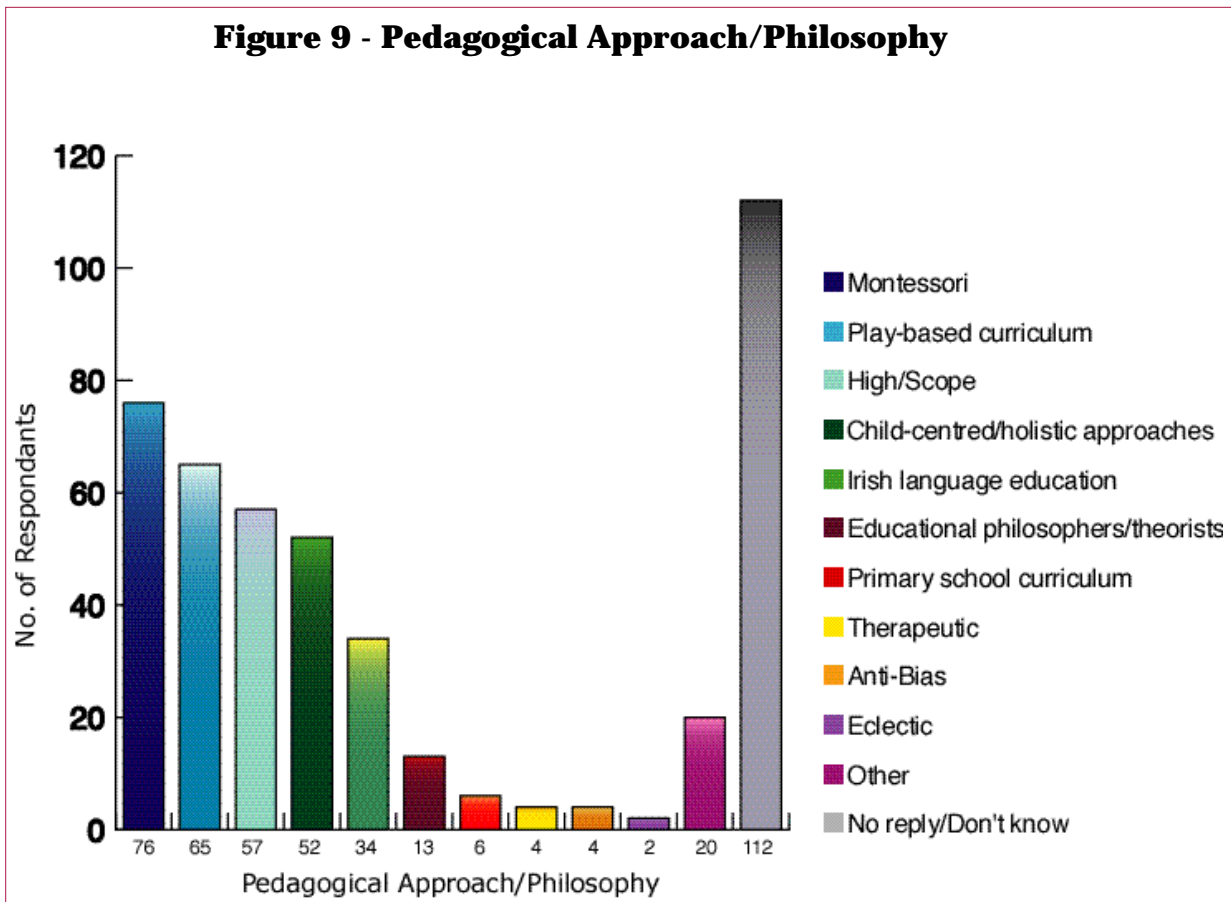
4.2 Defining Quality [3]

The challenge of defining quality resulted in a great diversity of responses as is illustrated by the statements of respondents below:

"Quality should cover all areas of a setting from the structure and staff to the broad range of individual needs of the child and their parents."

Figure 10 - Defining Quality
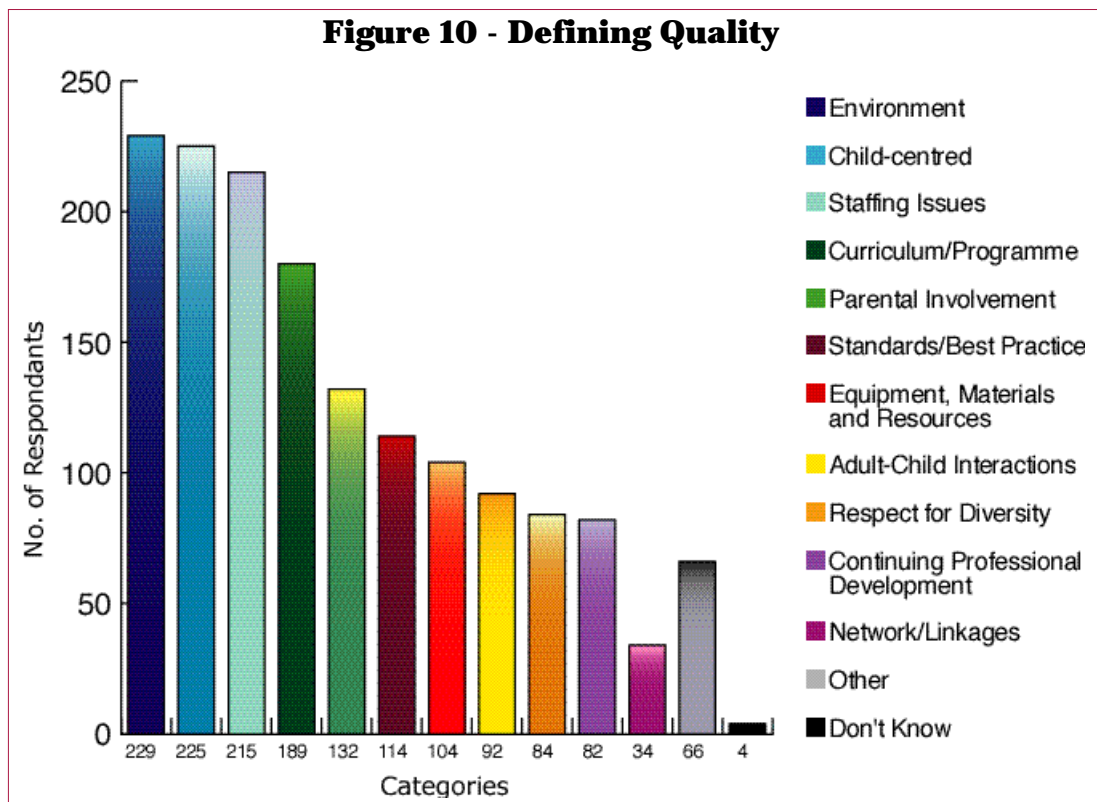
"Quality is a somewhat nebulous concept which changes and evolves as the early childhood care and education sector continues to develop, it can be difficult to define and difficult to claim as achieved."

"A journey that is ongoing with no end."

"Quality has many elements and for every person in the room, there could be as many definitions of quality."

"Quality is a process which constantly needs improvement."

Thematic analysis ultimately led to

---

[3] Please note that the total number of respondents for this question is 345 as opposed to the total of 387 for all other questions. This is due to the fact that the 42 web respondents were unable to fill in this question due to a technical difficulty.

the establishment of eleven overarching categories as represented in Figure 10 below. The **Environment** of the child was the predominant response, highlighted by 229 (66%) of all delegates. This includes a number of elements in the immediate environment, relating to both static and dynamic variables. Many respondents cited the provision of a safe, clean and warm space for the child. The availability of appropriate adult-child ratios also featured prominently within the responses. The advantages of an outdoor play space and of a suitable atmosphere were also commonly cited by delegates. The highest percentages of references to the environment emanated from parents and practitioners, while it was less of an issue for researchers and people more removed from the childcare setting.

"A quality environment will ensure that all children can have a sense of belonging and feel that their identity and background is valued."

"This environment includes the people, the objects and all the activities and events within it."

"The childcare setting should be clean, well equipped, safe and friendly with funding available to improve equipment when necessary and employ the essential ratios of professionals to children especially those with special needs."

"Quality is also in this instance, about providing an environment that complements and supports the home, safety yes, but important that there are opportunities for risk - not sanitised."

The second most common element in defining quality among respondents related to the service being **child-centred** (225/65%). This relates to the recognition and the valuing of each child as an individual and the need to work towards the realisation of these needs. The development of all aspects of the child, including the physical, intellectual, emotional and social elements is of paramount importance. Such settings allow for the full potential of the child to be realised at their individual rate of development.

"Daily experience of the child feeling they belong, they are valued, and they are supported in

their interests."

"Quality in childhood care and education to all means each child regardless of level of ability, the presence of physical, sensory or learning disability, cultural background or financial status is afforded on opportunity to have an educational system that will assess, encourage and facilitate that child to develop to his or her maximum potential in a safe, caring and supportive environment."

"Everything that helps to develop the full potential of each and every child. This covers the child's mind, body and spirit."

Staffing Issues accounted for 215 (62%) responses. This relates to the training and qualifications of staff working with children at all levels. The characteristics of staff were also seen as being of pivotal importance in the care and education of children.

"It is important that the adult is knowledgeable about child development and learning, and is informed about how to maximise their input to children's learning and development. Adults should

also have a clear understanding of their goals/remit in providing care and education to children."

"Cáilíochtaí cuí i gcúram leanaí a bheith ag na Stiúrthóirí."

"The term quality would hopefully mean that the children is an educational or care setting would be receiving care form qualified professionals who are well supported by a managing body and ongoing training."

"Quality in childcare is very dependant on the quality of the staff."

The **Curriculum** or **Programme** in use featured prominently within the responses, cited by 189 (55%) delegates. This includes the use of defined routines, structure and methodologies used within the setting, which evolve according to the changing individual needs and capabilities of children.

"So programme planning is vital. Providers need to be encouraged and supported to be innovate and creative, stimulating and child centred."

"Services should be clear on their goals and objectives and methods of educating and should have written assessments regularly of these."

"Clár Oibre a thugann isteach gach gné d'fhorbairt an linbh."

Parental Involvement was raised as an aspect of defining quality by 132 (38%) respondents. This involved accommodating the needs of families through real and consistent partnership.

"Meeting the parents needs - recognising the huge role parents play in ensuring the care and education of children is successful in the long term as well as the short term."

"Quality childcare means a service where both children and parents are happy and confident that all their expectations will be met. Parents can leave their child in the care of qualified and experienced staff knowing that they will be safe, happy mentally and physically challenged and also that they (the parents) can continue their own career(s) content that they have chosen a service that will enhance

and improve their child's growth and development."

"Parents are the child's first educators and that the child's development is best supported when service providers work closely with parents."

The issue of **Standards** and **Best Practice** was cited by 114 (33%) delegates, including the development of philosophies, policies, procedures and record keeping in relation to all aspects of the setting. This also involves their implementation, review and development on an ongoing basis. Adherence to the Preschool Regulations as enforced by the preschool officers also featured as a prominent response.

"Any services that purports to be a quality service must demonstrate evidence of and an articulation of the values governing the service."

"Quality means setting standards in the area below which no setting should fall. It should focus on three areas - practitioners, child, & environment."

The provision of **Equipment, Materials and Resources** apposite to the needs of each child featured in the responses of 104 (30%) delegates. This relates to all aspects of the setting, from the appropriate structure and layout of the building to the range of resources available to the developing child.

"Providing a high quality environment with equipment, materials, activities and interactions appropriate to their age and stage of development."

"Comfortable surroundings of adequate size, well lit, heated and ventilated. wide range of toys and equipment available, Outside play area."

"Correct amount of equipment and a high quality of equipment so as not to over-stimulate or under stimulate children."

Adult-Child Interactions were noted as being central to the definition of quality by 92 (27%) respondents. This involves affording individual time to each child for listening, supporting and interaction, which can be both adult and child-led. Within this relationship, there is a sense of mutual trust and respect.

"Where there is excellent interaction between staff and all children are listened to, by trained people who are continually up-grading their training."

"This term implies to me that children are exposed to an environment where there is a freedom of opinion with resultant freedom of speech, that the children can feel safe and happy in this childcare environment and that they are exposed to as many age-appropriate activities which will eventually ensure their self actualisation into adult life."

"Quality: is the relationship between child and adult."

Respect for Diversity was forwarded as an element in the definition of quality by 84 (24%) respondents. This was an inclusive concept, not only including race, ethnic, linguistic and religious elements but also comprising a respect for all children and their families regardless of circumstances. In addition the need

for integration and inclusion was prominent as was the necessity for training in such areas.

"Quality early childhood care and education is possible where diversity is acknowledged, affirmed and respected and where children are treated individually rather than the same and not excluded or disadvantaged on any ground."

"Awareness of a multi cultural society within the setting and curriculum is important in the Ireland of today to promote tolerance and equality. Staff training in this is essential to ensure a quality in its delivery."

The prerequisite of **Continuing Professional Development** in ensuring quality was cited by 82 (24%) respondents. This involved access to a variety of courses, workshops and training opportunities for personnel with all levels of qualifications and in all aspects of ECCE.

"Quality is about how staff receive in-service to extend and expand their skills and their own learning. How staff are supported."
"Continuous staff training and

workshops and support."

"Training is vital - integral and ongoing."

A total of 34 (10%) respondents noted the building of **Networks and Linkages** as important in ensuring a quality service. This was in order to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of information at both local and national levels.

"More input from the large professional agencies to aide and assist small community based childcare provision both rural/urban."

"Policy & procedures in place thru consultation and sharing of best practice."

The **Other** category (66/19%) is largely comprised of responses that did not relate specifically to the question of defining quality but related largely to local concerns about the development of ECCE (e.g. planning or funding difficulties). Only 1% of delegates failed to respond to this question.

4.3 Assessing Quality

The matter of Assessing Quality also generated lively debate at the seminars and a wide array of responses were forthcoming in this regard. Following thematic analysis, the responses were classified and generated ten all encompassing categories as represented in Figure 11 below.

