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Making Connections: a Review of International Policies, Practices and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

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Making Connections

A Review of International Policies, Practices and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

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Thomas Walsh.

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Foreword

The OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland encouraged the major stakeholders in Ireland to improve quality in early childhood settings, and proposed a number of policy initiatives. Among these were proposals to strengthen research and to open dialogue with other countries which have faced similar challenges in raising quality in their early childhood systems. With the launching of a successful international conference in September 2004 and now through the publication of this outstanding report on quality, the CECDE has responded to this challenge. This is a comprehensive and well-researched text, which will be extremely useful for policy makers and the major stakeholders in children's services in Ireland.

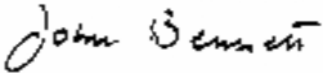
From the experience of the country reviews undertaken by the OECD, it is clear that in many countries practical reasons underlie the attention given to early childhood education and care. Children's services play an important role in contemporary economies in supporting young children and families. They contribute greatly to the well-being, development and learning of young children, and support young parents in their fundamental role of rearing and educating their children. Affordable services help to reconcile family and work responsibilities and contribute to equal opportunities for women. When good quality services are present, more women return to employment, helping to sustain economic growth and pension systems in the future.

Quality services help also to tackle child and family poverty and, in the case of Ireland, could provide - particularly on an extended-day basis - security and well-being to a substantial number of young children. A well-run service in every neighbourhood also contributes to the early identification of children with special learning needs, and to including them in mainstream education. If barriers to social participation are removed at the beginning of life, a powerful signal about a society's commitment to basic human rights is sent out.

The CECDE review of quality is particularly timely. A focus on *quality* in children's services demarcates a child-centred approach from a strictly labour-market reflex that seeks only to provide places. The quality of what is offered to children must be a priority in services. Although as this review outlines, such quality can be described and measured in many ways - through structural, process, cultural or outcome variables - the well-being, identity formation and learning of young children should remain at its centre. This focus corresponds well to the growing awareness in Irish society of the fundamental interests, needs and rights of young children.

The policy implications for quality in Irish services are skilfully drawn from this comparative review of six countries. The CECDE authors call for: a coherent, co-ordinated policy framework; a broad definition of quality to incorporate different perspectives; a support system that is advisory and empowering; the consultation and engagement of all stakeholders; parental involvement; adequate quality supports, such as a curriculum framework; high levels of training; and particular attention to children with special or additional learning needs.

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge this contribution, made by Heino Schonfeld and his team, to the policy and quality debate in Ireland. Other important national reports and analyses have also examined the issue from a more domestic perspective and have reached similar conclusions. The time now seems ripe to test aspirations in action. I wish all stakeholders courage, wisdom and the spirit of compromise in this task. Efforts over the next years will lay the values and structural foundations of an early childhood system in Ireland that is worthy of a progressive, democratic society.



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Acronyms

ADM	Area Development Management
BCCN	Border Counties Childcare Network
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CIS	Caregiver Interaction Scale
CRRU	Childcare Resource and Research Unit
CRSS	Centros Regionais de Segurança Social (Regional Social Security Centres)
DENI	Department of Education Northern Ireland
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Services
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DOPs	Desirable Objectives and Practices
DRE	Direcções Regionais de Educação (Regional Office of Education)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ECERS-E	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Extension
ECERS-R	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised
ECP	Early Childhood Programmes
ECS	Early Childhood Services
EEL	Effective Early Learning
EOCP	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project
ERO	Educational Review Office
FDCRS	Family Day Care Rating Scale
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ICCE	International Child Care and Education
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IEP	Individual Educational Plan
IPSS	Union of Private and Social Solidarity Institutions
ITERS	Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association
N.D.	No Date
NDP/CSF	National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework
NFQ	National Framework for Quality
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
NICMA	Northern Ireland Childminding Association
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PFH	Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus
PIECCs	Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres
QE	Quality in Education Mark
STAR	Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio
T and EA	Training and Employment Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report is a cross-national review of policy, practice and research pertaining to quality in early childhood care and education (ECCE), focusing on six countries. In the last few years, much attention has been focused internationally on the issue of quality in ECCE. Quality has also come to the fore of policy and practice in the ECCE sector in Ireland as evidenced by the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE). With this in mind, it is timely that attention be focused on the issue of quality in Ireland and this report can be viewed as one product of the current interest in the issue of quality.

This chapter introduces the report. The international context and the increasing attention given to the issue of quality in ECCE is first noted. The national context within which this review takes place is then examined in some detail. This includes looking at the growing interest and reference to quality in policy documents over the last decade, the variety of initiatives that have emerged to raise practitioner standards and the limited research that has been conducted around the issue of quality in Ireland. The context of the review is outlined as is the value of conducting cross-national research. The rationale for the choice of countries included in this review is discussed. Finally, the outline of the remainder of the report is discussed at the end of this chapter.