The largest number of respondents (178/46%) focused on **External Advice and Support** in relation to the assessment of quality. This category includes the existing preschool inspections in operation but there was a focus on the support as opposed to the inspection element of such services. There was great emphasis placed on the suitability of the personnel supplying the external supports, with wide experience and qualifications in the ECCE sector. Another prominent characteristic of responses was the call for the inspectors to look beyond the physical environment only and to focus on the quality of the care and education also. Such external advice and supports would be with a view to suggesting improvements for the setting and the sharing and

Figure 11 - Assessing Quality
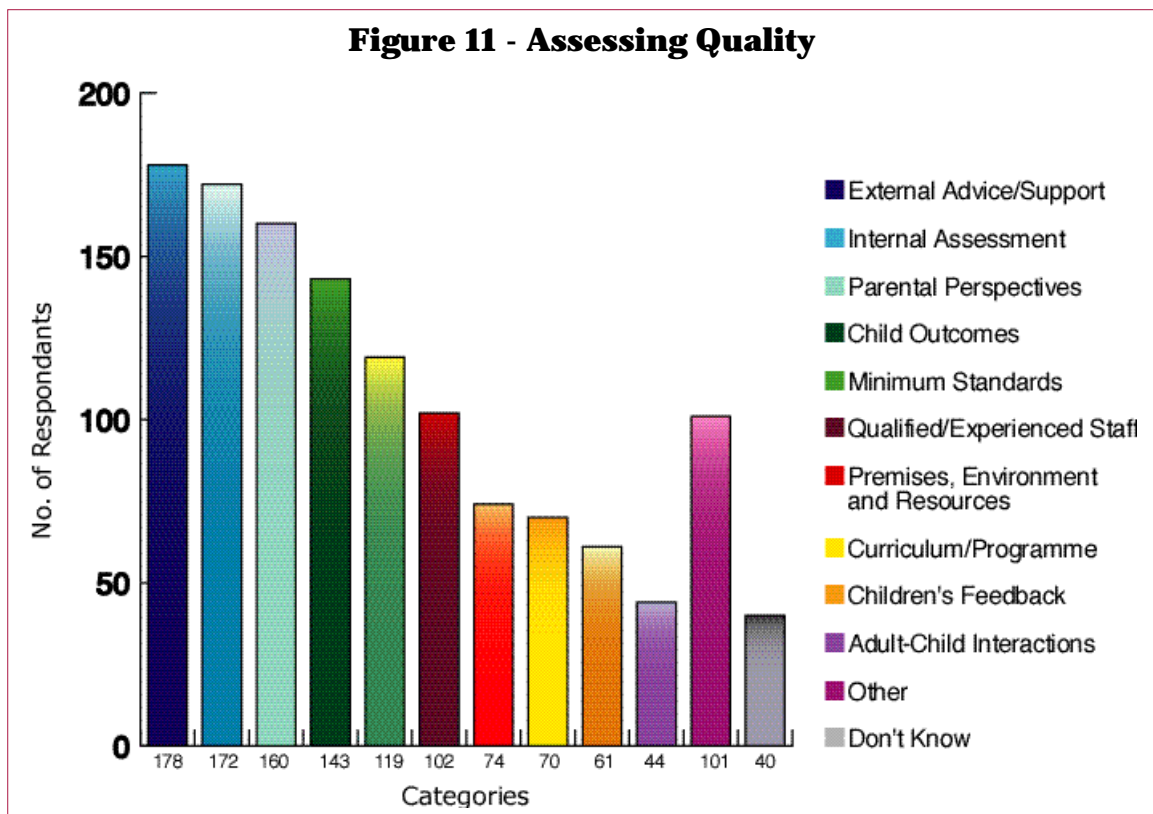
dissemination of evolving developments in policy and practice.

"A robust and informed external inspection system can play a critical role in assessing and raising the quality of early childhood care and education. This system should have an evaluative and advisory function rather than a 'policing' function."

"Tábhachtach go mbeadh saineolaithe a thuigfidh forbairt an pháiste agus iad cáilithe dá réir."

"Assessing quality in early childhood education and care should be undertaken by persons chosen as external examiners from within the system."

"Inspections of the preschool but this should focus on the service provided and the quality of care and not just the structural appearance and safety features of the building."

"Independent external assessment by a competent third party. The audits should at a minimum include : Interviews with parents (and children where possible) -

Observation - Review of documentation - Surveys/Focus groups with parent and children."

Internal Assessment was cited by 172 (44%) delegates. This relates to regular ongoing assessment and self-assessment within services. This involved the discussion, planning and evaluation of assessment in a cycle of reflective practice among all members of staff. Participants noted the time needed to implement this form of assessment and the necessity to develop self-evaluation tools within settings.

"It should take place on a continuous basis within early childhood settings themselves. The assessment process needs to be grounded in a commitment by all those concerned in the child's care and education, to meeting certain standards or benchmarks."

"Assisting practitioners to self-assess by discussion, planning, evaluation and re-planning - a cycle of reflective practice."

"Self assessment first (from within) and then it can be monitored from the outside. Imposition will never

ensure quality."

"Self Assessment is a very good starting point where teachers meet and assess everything from child in context, learning environment, daily routine, child/adult materials, team work, parental involvement, developmental assessment, daily curriculum planning to management and how it supports in-service training and grading of all necessary skill."

The viewpoint of the stakeholders within the service, such as **Parental Perspectives** was noted by 160 (41%) respondents. Delegates cited this form of assessment in relation to the willingness of parents to use the service and based on the happiness of the child. In addition, parents could be asked to complete evaluation forms regarding the service from which alterations and modification might be made.

"Sástacht agus meas atá ag an tuismitheoir leis an t-ionad atá an gasúr ag freastail air."

"Providers of ECCE services can assess how the views of families and of the children themselves are

taken into consideration in developing appropriate learning activities and in making decisions about policy changes."

"I feel the most effective way of assessing quality is the feedback we have every year from parents. If you offer a service where parents are happy and their child is happy and content then word will spread of the great service available."

Child Outcomes was mentioned as a form of assessment by 143 (37%) delegates in the process of conducting the seminars. This involves regular assessment and evaluation of the rate of development of each child, which is documented and recorded on an ongoing basis. This relates to all aspects of the development of the child, including physical, social, linguistic, cognitive and emotional aspects. Some mention was also made of the use of formal standardised tests and assessments within the early years settings.

"Children differ in terms of abilities, cultures, life experiences and learning styles. Knowledge of and sensitivity to difference and individual interests on the part of

practitioners is essential for quality care."

"Quality in early childhood care and education is very difficult to assess, as it requires insights into the early experiences as internalised by the child. This internalisation may not show 'fruits' until much later in the child's life, further complexifying the assessment process."

The use of **Minimum Standards** was noted by 119 (31%) respondents as important in the assessment of quality. Such documents could be recognised or even created nationally based on best practice and be reviewed periodically. Within settings, these checklists would be completed regularly for all children in an array of features, which would document the quality of the service provided. This category also comprises the policies of the setting in a variety of aspects, such as enrolments, diversity and health and safety.

"A formal system of assessment should be established so that there is a minimum standard for all services."

"Perhaps a baseline assessment could be undertaken in the first month, followed by the same at the end of the year. Baseline can be teacher friendly and informal, through observation during structured play for example."

"Have policies on quality, so everyone knows what is expected and what they are required to provide."

The issue of **Qualified and Experienced Staff** was cited by 102 (26%) delegates. In addition to access to initial training and qualifications, this includes the provision of regular and continuous professional development through in-service courses. The quality of the staff was asserted as being of primary importance, by virtue of the interactions with children on a daily basis. The need for standardised training across the sector was also prominent, leading to the creation of a career path and promotional ladder.

"Physical qualities are easily assessed, as they are visible. It is the qualities of the people in the work area and their methods that are difficult to assess."

"Ensuring that all personnel hold qualifications in early years care and education - only employing those that do and encouraging holders of minimum qualifications to engage in further study to improve their career prospects."

"In order to assess quality in ECCE are needs to look at the links between quality in provision of services and quality in provision of training."

The **Premises, Environment and Resources** were viewed as being important to assess quality by 74 (19%) participants. This includes the physical suitability of the premises layout as well as the atmosphere created within, ensuring it was warm, safe and stress free. The provision of space, both indoors and outdoors for play and other activities also featured prominently. The equipment, furniture, facilities and resources in use within the setting were seen as being of primary importance and their accessibility, relevance and suitability to the age and stage of the children present was highlighted.

"Environment would call to the

child. Environment. Bright - appealing. Safe. Boundries."
"The Atmosphere. Hear the Children. The Environment - Bright and airy, free space, child sized, natural materials, specific areas, safe."

A total of 70 (18%) delegates cited the **Curriculum and Programme** in operation within settings as being of importance in the assessment of quality. This involves articulating the routines and methods used within the setting and their appropriateness for the children present. Many respondents were insistent that flexibility must be an inherent characteristic of the curriculum or programme in the early years.

"Clear curriculum with regular inspections from an appropriate authority ensuring implementation."

"Having a national curriculum that includes all aspects of the childcare facilitation i.e. environment curriculum, hidden curriculum etc."

The perspectives of children in the form of **Children's Feedback** were noted by 61 (16%)

respondents. This involves listening to children's experiences of their time within settings and using this as a tool to assess quality. In addition, this can be monitored in the willingness of the children to return each day and by observation of their happiness within the setting.

"The children are the people who experience the quality of the setting. They have a voice and should be asked what they want from the centre and are they getting it. Even young babies can be included in this. The expression on their face as they are handed over in the morning speaks louder than words."

"You can assess quality by asking children how they feel while in the service. One can also see if the child is happy being left there. Babies can be assessed by observations done at various times throughout the day."

"To assess quality in ECCE, I feel the most important party to consult is the child - how relaxed and comfortable the child is in the setting."

Adult-Child Interactions were viewed as being central to the assessment of quality by 44 (11%) participants. This comprised all interactions within the setting, including that between adults and children and also child-child interactions as promoted by adults. This involves the language used, the level of eye-to-eye contact and the listening ability of the staff.

"Observation would be the most effective way of assessing quality. Observations between staff and children, staff and staff, staff and parents."

"Child observations - use the evaluations of these over time to assess whether or not the children overall are progressing as a whole and whether quality learning is taking place and the children are developing as a whole."

Within this question, 101 (26%) responses were classified as **Other**. A total of 40 (10%) delegates did not reply to this question.

4.4 Supporting Quality

The theme of Supporting Quality yielded a great diversity of responses from delegates at the seminars. Following thematic analysis, the ten categories shown in Figure 12 below were produced. Many delegates pointed out that a support infrastructure was crucial for the successful implementation of the NFQ:

financial assistance, professional development, opportunities for local networking and sharing practices and mentoring."

The main support cited by respondents at the consultative seminars regarding quality was **Funding and Financial Support**, mentioned by 224 (58%) delegates. Respondents proposed a number of ways in which this could

Figure 12 - Supporting Quality
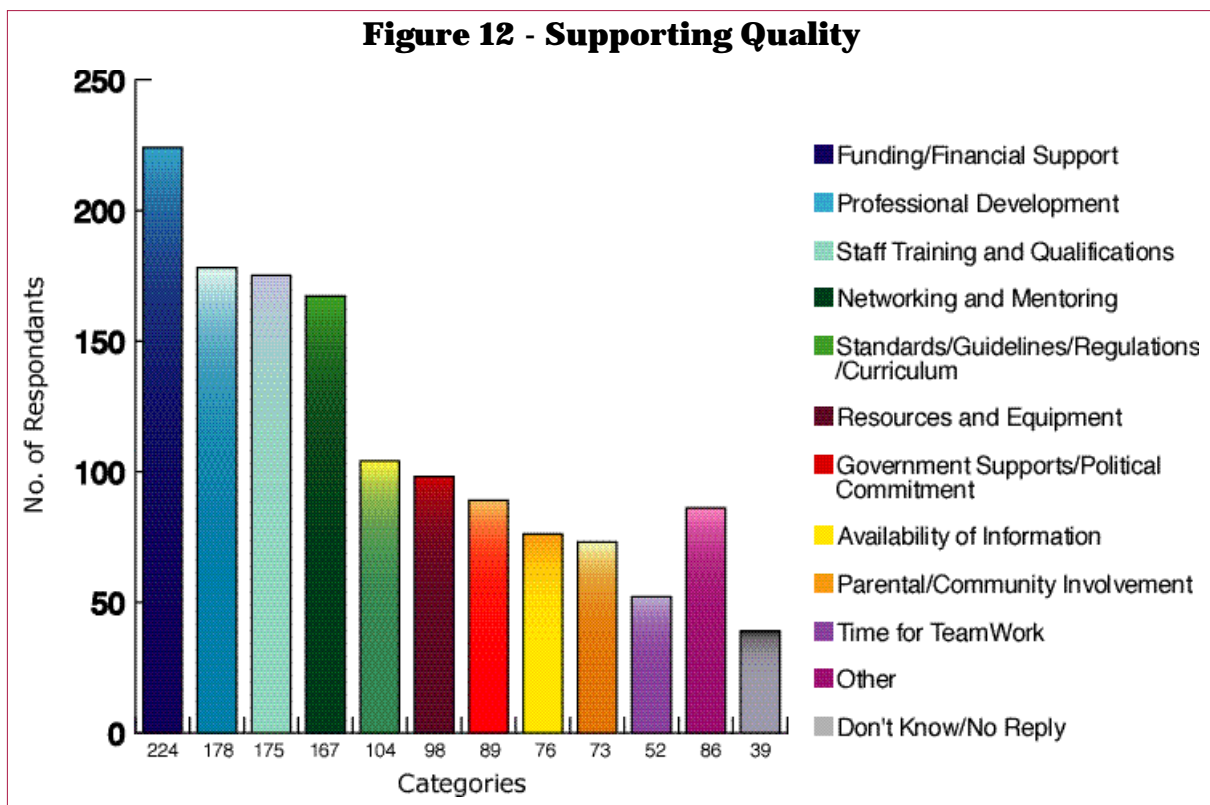
"A framework alone is likely to enable limited improvement in the quality of provision. Supporting structures and mechanisms should accompany the framework. These supports could take the form of

be facilitated, including direct funding for childcare, capital grants, capitation grants, tax breaks and tax credits for parents. Such funding was seen as essential to allow staff wages to reflect the onerous task

they fulfil, and to support the training and continuous professional development of practitioners to provide the infrastructure to allow the sector to develop and prosper.

"High quality provision will not come cheap. Support will have to be put in place. The emphasis should be on improvement rather than grading and competition which in my view is counter productive."

"Tax incentives for parents availing of childcare from a "quality marked service". Change in legislation from notification to registration."

"We feel that childcare in this country will really be appreciated when the government decide to pay workers wages and help with the day-to-day running of childcare organisations."

"Resourcing should be a right not a fight."

Continuous Professional Development was proposed as a support by 178 (46%) respondents. This involved access to ongoing training and development for practitioners, which dovetailed with

their work and personal commitments. This could include release time from work as well as the provision of modular or part-time courses. There were calls within this for ongoing training for management to support them in their role and also for specialist training, regarding special needs and diversity.

"Everybody needs ongoing in-service training to examine and explore on an ongoing basis all areas involved in childcare and education."

"Regular state run conferences and training days to update staff and state information and learning."

"Additional training and updated training - further courses. Practical more so than theory courses."

Closely related to the theme of Continuous Professional Development, and cited by 175 (45%) delegates, was the issue of **Staff Training and Qualifications**. This comprised access to training opportunities for staff at pre-service level and the provision of courses leading to accredited and standardised qualifications. There were calls for

an increasing professional identity for the sector, which may be facilitated by improved access to training and qualifications. Such a training infrastructure would permit a career path to be created, attracting and retaining young practitioners and strengthening the emerging identity of the sector.

"Framework of the levels of qualification needs to be put in place so staff will be aware of the differences in the various qualifications."

"If staff have had appropriate training children are more likely to get quality experiences and further their development."

"Standardised accredited training, for all workers in childcare not just micky mouse courses."

The provision of **Networking and Mentoring** was viewed by 167 (43%) respondents as an important element of supporting quality. This involved the sharing and dissemination of information among organisations at a local and national level. In addition, this networking was proposed to cross the traditional professional and sectoral divides, to include all the stakeholders in ECCE. The

inspectors and regional support workers were seen as important elements within this support framework, offering advice and support to practitioners in addition to performing their inspection role.

"Build on the organisations that are already in existence - help and support them. They have already started the quality process."

"Visits should be from people with a background in child development (or) childcare rep locally who has knowledge of individual providers and their setting who would help with grant forms."

"The support of other infant teachers in the school is also vital for sharing ideas and confiding in them about concerns."

The presence of **Standards, Guidelines, Regulations and a Curriculum** was seen as an important constituent of a support structure for quality by 104 (27%) delegates. These would help to clearly articulate within the setting what the minimum standards were and the delineation of a curriculum or programme within the setting. There was also prominent calls for the harmonisation of the sector, whereby the same rules and

standards would apply to all settings where children from birth to six were present.

"Child in school at 4 not getting same ratio/hygiene/regulations as child in preschool. Depts need to work together."

"Clear definition of quality and best practice."

"More written work on standards that should be practiced under to better the quality of education in all setting from the home up to school and further."

"A clear, concise outline of the quality requirements to be given to all services so every service is on an equal footing."

Resources and Equipment were alluded to as important supports by 98 (25%) respondents. Their provision would help to ensure that the physical environment was educationally and aesthetically stimulating and that each child had age and stage appropriate equipment and resources. Within this category, there was also mention of the need for appropriate staff-pupil ratios and the necessity of adjusting these for individual circumstances, including for children with special needs.

"Adequate funding and continuity of finance e.g. continued and improved financing for facilities and equipment."

"Materials/equipment needs to be assessed for the learning outcomes they could provide for children."

"Postéirí trí Gaeilge ag plé ábhar le haghaidh réamhscolaíocht."

The presence of **Government Supports and Political Commitment** ECCE was a priority for 89 (23%) of participants. This related to an acknowledgement of the importance of the early years in government policy and practice and a consequential improvement in the allocations and priority afforded to it. Moreover, there were calls for the implementation of the policies already devised or ratified by the government. In addition, delegates were anxious to see government departments and organisations dealing with ECCE to prevent duplications, voids and excessive bureaucracy in provisions.

"Substantial government investment is needed in the early childhood sector. There is now an emerging acknowledgement at

national policy level of the importance, and in particular the long-term importance of supporting children in their early childhood years."

"We need support at policy/infrastructure and practice level. We need a coordinator policy between Educ/Health/Social Welfare/Justice. We need an infrastructure that recognises the importance of the early years and invests premises/access for all/staff etc.

"Quality in early childhood care and education must have an interlinking framework of interdepartmental support and assessment."
"A political and national will to care about what children experience in services."

"A policy context which is not focussed on freeing parents to train or to work but which recognised the needs of children."

Availability of Information was listed as a core support by 76 (20%) respondents. This included a directory of services to provide and disseminate information on all aspects of quality for all stakeholders. This would also

comprise the raising of the ECCE profile nationally, through seminars, conferences and public relations. A telephone help line was also cited here as a means to access up to date information and support in a confidential manner. Delegates attending the seminar in Carraroe noted the need for the availability of such advice and support to be readily available in the Irish language.

"Perception that childcare is a service industry. Need to change all this at a social/cultural level and to look at attitudes first and then seek change."

"A help line to deal with problems that arise every day - confidential - just so supervisors and managers know they are taking the right."

"Advisory support groups for managers and practitioners who may feel isolated. Resources for helping to develop policies, procedures, curriculum, practice in general and the environment."

"Literature every couple of months to informally update staff members into developments of early childhood care and education."

"Tacaíocht ó thaobh teanga – na

séirbhísí ar fad a bhaineann le naíonraí a bheith ar fáil trí Ghaeilge, mar shampla, téiripe cainte, daoine ón mBord Sláinte srl."

"Leathanach 67 sa bPáipéar Bán deireann sé go mbeidh an tacaíocht ar fad atá i gceist le fáil ag na heagrais Ghaeilge."

A total of 73 (19%) delegates believed that **Parental and Community Involvement** was an essential support in achieving and maintaining quality in ECCE settings. To facilitate this, respondents held that parents would need to be supported to actively participate in this role.

"Developing a working partnership with parents will benefit the children, the parents and the centre. It builds trust and confidence on the part of the child and the parents, helps to ensure that the goals of the centre are supported in the home and that the centre supports the parents goals for the children."

"Parents need to be approached and their ideas considered. They can help to maintain quality by working with children at home on ideas that are identified in the setting."

"Parents and families need to be appreciated and their opinions taken into account."

The provision of **Time for Teamwork** within ECCE settings was prioritised by 52 (13%) respondents. This time would be inbuilt in the workday to facilitate planning, discussion and observations with the team. In addition, such time would assist wider networking and linkages with other settings and organisations in the locality.

"Time allocated to planning and evaluation. Floating staff - to allow other staff time off from the regular work to accommodate the above."

"I feel that once an early years worker begins working especially in private daycare the opportunity for reflection and improvement are lost."

"Need constant meetings in settings to ensure all workers are striving to the same high quality and standards."

There were 86 (22%) responses categorised as **Other**. A total of 39 (10%) of delegates made no response to this question.

Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The key objective of this consultation process was to gain insight into baseline perspectives on quality held by all stakeholders in ECCE in Ireland. The consultation was structured around three key questions:

- Defining Quality
- Assessing Quality
- Supporting Quality

These questions address the core content of an NFQ for ECCE in Ireland. The findings from this consultation process will feed directly into the development of the NFQ, which is currently being undertaken by the CECDE.

This section of the report discusses the findings of this consultation process, considering them in the light of Irish and international research, policy and practice. In keeping with our primary objective, our discussion focuses on the implications of these findings for the next steps in the development of the NFQ. Following our action research design, we have phrased the recommendations in a way that we hope will continue to facilitate full participation of all stakeholders in the subsequent phases of research and development.

The discussion is presented in the following structure:

1. Consideration of the findings in context
2. Discussion of the implications for the NFQ.

5.2 Profile of Participants

Analysis of the demographic information provided by participants indicates that there was a good representation across all age bands and a good balance of rural/ urban perspectives. It also appears that most of the main stakeholders in ECCE in Ireland were represented. In line with previous research (DJELR, 2002; ADM 2003), our findings indicate that women are in the majority amongst the workforce in ECCE.

In order to help deepen our understanding of the views of participants on the key issue of quality, we attempted to establish the context for these baseline perspectives. Interestingly, the findings appear to indicate that

most participants are working with children in the three to six age range. This correlates well with previous audits of ECCE provision, which have revealed that services for children aged birth to three, are limited (ADM 2003; CECDE, 2004). The diversity of provision in ECCE in Ireland has also been well documented and this was certainly reflected in the wide variety of pedagogical/philosophical approaches that were reported by participants.

The high proportion of Montessori practitioners may be due to the fact that there are a number of long established Montessori training colleges in Ireland. The predominance of Play based, High Scope and to a lesser extent Irish language programmes could also be due to the fact that there is a strong tradition of playgroup/preschool provision in Ireland supported by membership organisations who provide programme training and support for practitioners[4]. However, despite the fact that most respondents could articulate the pedagogical approach or philosophy they were taking, a significant

proportion of respondents (29%) selected the 'Don't know' response to this question on the information template. This is an issue for concern and warrants further investigation given the fact that participants have consistently cited the importance of programme/curriculum in defining, assessing and supporting quality.

The methodology employed in this consultation utilised the World Wide Web and as this is still a relatively recent tool for such processes, it is worth briefly commenting on the level of such response. Whilst initially slow to come in, 42 fully completed online forms were received. This response rate compared favourably with the centre based consultations and therefore demonstrates potential for future use in this regard. It is interesting to note that the highest concentration of these responses came from Dublin (36%).

Implications for the NFQ
The sample achieved through the consultation seminars appears to contain a good representation of the broad

---

[4] IPPA, the early childhood organisation, High/Scope Ireland, National Children's Nurseries Association, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo, Séirbhísí Naíonraí Teo

variety of stakeholders in ECCE in Ireland therefore it is reasonable to assume that the consensus which emerges from the findings of this consultation process can provide a good basis for the future development of the NFQ.

5.3 Perspectives on Quality

As the analysis of findings has shown, the most significant observation that can be made regarding perspectives on quality is their diversity. This undoubtedly has its origins in the cultural and historical context in which ECCE has evolved in Ireland (CECDE, 2004). This context, which could be characterised, until relatively recently as 'laissez-faire' in terms of state intervention, has resulted in both negative and positive outcomes. Whilst the negative outcomes such as under funding, low status and inadequate provision are more often highlighted, on a positive note, it has fostered the proliferation of philosophy and practice and the subsequent development of a rich well of experience and expertise in the development and delivery of 'quality' services for young children.

Literature on the subject of defining quality in ECCE supports the fact that we are dealing with a complex, dynamic and multi faceted issue and indeed the participants responses bear this out (DES, 1999; Hayes, 2002, French, 2003).

Implications for the NFQ
Quality in ECCE in Ireland exists within a huge diversity of perspectives, philosophies and practices, which are also dynamic and evolving. This necessitates that quality indicators or standards must contain sufficient flexibility to accommodate these characteristics.

5.4 Defining Quality

Despite the diversity that emerged from thematic analysis of the data, there were clear areas, which gained consensus amongst participants in relation to defining quality. These were:

1. Environment
2. Child-centred
3. Staffing issues
4. Curriculum/programme
5. Parental involvement
6. Standards/best practice
7. Equipment, materials and

resources
8. Adult child interactions
9. Respect for diversity
10. Continuing professional
    development
11. Networking/linkages

The first four categories represent the strongest consensus, each achieving in excess of fifty percent endorsement amongst participants. There were a small number of responses which did not fit into any of the above categories and which were represented in the findings as 'other'. In the main, these responses did not address the question under consideration.

1. Environment

Sixty-six percent of responses referred to the environment when defining quality. The focus of these responses included issues such as safety, hygiene, space (both indoor and outdoor) and staff-child ratios. These are all static as opposed to dynamic issues which are regulated by the Department of Health and Children through the Pre-school Inspection services under the Pre-school Services Regulations 1997 (DHC, 1997) and therefore it is not surprising that they should feature so prominently as indicators of

quality. In addition, information on child welfare and safety has been widely circulated and supported by information and training amongst practitioners in recent times and may also have impacted on the prominence given to safety within the responses (DHC, 1999; 2002; French, 2003).

It is interesting to note that there were several references made to the need to balance child safety and hygiene with the need for children to experience a certain degree of 'risk' within their environment. There is some support in literature for this perspective (Ogilvy, 2000; National Children's Office, 2004). Whilst the majority of responses to all the questions related to the environment as a defined situation where children were present, a few did attempt to discuss the environment in its wider context, referring to *"...the people, the objects and all the events and activities within it..."* This may reflect the fact that regulation of service provision in ECCE is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland and as such is dominating the priorities of providers. The Regulations are under presently under review and it is anticipated

that the results of this review process will be published in 2004.

Implications for the NFQ

The NFQ must support the development of environments that support the optimal development of children. To achieve such an objective, standards and guidelines should be informed by research on this issue whilst also complying with any relevant legislation, which may impact on the nature of the environment in ECCE.

2. Child centred

Concerns regarding the more static variables impacting on quality were equally balanced (65%) by a consensus on the fact that quality in ECCE could be defined by the degree to which the child's needs were given prominence. Recognition of the individuality of each child was to the fore in many of the comments and there was a repeated reference to the need for flexibility and responsiveness by practitioners and services. This finding articulates well with national policy such as Ready to Learn, the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999) and the

National Children's Strategy (DHC, 2000) which both advocate a holistic, coordinated approach to the provision of care and education for children.

Implications for the NFQ

The core rationale for the development of an NFQ must be that it contributes effectively to supporting the well-being and development of all the children of Ireland. In addition it must take account of and complement existing national policy and initiatives in this regard.

3. Staffing issues

Responses under this heading (62%) were dominated by reference to the training and qualifications of staff working with young children. There appeared to be a strong consensus that qualified staff were essential to the provision of quality services. This perspective finds substantial support in national and international literature. (Abbott and Pugh, 1998; Coolahan, 1998; National Research Council, 2001; DJELR, 2002; Fisher, 2002). In addition responses also referred to personal characteristics of staff as key indicators of quality e.g. warm,

caring and responsive were recurrent adjectives.

Implications for the NFQ

The role of the adult is central to the provision of quality. Training and qualifications are an essential element in supporting adults in this critical role. The NFQ should identify the core skills and knowledge necessary to the provision of quality in ECCE. It should be based on a clear set of values and principles, which reflect and support best practice.

4. Curriculum/programme

In general responses in this category (55%) made reference to the fact that structured programmes, which contained clear philosophies, policies, and procedures supported the delivery of quality services. Whilst many responses called for specific approaches and methodologies, there was a strong consensus that such programmes must maintain enough flexibility to support both the individual needs of children and the creativity and autonomy of practitioners. The NCCA has recently published *'Towards a Framework for Early Learning'* (NCCA, 2004). This initiative is one stage of the development of overarching curriculum guidelines for all adults working with children birth to six years which ultimately may resolve concerns expressed by participants in this consultation.

Implications for the NFQ

The NFQ must be able to articulate with and inform existing and developing programmes, methodologies and curriculum in ECCE.

5. Parental involvement

The views within this category (38%) expressed the belief that quality provision of care and education was characterised by the degree to which parents were recognised as the primary educators of their child. This role was depicted as one of equal partnership in the best interests of the child. Such provision would afford parents the opportunity to play a key role in the care and education of their children. National policy in Ireland is unequivocal on the central role of parents and family in the care and education of children. The Irish constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937) makes reference to

this as does relevant legislation such as the Child Care Act, 1991 (DoH, 1991) the Education Act, 1998 (DES, 1998) and the Children Act 2001 (DJELR, 2001).

Implications for the NFQ
The NFQ must recognise and support the role of parents as the primary carers and educators of their children.