1.2 International Context

Attention given to the subject of quality has increased noticeably since the 1980s (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999). Williams (1994) suggests that almost every publication on early childhood institutions contains the

word quality in its title. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report *Starting Strong* acknowledges that in terms of the ECCE sector, *"Quality is high on the agenda…"*(OECD, 2001:135). One of the current cross-national policy trends identifiable in ECCE concerns raising the quality of provision.

The OECD report suggests that:

> *In part, policy interest has been motivated by research showing the importance of quality early experiences to children's short-term-cognitive, social, and emotional developments as well as to their long term success in school and later life.* (OECD, 2001:13)

A significant body of empirical research has illustrated a link between quality in ECCE services and positive outcomes for children (Mooney and Munton, 1997). Two large longitudinal studies, the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) Project in England and the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care in the United States of America (USA) have both reported a significant relationship between the quality of ECCE and developmental outcomes (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). Good quality childcare (irrespective of childcare type) is associated with better child outcomes (Sammons *et al.*, 2002).

Martin (2001) suggests three reasons for the interest internationally in ECCE. Firstly, an awareness of the positive educational, emotional and social outcomes of ECCE has increased interest in the provision of high quality childcare. Secondly, quality ECCE services have the potential to alleviate some of the negative effects of poverty and can act as a powerful mechanism in initiatives designed to break the cycle of disadvantage. Thirdly, ECCE services can promote equal opportunities for men and women particularly in relation to participation within the work force (Martin, 2001). As Martin (2001:4) concludes:

> *Quality early childhood policies and programmes focus primarily on the best interests of children, and serve also the important goals of equity and social integration.*

1.3 National Context

Sections 1.3-1.5 provide a brief overview of the national context. The CECDE has also produced a comprehensive *National Review of Policy, Practice and Research in relation to Quality in ECCE*, which will be published in Autumn 2004. Though concern with the issue of quality in ECCE in Ireland is recent, this does not mean that understandings of what constitutes quality in the Irish context do not exist. Kiernan (2003) notes that there are currently numerous developments concerning quality taking place at both the policy, the practice and the research level in Ireland. The following section outlines some of the most significant developments in the areas of policy, practice and research regarding quality.

1.3.1 National Policy Context

Quality is a key focus of policymaking in relation to both education and care in Ireland. As the CECDE audit noted in terms of government publications:

> *…all documents pertaining to early childhood care and education contain the issue of quality as an integral element.* (CECDE, 2003:52)

The 1990s marked a critical point in emerging policy on ECCE. According to Hayes (2002b), policy was progressed by two separate elements, the recognition of the value of ECCE for those at risk of

educational disadvantage and the period of unprecedented economic growth resulting in a labour market shortage and the growing participation of women in the labour force. Irish policy making in the ECCE sector can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category comprises policies that are equality driven and focus on facilitating female labour force participation; these are concerned with the provision of care outside the home. One example of this is the *National Childcare Strategy* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 1999).

The second category comprises of policies focused on ECCE (Hayes, 2001). In addition, Hayes (2002b) points out that a more recent policy initiative has articulated an alternative policy approach, influenced by the needs and rights of children e.g. the *National Children's Strategy* (Department of Health and Children [DHC], 2000). This approach lies within an environmental policy theory perspective (Carroll, 2002), a perspective that is concerned with affecting the environment in which children are raised and which seeks to transform the child's upbringing and well-being. Hayes (2002b:183) suggests that this perspective may provide a solution to the dualistic nature of policy formation under the banners of education and care.

In this section government policy pertaining to quality in ECCE is outlined in terms of the three policy making approaches, a labour market approach, an environmental policy approach and an education approach. In addition, some key pieces of legislation and initiatives concerning quality are also highlighted.

1.3.1.1 The National Childcare Strategy

The National Childcare Strategy sees a quality childcare service as:

> *...one which provides enhancing experiences for children and positive interactions between adults and children.* (DJELR, 1999:49)

The Strategy views quality in terms of the appropriateness of the learning environment, staff child ratios, training and adequate pay on the part of staff, partnerships with parents and local community and the importance of diversity and accessibility (DJELR, 1999).

1.3.1.2 The White Paper on Early Childhood Education

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn,* formulates proposals in several areas relating to quality including the introduction of a Quality in Education mark (QE) for ECCE services (DES, 1999). This mark is to be awarded to providers of early education services who meet defined standards concerning staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, methodologies and curriculum (DES, 1999:54-55).