6. Standards/best practice

In the main the responses in this category (33%) reflect the view that there must be minimum standards below which services cannot fall in order for them to be considered as constituting quality provision. Interestingly, there were also a number of responses, which referred to the need for a set of clearly articulated values and principles to inform the development of quality. This particular issue has been discussed in national and international literature pertaining to quality and best practice in ECCE (Pugh, 1995; European Commission Network, 1996; Feeney and Freeman, 1999; DJELR, 2002; NAEYC, 2004). Analysis of this literature reveals a consensus that such a set of values and principles or code of ethics

should evolve from practitioners in ECCE and not be imposed by external agencies.

Implications for the NFQ
The NFQ should contain a set of clearly articulated minimum standards to support and inform the development of quality. These in turn should be based upon a set of values and principles, which have achieved the clear endorsement of all stakeholders in ECCE.

7. Equipment, materials and resources

These responses (30%) make specific reference to the type and nature of materials, resources and equipment necessary to the provision of quality. Recommendations were made related on a variety of issues including physical space in terms of suitable premises and layout, the need for natural play materials and there was a general consensus regarding the need for *'age and stage appropriate'* resources.

Implications for the NFQ
Further research and investigation regarding the

nature of appropriate materials, resources and equipment should inform the development of the NFQ.

8. Adult child interactions

This category relates directly to the child centred nature of quality provision. Responses (27%) were very clear on the fact that supportive and nurturing relationships and interactions between adult and child were essential for the provision of quality. In many responses a positive link was made between the role of training and the quality of interactions. This is not a new observation and is at the heart of the work of some of the most prominent theories of child development (Vygotsky, 1978, Bronfenbrenner, Forthcoming) and education (Dewey, 1938). However, despite such prominent support, regulation and legislation on quality has tended to focus on the more static variables and ignored the more dynamic issues such as relationships and interactions (DHC, 1997). There is evidence that such policy is being revised and certainly the issue of adult child interaction has been experiencing something of a renaissance in recent times. In the Irish context, Hayes (2004) describes a nurturing pedagogy, which is centred upon 'reciprocal, bi-directional interaction' as the key point at which learning and development are supported.

Implications for the NFQ

The NFQ should take account of the literature regarding the role of adult child interaction in the development and provision of quality in ECCE.

9. Respect for diversity

A significant percentage (24%) of respondents made reference to the importance of 'respect for diversity' as an element in defining quality in ECCE. The overarching message in these responses was the necessity for respect for all children and families regardless of their circumstances. There was a clear recognition that rather than treating all children the 'same', individuality must be recognised and supported. It is also interesting that many of these responses cited the need for specialised training to support this element of quality. The level and nature of responses in this category can be attributed to a number of factors including the fact that Ireland has experienced rapid

demographic change over the past decade, with a shift from large-scale emigration to significant levels of immigration (CSO, 2002). This, combined with the enactment of equality legislation (DJELR, 2000; DES, 2000) and consistent awareness raising by Traveller groups (Murray and O'Doherty, 2001; Pavee Point, 2002), has begun to impact on the policies and practices of ECCE.

Implications for the NFQ
Respect for diversity is a key issue, which must be central to the development of the NFQ.

10. Continuing professional development

Staff training and qualifications has already emerged as a key indicator of quality. These responses (24%) make specific reference to the fact that attention to initial or pre-service education is not enough to ensure the provision of quality. The dynamic and changing nature of ECCE necessitates that continuing professional development in the form of courses, workshops and also self-reflection is supported.

Implications for the NFQ
The implications of this finding for the development of the NFQ is that close links should be established with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the awarding bodies [5] who are responsible for the development of a framework for the facilitation, recognition and accreditation of continuing professional development.

11. Networking/linkages

A small but significant number of responses (10%) defined quality in terms of the networking relationships that had been established by the service. It was agreed that such networking would facilitate the sharing and dissemination of best practice. This finding is echoed more strongly under the heading of supporting quality.

Implications for the NFQ
The NFQ should facilitate the development of an infrastructure to support networking at national,

[5] HETAC, FETAC, DIT, Institutes of Technology, National University of Ireland, Trinity College.

regional and local level.

5.5 Assessing quality

Of the three questions on quality, the issue of assessment appeared to cause the most difficulty for participants. This is evidenced by the fact that 26% of participants did not address this issue in their responses. A further 10% did not respond at all. This may in part to be related to the fact that, for the majority of centre based ECCE services, regulation and inspection is a relatively recent phenomenon. Whilst the overall consensus appeared to agree that external assessment was necessary, participants were anxious to voice their opinions on the existing pre-school inspection system and how it might be improved. There was considerable overlap between responses to the question of defining and assessing quality with many of the indicators of quality being cited as assessment criteria. There were very few recommendations regarding 'how' to assess. A general theme of the responses to this question is the clear message that all assessment should be formative, constructive and accompanied by supportive activities. Thematic analysis of the responses yielded the following categories:

1. External advice/support
2. Internal assessment
3. Parental perspectives
4. Child outcomes
5. Minimum standards
6. Qualified/experienced staff
7. Premises/environment/resources
8. Curriculum/programme
9. Children's feedback
10. Adult-child interactions

1. External advice/support

Responses in this category (46%) clearly endorsed the fact that external assessment is a necessary element in assessing quality. However, the majority of responses qualified this endorsement by outlining key characteristics of any external assessment system. These included insistence that:

- Qualifications and experience of assessors should be in ECCE;
- Assessment should be formative and supportive and should encompass the more dynamic variables of quality such as programme quality, adult child interactions etc.
- Existing assessment processes should be co-ordinated and

result in consistent approaches from different agencies.

Two independent statutory inspections systems currently operate within ECCE in Ireland. These are the Pre-school Inspection service operated by the Health Boards and the Primary Schools Inspectorate operated by the Department of Education and Science. In addition a number of independent organisations have developed quality programmes, which also offer models of assessment (e.g. IPPA, NCNA, BCCN).

Implications for the NFQ
The NFQ must take account of these different approaches to assessment and be able to accommodate, support and where necessary develop current practice to achieve the desired levels of consistency and co-ordination.

2. Internal assessment
Responses in this category (44%) are primarily concerned with communicating the message that quality is the responsibility of all those involved in the provision of services. The point was also being made that the dynamic nature of ECCE necessitates regular review of policy and practice. Many articulated the model of the 'reflective practitioner' as being essential to the development of quality. This model of professional practice describes a professional/client relationship that is based on partnership and mutual respect, and emphasises the importance of regular review and reflection on practice as the key to quality and professional development (DJELR, 2002; Fisher, 2002).

Many responses were very specific as to the need for this reflection to be structured and resourced adequately. Some suggestions in this regard referred to the need for guidelines, mentoring and continuous professional development opportunities. Several agencies and organisations in ECCE have developed materials to help practitioners to engage in internal assessment. These will prove valuable in the development of the NFQ.

Implications for the NFQ
Assessment of quality must have relevance and involve all

stakeholders in the provision of ECCE. Internal assessment can be conceptualised as a continuum from the individual practitioner through to the team within a centre and ultimately to the wider community of practice involved in ECCE. The NFQ must acknowledge and support internal assessment at all points along this continuum.

3. Parental perspectives

The responses in this category (41%) fit broadly into two main strands. The first was the view that the best assessment of an ECCE service was the degree to which parents were satisfied. This reflects a perspective that quality is about 'fitness for purpose', which in this instance is meeting the needs of parents. The other aspect of these responses related to the view that services should be assessed by the degree to which parents' perspectives were taken on board in the planning, development and operation of ECCE. These are subtly different issues, one being a measurement and the other a criteria, however both are highlighting the central importance of parental perspectives in the

assessment of ECCE.

Implications for the NFQ
Mechanisms for the inclusion of parents' perspectives in the assessment of quality in ECCE should be developed as an integral part of the NFQ.

4. Child outcomes

A significant body of national and international research highlights the benefits of ECCE to children's development and learning (INTO, 1995; Coolahan, 1998; DES, 1999; Guralnick, 2000; Shonkoff and Meisels, 2000; National Research Council, 2001). In this consultation 36% of participants held the view that child outcomes were a measure of the quality of ECCE services. Few evaluations of ECCE in Ireland consider child outcomes as a criteria (CECDE, 2004). Evaluation of ECCE in Ireland, particularly service provision outside the remit of the Department of Education and Science, has usually been done in terms of funding criteria and in recent times this has been dominated by an agenda of facilitating equality to parents participation in the labour force (DJELR, 1999; NDP/CSF, 2003). Given the fact that quality of

provision is a significant factor influencing child outcomes (Vandell and Wolfe, 2000), it is imperative that any assessment mechanisms support the development of quality to this end.

Implications for the NFQ

The best interests of the child should be at the heart of the NFQ. Given that there is not a strong tradition of assessment in terms of child outcomes in Ireland, the NFQ must ensure that assessment of quality should always be balanced to support optimal outcomes for children.

5. Minimum standards

The responses under this heading (31%) were generally unified in calling for a set of national standards that could be applied by all practitioners in ECCE. Specific reference was made throughout these responses to the fact that standardisation of policies and procedures; across all ECCE settings are necessary. It would appear that these responses indicate a preference for easily administered procedures that would facilitate regular review of practice under key minimum standards.

Implications for the NFQ

Clear, standardised guidelines in relation to the development of policies and procedures should be included in the NFQ. In addition any assessment materials developed should be uncomplicated, straightforward and easy to complete.

6. Qualified/experienced staff

Once again staff qualifications and training emerge as an important issue for the assessment of quality (26%). In this instance the number of experienced qualified staff was held to be a measure of the quality of the service. In addition many references were made to the issue of quality in education and training programmes and calls were made for the standardisation of same.

Implications for the NFQ

The NFQ must articulate the important impact that quality in pre-service and in-service education and training programmes in ECCE can have on the delivery of quality services for children. It must communicate these issues clearly to those agencies responsible for the

development and delivery of education and training in ECCE.

7. Premises/environment /resources

Comments under this heading (19%) echoed those made regarding defining quality. They reinforced the need to look at the environment, materials and resources when assessing quality and gave specific criteria for such assessment. 'Bright and airy, free space, child sized, natural materials, specific areas, safe'.

Implications for the NFQ

Once again these comments point up the need to ensure that the NFQ is compatible with regulations and legislation regarding these issues and also any research that might support the selection of appropriate materials for children.

8. Curriculum/programme

In general these responses cited the presence of a clearly articulated curriculum or programme as evidence of quality provision. It was evident that many participants already operated such a curriculum/programme. Those

mentioned included Montessori, High/Scope, and Play-based approaches. It was felt that a clear overarching set of guidelines around this issue would support all practitioners to assess their own practice in this regard.

Implications for the NFQ

A set of clear guidelines regarding quality in curriculum/programme should be incorporated into the NFQ. These should be consistent with developments in this regard that are being undertaken by the NCCA.

9. Children's feedback

A small but significant number of responses expressed a clear concern that the first step in assessing quality in ECCE should be to pay attention to the feedback of children. This might involve asking children their views directly or by observing children's reactions and behaviours. This finding certainly finds support in the National Children's Strategy, which clearly outlines a commitment to consultation with children regarding their needs and perspectives on policy development that relates directly to them (DHC,

2000; Mc Auley and Brattman 2002; 2003).

Implications for the NFQ

Mechanisms and protocols must be developed to facilitate the voices of children to be heard on all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of quality in ECCE. Guidelines for consulting with young children should also be inherent to the NFQ.

10. Adult-child interactions

Again the issue of adult-child interaction featured as an issue when assessing quality (11%). Observation was identified as the key to assessing this more dynamic variable of quality.

Implications for the NFQ

Observation is a valuable tool in the assessment of quality in adult child interactions and the NFQ should include clear guidelines and policies on this important issue.

5.6 Supporting Quality

Despite the fact that 125 participants did not directly address the issue, those who did were unequivocal on the top issues under this heading:

1. Funding/financial
2. Professional development
3. Staff training and qualifications
4. External advice/networking/mentoring
5. Standards/guidelines /regulations/curriculum
6. Resources and equipment
7. Government support/political commitment
8. Availability of information
9. Parental/community involvement
10. Time for teamwork

1. Funding/financial

This was a dominant theme in responses to this question, and even in responses which highlighted other issues, a reminder was usually given that finance would be required to implement these recommendations. It was apparent that participants had given a lot of thought to this issue and there were a number of recommendations/suggestions as to how such funding might be distributed. These included:

- Financial support for improved pay and conditions for ECCE staff were seen as essential to

reflect the demanding and highly responsible role they fulfil. In addition, funding was called for to support the initial training and continuous professional development of all practitioners;

● Financing of a coordinated infrastructure at national, regional and local level to enhance and support future development of ECCE and improve long term sustainability of new initiatives;

● Capital funding for the improvement and development of service provision was viewed as critical to the development of quality;

● Supporting parents and families financially to afford them more choice in selecting appropriate care and education for their children.

The predominance of concern regarding funding is perhaps not surprising given the fact that, until the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) in 2000, state funding of ECCE has been traditionally been low level and concentrated upon targeted initiatives designed to tackle disadvantage or special needs (DES, 2003, CECDE, 2004). Whilst

the substantial commitment made under the EOCP was widely welcomed, it again is a time limited commitment of funding which ends in 2006. The issue of long-term sustainability of ECCE was one that emerged strongly in discussions amongst participants. Many comments on funding clearly stated that the real commitment of government and society to ECCE could only be evidenced by realistic and sustained level of financial commitment by the national exchequer.

Implications for the NFQ
The level of financial commitment allocated to its implementation will significantly affect confidence in and support of the NFQ.

2. Continuing Professional Development

Given the fact that this issue has featured in responses to both defining and assessing quality it is unsurprising that it should also attract strong consensus from participants (46%) in relation to supporting quality. It is interesting to note that continuing professional development has emerged from this consultation as a distinct category

from the more general issue of qualifications and training. This may be due to the substantial progress that has been made by many ECCE practitioners towards achieving at least a basic level of qualifications. Such progress has created a greater awareness of the need for further and continuing professional development programmes. Responses on this issue made many concrete suggestions as to the form continuing professional development might take. These include *'Regular state run conferences and training days...,.... practical more so than theory courses..., ...professional in-service during working day time..."*.

Implications for the NFQ
It is essential that the NFQ address these suggestions and incorporates a clear set of recommendations/guidelines/ actions regarding continuing professional development of ECCE practitioners.

3. Staff training and qualifications

As has already been stated the positive relationship between the qualifications of staff and the quality of ECCE services is strongly endorsed by participants in the consultation process and therefore again emerges strongly as an issue for supporting quality (45%). It is interesting though to note that suggestions under this heading are not simply calls for improved levels of qualifications and training amongst practitioners. Rather they are very specific regarding the need for "Standardised accredited training', and indeed several responses refer to the need for clearly articulated framework of qualifications to support the development of professional identity for ECCE. In addition there was evidence that the changing nature of practice in ECCE was creating new education and training needs, "A focus on diversity and equality -an anti-bias approach - needs to be mainstreamed as a core component in all pre-service training courses for ECCE". In addition to the development of the NFQ these findings also have implications for the developing National Qualifications Framework and associated national awards standards. They serve to reinforce the importance of close correspondence between these two structures.

Implications for the NFQ:
National quality standards developed as part of the NFQ must have relevance for and articulate with qualifications and education and training provision relevant to the practice of early childhood are and education.

4. Networking/mentoring

The responses in this category were once again very practical regarding the necessity for a well-resourced support infrastructure for ECCE. This infrastructure would include the availability at national, regional and local level of expert advice and mentoring for all stakeholders. It was suggested by many that existing infrastructure should be developed and enhanced to facilitate the implementation of the NFQ, *'Build on the organisations that are already in existence - help and support them. They have already started the quality process.'* In the majority of cases these organisations evolved from grassroots level to respond to the specific needs of individual groups. They have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and expertise on effective practice in support of ECCE. At the very least, the experience and expertise of a broad range of these existing support services and agencies should be drawn upon for the development of any support infrastructure within the NFQ.

The importance of establishing communication networks was highlighted by many, as this comment illustrates ...*'for sharing ideas and confiding ....about concerns'.* A number of responses articulated the need for help line facilities, which could be accessed for a wide range of advice information and support. The establishment of support groups was also mentioned, in particular, *"(a)dvisory support groups for managers and practitioners who may feel isolated*.

Implications for development of NFQ
The NFQ should provide a range of support mechanisms to meet the needs of the broad range of stakeholders in ECCE. These should build upon the existing infrastructure and expertise and should be accessible at national, regional and local level.

5. Standards/guidelines /regulations/curriculum

These emerged as an issue in supporting quality for 27% of respondents. The role of standardisation in terms of regulations, guidelines and curriculum was viewed as supportive of quality in so far as it would harmonise and unify the range of provision that exists within ECCE. The majority of comments highlighted the disparity between school based and non-school based provision or between centre based and home based. Strong terms were used to express this opinion, *'…it is not good enough to exclude 4,5 and 6 year olds in schools from regulations under the child care set - must cherish all our children equally." Furthermore, ' A clear, concise outline of the quality requirements to be given to all services so every service is on an equal footing."* Currently regulation of pre-school services does not extend to infant classes in national schools or to family day-care settings with less than three children (DHC, 1997). Conversely qualification and training requirements for non-school based

settings are neither regulated nor standardised. The resulting confusion is detrimental to supporting quality in ECCE.

Implications for development of NFQ

Harmonisation of existing national guidelines, regulations, and standards is a core function of the NFQ. A first step in achieving this would be to undertake research to identify and analyse all documentation in this regard with a view to highlighting the potential for streamlining.

6. Resources and equipment

Responses in this category (25%) were closely related to those given regarding the questions of defining and assessing quality. The need for resources and materials that met the individual needs of children was emphasised. There were specific areas in which participants felt there were major deficits in available resources and equipment. These included, 'Learning resources that reflect diversity need to be developed, manufactured and

"Examples of such organisations include: City and County childcare committees, Education centres, membership organisations (e.g. INTO, IPPA, NCNA), community and voluntary organisations (e.g. Barnardos, ISPCC, Enable Ireland), County Development Boards, Partnership companies etc."

published and be available in the mainstream. A recurrent theme across many responses under other headings was again echoed here with a call for '(m)aterials in Irish and relevant to the child's environment.' In addition to physical resources, the need for adequate adult child ratios was again prominent in the responses. Implications for development of NFQ

The NFQ should be able to support the development and use of appropriate materials and resources in ECCE. Recommendations in this regard should be based upon a comprehensive review of national and international best practice and take account of knowledge regarding child development.

7. Government support/political commitment

Many responses in this category (23%) reflected the fact that responsibility for ECCE in Ireland is spread over a number of different government departments and agencies and that in general there is little or no coordination of initiatives (CECDE, 2004) established under each different remit. This situation was felt to be a barrier to quality and one that must be addressed by the NFQ. There was a clear call for *"Joined up thinking across the different sectors of government..."* In addition to the lack of coordination, many responses also highlighted the necessity for government and indeed societal commitment and support for ECCE. This comment is typical of this viewpoint, *"Recognition of value and quality of early education to the economic state of the country."* It was suggested that this would increase the status of ECCE and thereby support quality provision. Attention was also drawn to the fact that whilst there has been a wealth of policy rhetoric in the past number of year related to the development of ECCE, enactment of these policy commitments has been sadly lacking. Participants were anxious to communicate their concern that this situation would be resolved and that the proposed NFQ could act as a catalyst in this regard.

Implications for development of NFQ

Analysis of current Government policy and initiatives should be undertaken to identify potential for accommodation

and coordination within the NFQ.

8. Availability of information
This category of responses (20%) echoes many of the issues highlighted under the theme of external advice/networking and mentoring. They highlight the importance of the regular dissemination of up to date information to all stakeholders in support of quality. Reference was made to the need for a central repository for information and the availability of directories of services. This finds congruence with recommendations in the recently published 'An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990 – 2003' (CECDE, 2003: 145) which proposed that the CECDE becomes a national clearinghouse for all research in ECCE in Ireland.

It was also clear that a variety of different modes of accessing such information were required. These included courses, support groups, literature and databases. Recent research by the CECDE has established that there is a fundamental deficit in baseline information regarding the provision of services in ECCE and that the capacity of the sector to supply such information is variable (CECDE, 2004). It would be important to establish the current nature of information availability and dissemination networks to support the development of an information infrastructure within the NFQ. On a separate note, respondents also suggested that there was a need for information on the benefits of ECCE to be communicated to society in general as this would also serve to raise the status of ECCE and thereby elicit the necessary support for the generation of quality service provision.

Implications for development of NFQ
The NFQ should establish mechanisms for the regular dissemination of information on all aspects of ECCE to all stakeholders and general society. These mechanisms should be able to accommodate the needs of practitioners in both Irish and English.

9. Parental/community involvement
This category of responses

acknowledged the fact that parents and indeed the wider community could play a vital role in supporting quality in ECCE. *"Parents as the main educators of their children have to be involved in a meaningful way in the care and education process in the early years setting."* Apart from the suggestion that parent education programmes would be necessary to assist parents in this supportive role, there were no further suggestions as to how such involvement could be achieved. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that access to parents of children in ECCE is difficult due to the fact that no national parents council (such as those for primary and secondary education), currently exists. The establishment of such a body may represent one possible mechanism to facilitate parental involvement.

Implications for development of NFQ

The NFQ should facilitate the involvement of parents and the wider community in the development, implementation and maintenance of quality in ECCE. Clear guidelines and recommended activities allied to a coordinated structure which can foster parental and community involvement should be an integral part of the NFQ.

10. Time for teamwork

This issue, though very specific in nature, emerged as a distinctive category in the data analysis as it was cited by 13% of participants. It highlights the need to recognise that teamwork or team building is a critical element in supporting quality in service provision. This finding is congruent with literature on quality assurance/management and stresses the need to set aside a significant proportion of the working week which can be dedicated to team planning, review and discussion (Kagan and Bowman, 1997; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Culkin, 2000).

Implications for development of NFQ

It is clear that work practices will constitute a core element in supporting quality in ECCE, therefore the NFQ must develop clear guidelines in this regard.

Chapter 6
Conclusions and Recommendations

The consultation on quality in ECCE revealed that there is a valuable pool of experience and expertise within which can support and inform the development of the NFQ. Participants in the seminars were articulate, informed and constructive in their comments and expressed a general welcome for the need for and development of an NFQ. Synthesis of responses under the three main questions of quality reveals a number of core elements of quality under which development activities should be focused. These are presented below with specific recommendations for the development of the NFQ. These elements are not ordered hierarchically - they are interrelated and interdependent and must each be accorded equal attention.

6.1 Perspectives on Quality

It is evident from analysis of the feedback templates that a broad range of opinions, views and advice was shared in this consultation process. This breadth and depth of perspective is a valuable asset to early childhood care and education in Ireland and should not be lost in the process of developing and implementing the National Framework for Quality.

Quality in ECCE in Ireland

exists within a huge diversity of perspectives, philosophies and practices, which are also dynamic and evolving. This necessitates that quality indicators or standards must contain sufficient flexibility to accommodate these characteristics.

6.2 Environment

The majority of responses under this heading refer to the immediate environment where the child is present. Comments encompass the physical spaces in terms of space, layout, design, comfort, safety and hygiene, both indoor and outdoor. They also include all the variety of materials and equipment that is necessary to support appropriate activity for children and adults. Other dimensions that were highlighted related to the more intangible aspects of the environment such as atmosphere, openness and the welcoming nature of the setting. It was agreed that the environment should be aesthetically pleasing, welcoming, and balance the need for safety and hygiene with the opportunity for children to experience 'safe risk' in support of their optimal development. In light of this the following recommendation is made:

A clear set of minimum standards relating to the nature of the environment in ECCE settings should be developed to apply to all situations where children (0-6) are present. They should be firmly grounded in research and best practice in relation to child development, encompass all current and relevant legislation and guidelines and embrace existing best practice as exemplified in established quality assurance programmes in ECCE.

6.3 Child-centred

This heading refers to the strong consensus that the best interests of the child must inform all policies and practice in ECCE. This perspective is well articulated in the National Children's Strategy, which states.

"An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential." (DHC, 2000: 10)

Participants clearly endorsed the

need to consult with and listen to children's views when developing policies and services directly related to them. In light of this consensus the following recommendations are made:

The NFQ must support the well being and development of all the children (0-6) of Ireland. This child centred focus must inform all elements of the NFQ including standards, assessment and support mechanisms.

Mechanisms and protocols must be developed to facilitate the voices of children to be heard on all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of quality in ECCE. Guidelines for consulting with young children should also be inherent to the NFQ.

6.4 Staffing

This heading refers primarily to the staffing issues in centre based ECCE settings. It includes:

- Concerns regarding the need for adequate ratios of staff to children in order to facilitate the optimal levels of support and interaction for children and also to facilitate essential activities such as child observation, record

keeping, supervising students, engaging with parents etc.

- The need for managerial staff with appropriate management qualifications and expertise.
- The need for allocation of time and resources to teamwork/team building and networking and liaison with other professionals and agencies. This time should be within usual working hours.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendations are made:

The NFQ should give clear guidelines on adult-child ratios based on research evidence and best practice. It should also provide guidelines for practitioners in centre-based settings on supporting essential activities such as teamwork, team building and reflective practice.

6.5 Education, Training and Qualifications

This heading reflects a wide range of consensus amongst participants including:

- The positive relationship between quality of provision in ECCE and the qualifications of staff.

- The need for standardised and accredited education, training and qualifications, both pre-service and in-service.
- The need for infrastructure to afford all practitioners access to accredited education, training and qualifications wherever and whenever they require it.
- The importance of continuing professional development and need for specific training programmes related to the changing nature of ECCE practice e.g. diversity, special needs, quality assurance.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendations are made:

The NFQ must articulate the important relationship between quality of ECCE and the qualifications of practitioners. It must articulate well with and support developments regarding standard setting for qualifications, mechanisms for access, transfer and progression and quality assurance procedures currently being undertaken by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the National Awarding bodies and

all institutions involved in the development and delivery of education and training in ECCE.

It must make provision for education and training associated with the implementation of the NFQ.

6.6 Parental Involvement

This heading refers, in the main, to the necessity for the NFQ to recognise parents as the primary carers and educators of the child. There was a strong consensus on the necessity of parental involvement in ECCE. Perspectives on this involvement varied along a continuum from asking parents to give satisfaction ratings to services, through to full partnership within the day-to-day operation, management and development of services. It was agreed that facilitating parental involvement was often difficult to achieve and that the NFQ should be able to support and develop this important dimension of quality.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendation is made:

The NFQ should facilitate the development of infrastructure to facilitate the representation of parents' perspectives in the development of policy and practice in ECCE. In addition it should provide guidelines for practitioners regarding supporting and developing parental involvement in service provision.

6.7 Curriculum/Programme

As is evident from the heading a number of different terms were used by participants to refer to the need for some sort of overarching national guidelines in relation to everyday practice in ECCE settings with children aged birth to six years. It was agreed that such guidance needed to have a high degree of flexibility to take account of children's needs, support the autonomy of practitioners and accommodate the broad range of existing curriculum, programmes and methodologies that exist in ECCE in Ireland.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendation is made:

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is presently engaged in the development of a national framework for early learning. This initiative will provide overarching curriculum

guidelines for all adults working with children birth to six years and may resolve concerns expressed by participants in this consultation. The NFQ should support the development and dissemination of this initiative.

6.8 Standards

It was clearly acknowledge that standards were an essential element of the development of quality in ECCE. The role and nature of such standards attracted the following consensus:

- They should support the harmonisation of existing regulations, standard and guidelines;
- They should be applicable to all settings where children aged birth to six are present and be flexible enough to have relevance to a wide variety of practice;
- They should be based on a clear set of values and principles, which should emerge from the consensus of stakeholders in ECCE;
- Implementation materials should be developed that are easy to administer and facilitate regular reviews of practice.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendation is made:

Clear, standardised guidelines in relation to the development of policies, procedures and practice in a wide variety of ECCE settings should be included in the NFQ. In addition any assessment materials developed should be uncomplicated, straightforward and easy to complete.

6.9 Adult-Child Interactions

This heading refers to the consensus that emerged regarding the critical importance of positive adult child interaction in the development of quality in ECCE. It also highlights skilled and purposeful child observation as a key tool for the development of such positive interaction.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendations are made:

The NFQ should take account of the literature regarding the role of adult child interaction in the development and provision of quality in ECCE.

Observation is a valuable tool in the assessment of quality in

adult child interactions and the NFQ should include clear guidelines and policies on this important issue.

6.10 Respect for Diversity

This heading refers to the significant consensus that ECCE provision must be guided by a fundamental respect for diversity in society. This loosely translates into two key perspectives; the first is that all children and families must be treated with respect regardless of their circumstances and secondly that there recognition of the individuality of children should result in policy and practice that avoids uniformity and instead supports difference.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendation is made:

Respect for diversity is a key issue, which must be central to the development of the NFQ. A review of literature and best practice on this issue should underpin this development process.

6.11 Networking, Linkages and Information

This heading refers to the consensus that emerged regarding the necessity for the establishment of networks at local, regional and national level, which would facilitate the sharing of information and best practice amongst ECCE practitioners. It was emphasised that these networks should build upon established infrastructure. A number of practical suggestions related to the nature of a networking infrastructure, including a national clearinghouse for research and information, mentoring systems for practitioners at all levels, discussion groups and telephone help lines. A separate theme emerged out of this heading related to the need for promotion and profile raising of ECCE itself within society in general.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendation is made:

The NFQ should facilitate the development of infrastructure to support networking and meet the information needs of the broad range of stakeholders in ECCE. This should build upon existing infrastructure and expertise and should be accessible at national, regional and local level.

6.12 Assessment

This heading refers to the consensus regarding assessment mechanisms in ECCE. It is divided under two clear sections that of external and internal assessment. External assessment referred primarily to existing inspection systems that operate within ECCE. Comments stated the need for:

- Inspectors and assessors to be qualified in ECCE;
- Formative and supportive assessment;
- Consideration of the more dynamic variables of quality;
- Standardisation, coordination and consistency of external inspection.

Internal assessment can be conceptualised as a continuum from the individual practitioner through to the team within a centre and ultimately to the wider community of practice involved in ECCE. It generally involves review and reflection on practice towards the development and improvement of same. Such elements were viewed as essential to the development of quality.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendations are made.

The NFQ must take account of the variety of established approaches to the assessment of quality and be able to accommodate, support and where necessary develop current practice to achieve the desired levels of consistency and co-ordination.

Assessment of quality must have relevance and involve all stakeholders in the provision of ECCE. The NFQ must acknowledge and support the importance of internal assessment at all points along this continuum.

6.13 Government Support, Commitment and Funding

This heading reflects the unequivocal consensus that quality in ECCE in only achievable if strong government support is present. This support can be realised by clear and coordinated policy across all departments. Financial support emerged as a major issue for participants and it was widely viewed that exchequer support for ECCE was essential for the sustainability of growth and development. Funding was identified as necessary under a variety of different headings

including, development for infrastructure, capital development of service provision, adequate terms and conditions of employment for staff and support for parental choice of ECCE.

On the basis of this consensus the following recommendations are made:

Analysis of current Government policy and initiatives should be undertaken to identify potential for accommodation and coordination within the NFQ. Government support for ECCE in Ireland must be clearly evidenced by the publication of strategic, coordinated policy and adequate allocation of financial support to realise and sustain these policy commitments.

6.14 Conclusion

The premise upon which this consultation process was conducted was that the formation of the National Framework for Quality should be based upon wide ranging consultation with all stakeholders in early childhood care and education in Ireland. The CECDE would like to reiterate its appreciation to all those who participated in the consultative process and who consequently have played an integral role in the development of the NFQ. The wealth of data generated during the consultative seminars outlined in this report provides invaluable insights from a diverse array of stakeholders. This complements other elements of the CECDE's work in developing the NFQ, such as the Conceptual Framework and the review of national and international best policy and practice. It is now envisaged that these elements will be amalgamated and synthesised to produce the core elements of the NFQ, i.e. a set of national quality standards, and mechanisms for implementing and supporting achievement of these standards in early childhood care and education in Ireland. The CECDE is committed to ongoing consultation in the development of the NFQ and we look forward to further collaboration and partnership with the sector in the process of developing and implementing the NFQ.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Letter to Stakeholders

Appendix 2 - Flyer 1

Appendix 3 - Flyer 2

Appendix 4 - Briefing Notes for Facilitators

Appendix 5 - Guidelines for Facilitators

Appendix 6 – Members of the Consultative Committee

Appendix 7 – Organisations Contacted

Appendix 8 - Seminar Presentation – Thomas Walsh

Appendix 9 - Seminar Presentation – Maresa Duignan

Appendix 10 - Seminar Presentation – Sharon O'Brien

Appendix 11 - Information Template

Appendix 12 - Evaluation Sheet

Appendix 1
– Letter to Stakeholders

22nd September 2003

<u>A Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education.</u>

A Chara,

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education was set up in 2001 in response to the Government White Paper 'Ready to Learn' in order to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education in Ireland. The Centre's brief covers children from 0 to 6 years of age in a wide variety of settings, including families, nurseries, crèches, playgroups, child minders, preschools and the infant classes of primary schools.

One of the main objectives of the Centre is to develop early education **quality standards** in relation to all aspects of early childhood education including equipment and material, staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, curriculum etc And also to develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards.

In order to carry out these objectives, the Centre is committed to consulting on an ongoing basis with relevant agencies, groups, advisory bodies and providers of early childhood education.

To this end, we have organised a **Series of Consultative Seminars** in October 2003 and invite anyone with an interest in Early Childhood Education to take part.

Each seminar will comprise of a short introduction to the work of the CECDE and a brief presentation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. Participants will then be invited to form groups to discuss the issue of quality and voice any opinions or concerns. We will also ask each person to fill in an information template which we will use to prepare a report on the findings and to provide feedback to the participants. The results will be posted on our website at www.cecde.ie.

I enclose some of our promotional flyers with all of the relevant information and ask that you would distribute them to interested parties and/or members of your organisation. We would hope to have a wide variety of representation across the sector.

Looking forward to seeing you there,

Sharon O' Brien.

Appendix 2
– Flyer 1

The Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (CECDE) invites you to take part in a **Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education** to be held in the following locations:

Ag seo cuireadh dhuit ón Lárionad um Fhorbairt agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige (LFOLO) páirt a ghlacadh i **gComhchomhairle ar Cháilíocht i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige** a thionólfar insna suímh seo leanas:

20th October	23rd October	29th October
Sheldon Park Hotel,	Rochestown Park	Galway Bay Hotel,
Kylemore Road,	Hotel, Douglas,	Salthill,
Dublin 10	Cork	Galway

7 pm-9.30pm, Refreshments supplied
For Everyone With an Interest in Early Childhood Care and Education
(e.g. Early Years Practitioners, Infant Teachers, Parents)

Each seminar will begin with registration at 7 o'clock and will involve short presentations on the CECDE and on the issue of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. Participants will then have the opportunity to discuss the topic, provide feedback and take part in the consultation process that will assist us in our work, developing quality standards for all settings for children aged 0-6 in Ireland. The seminars should finish by 9.30.

Iosnoidh gach seiminear le claru ag a 7 a chlog agus déanfar cur i láthair gearr ar an LFOLO agus ar cheist na Cáilíochta i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige. Beidh seans ag na rannpháirtithe ansin an t-ábhar a phlé, aiseolas a sholáthar, agus páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas comhairlithe a chabhróidh linn inár dtasc caighdeáin cáilíochta a fhorbairt do gach uile suíomh do leanaí 0-6 in Éirinn. Táimid ag súil leis na seimineáir a chríochnú ag 9.30.

Further information is available on our website or by contacting the Centre:
Tá tuilleadh eolais le fáil ar ár suíomh gréasáin nó trí dhul i dteagmháil leis an Lárionad:

The Gate Lodge, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Tel: 01 8842110 Fax: 01 8842111
Email: early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie
Website: www.cecde.ie

Appendix 3
– Flyer 2

The Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (CECDE) invites you to take part in a **Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education** to be held in the following locations:

cecde
Centre for **Early Childhood**
Development & Education
An Lárionad um Fhorbairt
agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige

Ag seo cuireadh dhuit ón Lárionad um Fhorbairt agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige (LFOLO) páirt a ghlacadh i **gComhchomhairle ar Cháilíocht i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige** a thionólfar insna suímh seo leanas:

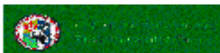| 24th November	25th November	27th November
Hillgrove Hotel,	Hodson Bay Hotel,	Óstán Cheathrú Rua,
Monaghan	Athlone	Co. na Gaillimhe

7 pm-10pm, Refreshments supplied
For Everyone With an Interest in Early Childhood Care and Education
(e.g. Early Years Practitioners, Infant Teachers, Parents)

Each seminar will begin with registration at 7 o'clock and will involve short presentations on the CECDE and on the issue of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education starting at 7.30. Participants will then have the opportunity to discuss the topic, provide feedback and take part in the consultation process that will assist us in our work, developing quality standards for all settings for children aged 0-6 in Ireland. The seminars should finish by 10.00.

Tosnóidh gach seimineár le clárú ag a 7 a chlog agus déanfar cur i láthair gearr ar an LFOLO agus ar cheist na Cáilíochta i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige, ag tosú ag 7.30. Beidh seans ag na rannpháirtithe ansin an t-ábhar a phlé, aiseolas a sholáthar, agus páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas comhairlithe a chabhróidh linn in ár dtasc caighdeáin cáilíochta a fhorbairt do gach uile suíomh do leanaí 0-6 in Éirinn. Táimid ag súil leis na seimineáir a chríochnú ag 10.00.

The survey form is also available on our website or by contacting the Centre:
Tá an foirm aiseolais le fáil ar ár suíomh gréasáin nó trí dhul i dteagmháil leis an Lárionad:

The Gate Lodge, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Tel: 01 8842110 Fax: 01 8842111 Email: early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie
Website: www.cecde.ie

NIDD
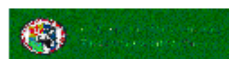
Appendix 4
– Briefing for Facilitators for Consultation Seminars

Purpose of consultation

"Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards." (CECDE, 2001: 4)

It is fundamental to the development of national quality standards that we actively seek the opinion and perspectives of all those who are interested and involved in the provision of early education for children in the birth to six age range. This consultation will promote:

- Dialogue and discussion
- Sharing of knowledge and expertise amongst a broad range of stakeholders
- The development of consensus on core issues regarding quality
- Relevance of quality standards for all stakeholders in all settings

Schedule for consultation

Public consultation seminars have been planned for October and November 2003 as follows:

October 20th 2003 – Dublin
October 23rd 2003 - Cork

October 29th 2003 – Galway
November 24th – Monaghan
November 25th – Athlone
November 27th - Carraroe

The running order for each evening will be as follows:

- 6.45pm - briefing session for facilitators– (refreshments will be available)
- 7 – 7.30pm - registration for participants
- 7.30 - 7.50pm - introduction and overview – two short presentations
- 7.50 – 8pm – break up into groups / introduction of group members
- 8 – 8.10pm – Distribution and completion of information template
- 8.10 – 8.55pm - group discussion. Small, facilitated groups of approximately 10 persons will consider three key questions and complete a short information template (15 minutes per question).
- 8.55 - 9pm Complete information template
- 9 - 9.15pm - Feedback session
- 9.15 – 9.25pm - closure of session.

- 9.25 - 9.30pm – Fill in Evaluation Sheet
- Collect and hand up information template, Evaluation Sheet and Facilitators notes

Facilitation process

- Introduction of the group members (5 mins)
- Distribution and completion of information template (10 mins)
- Introduction of issue 1 – *Defining quality* (15 mins)
- Recording of key points and highlighting of areas of consensus.
- Introduction of issue 2 – *Assessing quality* (15 mins)
- Recording etc.
- As above for issue 3 – *Promoting quality* (15 mins)
- Conclusion of discussion - request for members to review and complete information template forms (5 mins)
- Feedback by facilitators – One key sentence for each of the three questions
- Collection of forms – thank participants.
- Distribution and Collection of the Evaluation Sheet
- Hand up the information templates, Evaluation Sheets and the notes recorded during facilitation

NB: All forms distributed must be returned on the night. If participants wish to take additional forms for completion after the seminars they may do so. Alternatively you may direct them to the consultation section of the CECDE website (www.cecde.ie) where the information template may be completed and returned electronically.

The three questions on quality reflect the Work Programme of the CECDE which is also available in full on the website.

Feedback

A summary report of each consultation seminar and key findings will be posted on the CECDE website within three weeks of completion of each seminar.

The closing date for completion of electronic information template forms is November 30th 2003. A full report of the CECDE Consultation on Quality will be prepared subsequent to this date.

Appendix 5
- Guidelines for facilitators

Adapted from: Prenderville, P. (1995) *Developing facilitation skills: a handbook for facilitators.* Combat Poverty Agency. Dublin.

Facilitation is a way of working with people. Facilitation enables and empowers people to carry out a task or perform an action. The facilitator does not perform the task, but uses certain skills in a process, which allows the individuals/group reach their decision/set their goal/learn a skill.

Developing participation

The facilitator's role is to encourage participation and challenge behaviour that inhibits it. People are not forced to contribute. The facilitator creates an environment in the group where people can choose to contribute and where it is safe for them to do so. In order to achieve the optimal environment to support group members to participate it is important that ground rules are established. These will ensure that everyone is clear about the task that the group has to accomplish and the way in which this is to be achieved. Group rules or boundaries can be in relation to

- 'house-keeping arrangements' e.g. time keeping, breaks etc.
- Organisation of group work –e.g. step 1 - introductions, step 2 - brainstorming, step three – establishing areas of agreement/consensus, step 4 - recording.
- issues such as turn taking, one voice at a time, owning statements, group members use the term "I" when making a contribution. Respecting others opinions (respect does not mean acceptance)

Introductions

This is a key aspect of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for group members. It can be accomplished simply by asking each member to go around the group and state their name and their role in the early childhood care and education sector e.g. my name is Mary and I am a parent and a teacher of junior infants. It is important to welcome and thank each participant at this stage before moving to invite the next participant to introduce her/himself. If you feel confident enough it is possible to lighten the tension that usually occurs at the

beginning of such a session by making the introductions into a game e.g. the facilitator take a pencil and says her name " I am Ann" Then she passes it to the next person who says, "I got the pen from Ann and my name is John" and so on. Alternatively each member of the group introduces themselves by their first name and accompanies it with a positive adjective to describe her/himself in some way. E.g. I am Amazing Ann. The next person then says This is Amazing Ann and I am Jolly John. Another alternative is to substitute the adjective for the name of an animal e.g. Monkey Mary and Parrot Peter.

Skill	Explanation
Explaining	Giving an interpretation of previous statements. This is helpful of someone is unclear about the meaning of what s/he is expressing. E.g. It could be that what happened was....?
Clarifying	Checking that what was said is understood. E.g. "So what you are saying is...?"
Paraphrasing	Repeating back to the speaker a little of what was said either in his/her own words or similar. E.g. " So training is an important issue"
Open ended questions	Asking the speaker questions which will encourage further disclosure. E.g. Can you give an example of that...?"
Encouraging	Can be verbal or non verbal. Includes thanking the person for their contribution and offering praise. E.g. "Thank you for that, it was very interesting" Or using sub speech like "Mmmm or uhuh"
Linking	Short sentences indicating interest, support and encouragement to continue E.g. "Does anyone else have a similar view?"
Silence	Allowing some time between what a person says before speaking. Silence can act as an encouragement to continue or for others to join in.

Active listening

Good communication is essential in any group work situation. Active listening is a core skill for facilitators and essential for the establishment of good communication.

Active listening is more than simply listening to someone. It is absorbing what is being said and letting the speaker know that s/he has been heard. It is about ensuring that the speaker feels listened to. The following verbal and non verbal skills promote active listening and participation by all group members

It should be noted that there are some common pitfalls that can hamper the smooth facilitation of a group. Some examples are listed below.

And finally!

Thank you very much for agreeing to be a facilitator for the CECDE Consultation on Quality. Your support and expertise plays a key role in this consultation process. We look forward to seeing you at the venue at 6.45pm for a short briefing session and a cup of tea or coffee before the main event.
We do hope that you will enjoy the evening and we look forward to seeing you there.

Pitfalls	Explanation
Over-analysing	Interpreting the speakers motives
Parroting	Continuously repeating parrot like what the speaker is saying.
Over expansion	Adding on to what was said or generalising the content of a contribution to the group.
Omitting	Ignoring relevant facts, comments, contributions.
Exaggerating	Intensifying the importance of what was being said
Rushing	Anticipating what the speaker will say next and saying it for him/her
Lagging	Failing to move on to the next item

Appendix 6
- Members of our Consultative Committee

1. Ballymun Partnership – Nóirín Coughlan
2. Barnardos – Seán Redmond
3. BCCN – Michelle Hart
4. Childminding Ireland – Patricia Murray
5. Children's Research Centre – Ann-Marie Halpenny
6. Children's Rights Alliance – Mary O'Connor
7. Combat Poverty Agency – Angie Daly
8. Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo – Déirdre Uí Ghrádaigh
9. Department of Education and Science – Alan Wall
10. Department of Health and Children – Mary Deacy
11. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform – Patrick Murray
12. Department of Social and Family Affairs – Heber McMahon
13. Disability Federation of Ireland – Toni Gleeson
14. Dublin Institute of Technology – Máire Mhic Mhathúna
15. FÁS (Equal Opportunities & Social Inclusion Department) - Mary Beggan
16. FETAC – Angela Lambkin
17. Forum of People with Disabilities – Bethan Collins
18. HETAC – Mary Sheridan
19. High/Scope – Patricia Murphy
20. IATSE – Anita Craig
21. IFA – Frances Coffey
22. IMEB – Helen O'Connor Nolan
23. IMPACT – Sheila Carroll
24. INTO – Deirbhile Nic Craith
25. IPPA – Irene Gunning
26. Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association – Pearse O'Shiel
27. Mary Immaculate, Limerick- Nora Maria Ní Mhurchú
28. NAMHI – Stephen Kealy
29. National Children's Office – Sinéad Hanafin
30. National College of Ireland – Alan Sharkey
31. NCCRI – Kensika Monshengwo
32. National Disability Authority – Erik Koornneef
33. National Federation of Voluntary Bodies – Maria Walls
34. National Forum of Preschool Inspectors – Marie Gleeson
35. National Parents and Siblings Alliance – Seamus Greene
36. National Parents Council – Primary – Irene Cassidy
37. NCCA – Arlene Forster
38. NCNA – Ashling Hooper
39. OMEP – Ann Fanning
40. Pavee Point – Colette Murray
41. RAPID – Anne Genockey
42. Seirbhísí Naíonra Teo – Mairéad Mac Con Iomaire
43. Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly – Derville Killian
44. St. Nicholas Montessori Society – Bernadette Burns
45. St. Patrick's College – Maura O'Connor
46. Traveller Preschool Teachers' Association - Anne Boyle
47. Treoir – Margot Doherty
48. UCC – Mary Horgan

Appendix 7
- Organisations Contacted

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo

Barnardos

BCCN

Childminding Ireland

Children's Research Centre

Children's Right's Alliance

Clare County Childcare Committee

Combat Poverty Agency

Cork City Childcare Committee

Cork County Childcare Committee

County Councils

Department of Education & Science

Department of Health & Children

Department of Justice Equality & Law Reform

Department of Social & Family Affairs

Disability Federation of Ireland

Down Syndrome Ireland

Dublin City Childcare Committee

Dublin Fingal Childcare Committee

Dublin Institute of Technology

Dublin South County Childcare Committee

Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown Childcare Committee

Early Start

Education Centres

FÁS (Equal Opportunities & Social Inclusion Department)

FÁS Training Centres

FETAC

Forum of People with Disabilities

Galway City and County Childcare Committee

Health Boards

HETAC

High/Scope Ireland

IMPACT (Representative)

IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation

Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

Irish Farmer's Association

Irish Montessori Education Board

Irish National Teachers Organisation

Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association

Kerry County Childcare Committee

Kildare County Childcare Committee

Local Radio Stations

Louth County childcare Committee

Mary Immaculate College

Mayo County childcare Committee

Meath County Childcare Committee

NAMHI

National Children's Office

National College of Ireland

National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism

National Council for Curriculum & Assessment

National Disability Authority

National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

National Forum of Pre-school Inspectors

National Parents & Siblings Alliance

National Parents Council – Primary

National Schools

OMEP Ireland

Partnerships

Pavee Point Travellers Centre

RAPID

Roscommon County Childcare Committee

Séirbhísí Naíonraí Teo

Sligo County Childcare Committee

Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly

St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association

St. Patrick's College

Tipperary South County Childcare Committee

Traveller Preschool Teachers Association

Treoir

University College Cork

Waterford City Childcare Committee

Waterford County Childcare Committee

Wicklow County Childcare Committee

Appendix 8
- Seminar Presentation Thomas Walsh

1. Consultation on Quality

Dia Dhaoibh.Tá an-fháilte romhaimh chuig an seimineár seo anocht maidir le cáilíocht I gCúram agus Oideachas na luath-Óige in Éirinn.

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen and thank you for taking the time to be with us here this evening in our consultation on quality in early childhood care and education in Ireland. My name is Thomas Walsh and I work as a Development Officer in the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

The main purpose of this evening is for us to listen to you so we want to maximise the time you have to express your views. We are anxious that you will have an opportunity to share your perspectives and insights in relation to quality with us and to facilitate this; you will shortly split into break-out groups.

I will now give a brief outline of the format for this evening. First of all, I will give a short presentation on the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education,

outlining our origins, functions and progress to date. Maresa will then briefly explain the format of the consultation to follow. Sharon will finally organise the break-out groups. This will take no longer than 20 minutes so that by 8pm, you will be actively engaged in dialogue in your groups.

2. History

The establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education marks the culmination of a number of reports and publications in the late 1990s. The National Forum on Early Childhood Education in 1998 brought together all stakeholders in the early childhood care and education sector for the first time. It provided a forum for all to express their views and concerns and to realise the commonality of issues.

The Expert Working Group on Childcare reported in 1999 and it highlighted many of the issues in the childcare sector and made recommendations to alleviate defects in the system.

The Department of Education and

Science produced the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, Ready to Learn, in 1999. This was the first White Paper on early childhood education in Ireland and it made wide-ranging proposals for the development of the sector.

Among these was the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency with Statutory powers. The Centre for early Childhood Development and Education was launched one year ago as a seed to this Agency envisaged in the White Paper. It was established by the Department of Education and Science and is jointly managed by the Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College of Education. It is located in the Gate Lodge of St. Patrick's College. The CECDE does not have the wide-ranging powers envisaged for the Agency but is charged with a three-year Programme of Work.

3. Objectives

The CECDE has a number of Objectives and Functions. We will first of all look at the Objectives.

1. The development of a National Quality Framework is the core function of the CECDE. This involves devising quality standards for all settings in which children aged zero to six are present. It also involves developing appropriate support mechanisms for personnel working with children as well as a system of assessment to ensure quality is achieved and maintained. This work will be completed in close cooperation with the sector and this is the main focus of our consultation here this evening.

2. The CECDE is currently in the process of devising proposals for targeted interventions for children who are disadvantaged and who have special needs in the birth to six age-category for the Department of Education and Science.

3. As mentioned earlier, the CECDE is not the Agency envisaged in the White Paper but one of the objectives of the Centre is to prepare the groundwork for the establishment of the Early Childhood education Agency. Recently, the Government has recommitted its intention to establish the Early Childhood Education Agency.

4. Functions

Our 5 functions are closely related to our overall objectives:

1....To develop quality standards for the early childhood care and education sector

2....To support all those who work with children to comply with the quality standards

3....To help coordinate existing provision to ensure there are no voids or duplications and to enhance the ability of the sector to expand

4....To undertake research in the Centre to support these initiatives or to commission research where necessary

5....To provide advice to the Minister for Education and Science on all aspects of early childhood care and education

5. The Team

There is a core team of 8 people working at the Centre and the majority of them are here this evening.

We have a Director, Heino Schonfeld, and an Assistant-Director, Dr. Gemma Kiernan.

There are three Development Officers, Maresa Duignan, Jacqueline Fallon and myself, Thomas Walsh.

We have an Information Officer, Peadar Cassidy, who will speak to you later.

Sharon O'Brien, who you will organise the break-out groups is our administrator while Claire Brennan is our Secretary.

Shortly, two students who will conduct doctoral research with the Centre will commence work with us.

6. Current Work

The CECDE is in operation for exactly one year and we have completed some work projects and are in the process of conducting other work.

- An Audit of Provision for children affected by disadvantage and for children with special needs is now nearing completion and will be available early in the

new year.

- As mentioned earlier, we are currently drafting proposals for the Department of Education and Science in relation to targeted interventions for children affected by disadvantage or who have special needs.
- The CECDE is currently in the process of devising a Conceptual Framework of how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland. This will assist in devising our Quality Framework and will be available shortly
- The CECDE prepare submissions on an ongoing basis and is represented on a large number of committees and boards.
- The CECDE recently launched 'An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003.' This contains 1082 references on research in early childhood care and education over the past 13 years. This research is presented in 12 different themes including disadvantage, children's rights, cultural diversity and special needs. It highlights a number of gaps in research in the Irish context and this has formed the basis of the CECDE's Research Strategy. The research is

accessible as a searchable database on the Centre's website (www.cecde.ie). Copies are available free of charge from the Centre.

7. Summary

I hope that this has given you a brief outline of the origins, work and progress of the Centre to date. To summarise:

- We are an initiative of the Department of Education and Science.

- Our role and functions stems from the recommendations in the White Paper and as specified by our 3 year Programme of Work.

- Our remit crosses many of the traditional divides in the Irish context, including the education and care dichotomy and also the barrier between the early years settings and the formal sector.

- A core value of the CECDE is to conduct this work in close cooperation with all stakeholders in the sector. We have recently convened a Consultative Committee for the Centre,

comprised of close to 50 representatives from the sector, which will advise the CECDE on all aspects of our work.

- We will utilise this expertise and experience within the sector as well as looking at national and international research, policy and practice in the area in devising these quality standards.

All of this information, including the contact details of individuals, copies of our newsletter, Alana, access to the searchable database, a copy of the research audit, copies of conference papers and submissions, membership of our Consultative Committee, our Research Strategy and more, is available on our recently launched website www.cecde.ie or contact us on 01 8842110.

Thank you for your time and interest. I will now pass you on to my colleague Maresa who will discuss the outline of the consultation this evening.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Tom Walsh

Appendix 9
- Seminar Presentation Maresa Duignan

Good evening everyone and welcome again to the CECDE's Consultation on Quality. My name is Maresa Duignan, also a Development Officer with the Centre. My colleague Tom has given you a brief overview of the origins, function and progress of the CECDE to date and my role now is to take you through the rationale for this evening, consider briefly the concept of 'Quality' in early childhood care and education and then take you quickly through the information template which we hope that you will each complete and return to us this evening.

I wish to stress from the outset that this evening should resonate with your voices not ours. We have deliberately structured the evening to minimize our influence and maximise your opportunities to engage in discourse and dialogue on this important issue and I hope that you find the experience an affirming and enjoyable one.

Discourse on quality in the early childhood care and education sector has expanded rapidly in recent times. I am sure that many of you here tonight have been engaged in this discourse and furthermore have been instrumental in developing and advancing quality in all aspects of the provision of early years services in Ireland.

We in the CECDE are fully aware of the rich well of expertise that already exists related to developing and implementing quality in early childhood settings and we are committed to building on this solid foundation as we progress our work.

Having acknowledged the positive aspects however, it is also important to realise that much work does remain to be accomplished. It is interesting to note that the recently published Audit of Research in Early Childhood Care and Education reported that:

" Surprisingly, there has been little research in the area of quality in the Irish context, both in relation to quality indicators or the evaluation of the more subtle and intangible aspects of quality." (CECDE, 2003:141)

The work that we are engaged in tonight aims to redress this situation. It is in fact the first

attempt to conduct research on quality in the Irish context across all early childhood care and education settings with a view to establishing national quality standards.

It is important that all developments in both policy and practice in the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland are based on a solid foundation of research evidence. Our work programme, which spans a three-year period has a strong research strand. In respect of quality we have specific objectives to reach:

"To develop quality standards in relation to all aspects of early childhood education including equipment and material, staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, teaching methodologies, curriculum and related areas. " (CECDE, 2001: 4)

Furthermore we are required:

"To develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards by early education providers." (CECDE, 2001: 4)

This is a complex and challenging

brief. It is also, as I am sure you will all agree necessary for the continuing development of the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland.

Our research will be conducted in many ways as we seek to draw on the collected wisdom of national and international expertise in this field and Tom has already outlined a number of the processes we are engaged in.

At the core of our work however is consultation. This consultation must include all those who have a vested interest in early childhood care and education; parents/guardians, children, teachers and carers, policymakers and practitioners. Tonight is the first of a series of public consultations and we hope that you find it a safe and valuable forum within which to share your views and ideas.

Tonight's consultation is about gaining insight and understanding and establishing baselines. We want to get as broad a picture as possible of the range and nature of perspectives that exist on the three particular issues that we have

highlighted for discussion.

1. - The first of these questions (Defining Quality) is an attempt to begin to understand the many perspectives that are held in Ireland on the meaning of quality in the context of early childhood care and education. Some of the questions that may arise in your discussions are - What does quality mean to you? What has your involvement in the education and care of young children revealed to you about quality? What are the different aspects of quality? And are there areas that we can all agree on despite our different perspectives?

2. The second question (Assessing Quality) addresses the issue of assessing quality. How do we recognise quality? Can it be assessed? What kind of measurements should be used? This is a key issue for the implementation of national quality standards.

3 - And finally, but of no lesser importance, (Supporting Quality) we want to begin to discover what you need to help you develop and deliver quality in early childhood care and education settings.

As we have already stated, your feedback tonight will inform the development of national quality standards for all early childhood care and education settings in Ireland. This is an important issue and I hope that you take full advantage of this opportunity.

My colleague Sharon will explain the format of the rest of the evening to you. However before I hand over to her I would just like to reassure you of a few important points. This consultation is entirely confidential and you are not required to identify yourselves on the feedback form.

We hope that you will all contribute to the discussion of the issues. Each discussion will be facilitated to create a safe and supportive forum for discussion. We welcome all constructive and positive contributions to this discussion and we hope that you will respect and encourage your fellow participants in the consultation process this evening.

The form you will be completing contains four sections. The first is designed to give us some background information, which will

help us to report back to you on the results of this consultation process. The following three sections relate to the three discussion points that you will be considering tonight.

Conclusion:

It is often been stated that the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland is characterised by the diversity of provision, which exists for our youngest children. However despite this diversity we are all united by a common goal, to ensure that all children in Ireland can experience positive achievement and realise their full potential. I hope that this common vision will underpin and support our deliberations this evening.

Appendix 10
- Seminar Presentation Sharon O'Brien

My name is Sharon O' Brien and I am the Administrative Officer with The Centre.
As Tom and Maresa have just said, this evening is about YOU and your feelings about Quality and we really do appreciate it that you have all made the effort to come out tonight. For our part, we want to focus completely on getting as much information from you as possible.

So just before we break up into groups, I want to quickly give you some idea of the format of the rest of the evening –
Each group has a facilitator.

- When you get into your groups, your facilitator will ask you to introduce yourselves and then will give you a hand out with the 3 questions on quality.
- You will have a short time – about 5-10 minutes to fill in the general information in the first part of the information templates and to jot down a few rough points.
- We will then discuss each of the 3 questions on Quality in turn (Maresa outlined these) and this should take about 45 Minutes – 15 minutes per question. Fill in the form during the discussion as you go along.
- At the end, you will have 10 minutes to finish up. And your facilitator will collect all of the forms.

Just 1 or 2 points to note:

- Don't wait until the end to make all your points, fill it in as you go along.
- Write as clearly as possible!
- Try not to leave anything blank
- Ask your facilitator if you have any problems

- We will not have a plenary session at the end but will have a short feedback session – about 20 minutes – before we close, so use the time in your group to get your points across to your facilitators.

At the end, your facilitator will give each of you an evaluation sheet. We would really appreciate if you could take a few moments to fill this in, as it will be enormously beneficial to us for future seminars. If you would like an Irish Version of the evaluation, just ask your facilitator.

Okay – we're now going to break up into the groups. You were each given a name badge at registration, and each badge has a letter A-J on it – the letter corresponds to your group. The groups are arranged around the room (point them out) So if you are group A, you're over here (point it out) B, C, and so on.

Thanks very much and I hope you have lots of stimulating and productive discussion.

Appendix 11
- Information Template

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

04703 (1-5)

(6)	(7)	(8)

Card One 9/1

Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

This feedback form is comprised of 4 sections.

The first one records information about the respondent's background; the other three deal with the issue of 'Quality' in Early Childhood Care and Education.

Please complete each question. All information will be treated with complete confidentiality. You are not required to give your name and contact details and anonymity is guaranteed.

Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige

Tá 4 rannóga sa bhfoirm aiseolais seo.

Cláraíonn an chéad ceann sonraí ar chúlra an fhreagróra; baineann na trí chinn eile le ceist na Cáilíochta i gCúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige.

Freagair gach ceist chom hiomlán agus is féidir led thoil. Caithfear leis an eolas ar fad faoi chuing rúin. Ní hiarrtar ort d'ainm agus do shonraí teagmhála a thabhairt agus ní ligfear d'aithne le duine ar bith.

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

Section One	**Rannóg a hAon**

1. Please indicate your gender:

1. Cuir in iúl d'inscne: (10)

Male	_	Fireann	_
Female	_	Baineann	_

2. Please indicate which of the following age ranges apply to you:

2. Cuir in iúl cén ceann de na haois réimsí seo leanas ina bhfuil tú fhéin: (11)

15-17	_	15-17	_
18-24	_	18-24	_
25-34	_	25-34	_
35-44	_	35-44	_
45-54	_	45-54	_
55-64	_	55-64	_
65+	_	65+	_

3. Please indicate which county you live in:

3. Cuir in iúl cén condae ina chónaíonn tú: (12) (13)

_____   _____

4. I am responding as a: (tick as many boxes as applies to you)

4. Táim ag freagairt mar: (cuir tic i mbosca ar bith a fheileann) (14) (15)

Parent/Guardian	_	Tuismitheoir /Caomhnóir	_
Practitioner/Teacher	_	Cleachtóir/Múinteoir	_
Member of Management	_	Bainistíocht	_
Health Professional (please specify) _____	_	Ball de ghairm na sláinte (sonraigh led thoil)_____	_
Policy developer	_	Forbróir pholasaí	_
Adult educator	_	Oideoir aosach	_
Researcher	_	Taighdeoir	_
Other (please specify) _____	_	Eile (sonraigh led thoil) _____	_

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

5. Please tick to indicate the early childhood setting that your comments relate to:

Home	_	Baile	_
Mother and Toddler Group	_	Grúpa Máthar agus Lapadán	_
Nursery	_	Naíolann	_
Preschool	_	Réamhscoil	_
Infant Class (primary/special school)	_	Rang Naíonán (bunscoil/scoil speisialta)	_
Hospital Setting	_	Suíomh Ospidéil	_
Family Care (Childminding)	_	Cúram Teaghlaigh (Feighlíocht leanaí)	_
Créche	_	Creis	_
Playgroup	_	Grúpa súgartha	_
Montessori	_	Montessori	_
After-School Club	_	Club Iarscoile	_
Other (please specify)		Eile (sonraigh led thoil)	
_____	_	_____	_

5. Cuir tic led thoil ag an suíomh luath-óige is mó a thagrann d'fhreagraí leis: [16] [17]

6. Would you describe this setting as:

6. An ndéarfá go raibh an suíomh sin: [18]

Rural	_	Tuathúil	_
Urban	_	Cathrach	_

7. What is the age range of the children you work with (tick as many boxes as applies to you):

7. Céard é réimse aoise na leanaí lena n-oibríonn tú: [19]

Babies: Birth – 12 months	_	Leanbáin– breith – 12 mí	_
Toddlers: 12 months – 3 years	_	Lapadáin 12 mí – 3 bliana	_
Young Children: 3-6 years	_	Páistí óga – 3-6 years	_

8. When working with children, what type of pedagogical approach/philosophy (if any) influences you?

8. Agus tú ag obair le páistí cén sórt cur chuige/fealsúnachta oideolaíoch a bhíonn mar shampla agat? [20] [21] [22]

_____   _____

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

Section Two
Defining Quality

Rannóg a Dó
Cáilíocht a Shainmhíniú

What does the term **'quality'** in early childhood care and education mean to you?

Céard is brí le **cáilíocht** i gcúram agus oideachas luath-óige i do thuairimse?

(23) (24) (25) (26)

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

Section Three
Assessing Quality

In your opinion, what are the **most effective ways of assessing quality** in early childhood care and education?

Rannóg a Trí
Cáilíocht a Mheasúnú

Céard iad **na bealaigh is éifeachtaí le cáilíocht** i gcúram agus oideachas luath-óige a mheasúnú i do thuairimse?

(27) (28) (29) (30)

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

Section Four **Supporting Quality**	**Rannóg a Ceathair** **Cáilíocht a Thacú**

What **support** do you need to receive in order to **achieve and maintain quality** in early childhood care and education? All suggestions will be appreciated.

Cén **tacaíocht** a theastaíonn uait **chun cáilíocht i gcúram agus oideachas luath-óige a bhaint amach agus a chothabháil**?

(31) (32) (33) (34)

CECDE Consultation on Quality - Comhairliúchán ar Cháilíocht

Thank you for your participation in this consultation process. Your responses will provide the CECDE with valuable information that will be used when developing a quality framework for early childhood care and education in Ireland.	**Go raibh maith agat as páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas comhairlithe seo. Cuirfidh d'fhreagraí eolas luachmhar ar fáil dúinn agus sinn ag cruthú creatlach feabhais don cháilíocht i gcúram agus oideachas luath-óige in Éirinn.**
Finally please indicate which location you are in while completing this questionnaire	**Cuir tic led thoil ag an áit ina bhfuil tú ag líonadh an bhfoirm aiseolais seo:**

Athlone	_	Átha Luain	_
Co Galway	_	Co na Gaillimhe	_
Monaghan	_	Muineacháin	_
Web	_	Idirlíon	_

Appendix 12
- Evaluation Sheet

1. Which of the following applies to you (please tick as many boxes as appropriate)

Parent/Guardian ❏ Practitioner/ Teacher ❏ Member of Management ❏

Health Professional ❏ Policy Developer ❏ Adult Educator ❏

Researcher ❏ Other (please Specify) ❏ ....

2. Which Seminar did you attend (please tick as appropriate)

Dublin ❏ Cork ❏ Galway ❏

2. What were your expectations for this seminar?
....
....

3. Did the seminar meet your expectations (please tick as appropriate)

Definitely   Mostly   Some   Not really

Please say why
....
....

4. Please rate the following (1=unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied, please circle as appropriate)

Venue	1	2	3	4	5
Presentations	1	2	3	4	5
Facilitators	1	2	3	4	5
Groupwork	1	2	3	4	5
Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Seminar	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Please State)	1	2	3	4	5

4. How do you feel this seminar could have been improved?

....
....
....
....
....

5. Where did you hear about the seminar?

....

6. Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation sheet.

References

Abbott, L. and Pugh, G. (Eds.) (1998). *Training to Work in the Early Years: Developing the Climbing Frame*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Area Development Management (2003). *National Childcare Census Baseline Data 1999-2000*. Dublin: Area Development Management.

Borgia, E. and Schuler, D. (1996). *Action Research in Early Childhood Education*. ERIC Digest. [Accessed at http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed401047.html. 16/01/04]

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Mass.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1997). Ecological Models of Human Development (in) Guavain, M. and Cole, M. (Eds.). *Readings on the Development of Children* (2nd edition), pp. 37-47.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.) (Forthcoming). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. California: Sage Publications

Central Statistics Office (2002). *Census Principal Demographic Results.* Dublin: The Stationary Office.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2001). *Programme of Work*. Dublin. Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2003). *An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003*. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2004). *On

Target? An Audit of Research on Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs Among Children from Birth to Six Years in Ireland. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (Forthcoming). *A Conceptual Framework on how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland.* Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Coolahan, J. (Ed.) (1998). *Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Culkin, M. (2000) (Ed.). *Managing Quality in Young Children's Programs: The Leader's Role.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives.* London: Falmer Press.

Department of Education and Science (1998). *Education Act.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1999). *Ready to Learn – A White Paper on Early Childhood Education.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2000). *Education Welfare Act.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health (1991). *Child Care Act.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (1997). *Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Preschool Services) (Amended) Regulations 1997 and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (1999). *Children First - National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2002). *Our Duty to Care: The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1999). *National Childcare Strategy, Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2000). *Equal Status Act. Dublin*: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2001). *The Children Act 2001*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2002). *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dick, B. (1997). A Beginner's Guide to Action Research [On line] Available at http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/sawd/arr/guide.html, Accessed 16/01/04]

Duignan, M. (2003). *A Problem-based Learning Approach to Continuing Professional Education for Pre-school Officers in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland: Rationale and Curriculum Design.*

M.A. Thesis in Third Level Learning and Teaching. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.

European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities (1996). *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children*. Brussels: European Commission DG5 Equal Opportunities Unit.

Fannin, M. (2002). *Collaborative Research Methods in Regional Science: What have we Accomplished?* Where do we go from here? Paper presented at the 41st Annual Meetings Southern Regional Science Association, Arlington, VA, April 13, 2002.

Feeney, S. and Freeman, N. (1999). *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fisher, J. (2002). *The Foundations of Learning*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

French, G. (2003). *Supporting Quality – Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services (Second Edition)*. Dublin: Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre.

Garner, B. (1996). *Using Action Research: Challenges and Opportunities for the Beginner*. Paper presented at the Greater St. Louis Sixth Action Research Collaborative Conference, St. Louis. MO.

Government of Ireland (1937). *Bunreacht na hÉireann*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Gummesson, E. (1991). *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Guralnick, M. (Ed.) (2000). *The Effectiveness of Early Intervention*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Hatten, R., Knapp, R. and Salonga, R. (1997). "Action Research: Comparison with the concepts of 'The Reflective Practitioner' and 'Quality Assurance'" (in) Hughes, I. (Ed.). *Action Research Electronic Reader*, The University of Sydney, on-line http://www.behs.cchs.usyd.edu.au/arow/Reader/rmasters.htm (Accessed 16/01/04).

Hayes, N. (2002). *Quality in Early Childhood Education.* Presentation to the National Children's Nurseries Association Annual Conference, Dublin Castle.

Hayes, N. (2004). "Towards a Nurturing Pedagogy: Reconceptualising Care and Education in the Early Years" (in) Kernan, M. and Hayes, N. (Eds.) (2004). *Transformations: Theory and Practice?* Proceedings of the OMEP Conference 2003, UCC.

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1995). *Early Childhood Education: Issues and Concerns.* Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Kagan, S. and Bowman, B. (Eds.) (1997). *Leadership in Early Care and Education.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Kemmis, S. and Mc Taggart, R. (2000). "Participatory Action Research" (in) Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Edition). London: Sage.

McAuley, K. and Brattman, M. (2002). *Hearing Young Voices. It's Not Rocket Science: Consulting Children and Young People, Including those Experiencing Poverty or other Forms of Social Inclusion, in Relation to Public Policy Development in Ireland. Key Issues for Consideration.* Dublin: Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative.

Mc Niff, J. (2002). *An Action Research Update: Progress and other Stories.* A paper presented at the Research Forum, Centre for Research in

Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta, 24th October 2002.

Mc Taggart, R. (2001). The Mission of the Scholar in Action Research. http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/w/McTaggart.pdf [Accessed: 16/01/04]

Murray, C. and O'Doherty, A. (2001). *"Éist," Respecting Diversity in Early Childhood Care, Education and Training*. Dublin: Pavee Point.

NAEYC. *A Call for Excellence in Early Childhood Education*. Published on the web at: http://www.naeyc.org/childrens_champions/call-for-excellence.asp[Accessed 03/03/2004]

National Children's Office (2004). *Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2004). *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

National Development Plan Community Support Framework Evaluation Unit (2003). *Evaluation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006*. Dublin: National Development Plan Community Support Framework Evaluation Unit.

National Research Council (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy. Barbara Bowman, Suzanne Donovan and Susan Burns, (Eds.) Commission on Behavioural and Social Sciences and Education. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Ogilvy, M. (2000). *Exercising Muscles and Minds*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Pavee Point (2002). *Traveller Proofing within an Equality Framework*. Dublin: Pavee Point.

Pugh, G. (1995). What Do We Mean by Quality? Presentation to *Promoting Quality in Nursery Care and Education*, 29 June 1995, London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre; 12 July 1995, Hotel Metropole, Leeds.

Santrock, J. (1996). *Adolescence: An Introduction – 6th Edition*. Madison: Brown and Benchmark.

Shonkoff, J. and Meisels, S. (Eds.) (2000). *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention – Second Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Sohng, S. (1995). *Participatory Research and Community Organizing*. A Working Paper presented at the New Social Movement and Community Organizing Conference, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, November 1-3, 1995.

Vandell, D. and Wolfe, B. (2000). *Childcare Quality: Does it Matter and Does it Need to be Improved?* University of Wisconsin/Madison: Institute for Research on Policy.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1992). *Action Research in Higher Education. Examples and Reflections*. London: Kogan Page.