1.3.1.3 The National Children's Strategy

The National Children's Strategy, Our Children - Their Lives (DHC, 2000) is a ten-year plan for all children, designed to improve the quality of the lives of all children through co-ordination and planning at national and local level. Quality childcare services are one objective of the *National Children's Strategy*. The Strategy also proposed that:

> *...early education and child development programmes will be developed, based on the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, to meet the needs of all children, as part of a quality service programme.* (DHC, 2000:52)

1.3.1.4 Regulations

While the *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations* (Department of Health, 1996)

set down minimum standards in areas of quality such as health and safety, child-adult ratios, insurance, size and condition of premises across the various types of pre-school provision. However:

> *...there is no national inspection mechanism to assess other indicators of quality, such as curriculum and qualifications of practitioners.* (CECDE, 2003:52)

The *Education Act* (DES, 1998) and the *Education (Welfare) Act* (DES, 2000) set out standards for all aspects of a school's functioning. Emphasis is placed on aspects of quality such as the promotion of best practice in teaching methods, the promotion of equality of access, the rights of parents and the establishment of effective communication between the schools and the wider community (Kiernan, 2003:5).

1.3.1.5 The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP)

The *National Childcare Strategy* provides the framework for the EOCP, which has three key aims, one of which is to improve the quality of childcare in Ireland (Area Development Management [ADM], 2003b). The EOCP includes a grant scheme for quality improvement (Sub-Measure 3):

> *...designed to support improvements in the quality of childcare service provision generally through the training and education of childcare workers and the establishment of support networks for childcare providers.* (ADM, 2003a:1)

Up to €85 million of the €449 million in EOCP funding has been allocated directly to quality improvement. The DJELR also established a series of structures at national and local level to ensure the effective development of childcare, thus promoting high standards within the sector. The interim evaluation of the EOCP concluded that the progress made, particularly in respect of the Quality Improvement Sub-measure, was disappointing. One of the main deficiencies cited was in respect of the assessment of tangible outcomes due to the absence of indicators to capture the outputs of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the County Childcare Committees regarding quality (National Development Plan/Community Support Framework [NDP/CSF], 2003:62). The report made a number of recommendations to improve this situation.

1.3.1.6 Educational Disadvantage

There are some initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage funded by the DES. These include the Early Start pre-school programme, the Breaking the Cycle Initiative, Giving Children an Even Break and the Rutland Street project. These initiatives provide information on what constitutes quality in ECCE. For example, the Early Start Programme:

> *...emphasises the importance of (1) good staff child ratios, (2) a well thought out, developmentally appropriate curriculum, (3) parental and community involvement, and (4) the importance of easing the transition into formal schooling for children.* (Kiernan, 2003:5)

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

The CECDE is charged with the development of a National Framework for Quality (NFQ) for the ECCE sector, and with *"...support(ing) providers in relation to compliance with quality standards..."* (CECDE, 2001:11). The CECDE Programme of Work therefore includes:

> *...developing guidelines and standards in the areas identified in the White Paper (curriculum and*

> *methodology, equipment and materials, staff and qualifications) and in relation to parental involvement.* (CECDE, 2001:3)

1.4 National Practice Context

As illustrated above, quality in ECCE has been a key focus of several recent policy developments. There is also interest within the sector itself in the issue of quality. At practice level, there have been a number of guides to good practice published by voluntary organisations which address issues of quality from the perspective of practitioners (French, 2003). One example of this is the *Good Practice Self Assessment Manual,* produced by the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA), *"...designed to act as a guide to improve the quality of service provision for full day care providers"* (Kelly, 2000:vii). The manual covers issues such as the identification of needs of children, parents and staff, assessing the quality of care provided and management skills. In addition, each issue has a number of components. For example, physical needs, language needs, cognitive needs and social and emotional needs are addressed under the heading of identification of needs. Each section of the manual involves self-assessment, usually in the form of a rating scale. It is intended that full day care providers will use the manual to assess their current abilities in a number of different areas, looking at how practice can be improved and lead to change.

A number of organisations have initiated *"...innovative quality assurance initiatives..."* (Kiernan, 2003:6), which aim to improve the quality of provision in services. The Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN) outline six quality assurance/improvement programmes, all designed to improve the standards and quality of services including the BCCN, FÁS/Barnardos, High/Scope, IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, the National Children's Nurseries Association and St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association (BCCN, 2004). Quality assurance/ improvement programmes have several features in common; they all involve self-evaluation, training and support and external evaluation. However, there are differences in the extent to which these features can be found in any one programme. In some quality assurance/improvement programmes, providers determine what will be assessed, while in other programmes, assessment criteria are laid down (Kiernan, 2003). Quality assurance/improvement programmes vary in the amount and type of training and support they offer to providers. They also differ in the extent to which they see external validation as an ongoing process or as a sign of an end point (Kiernan, 2003). However, in outlining the variety of quality assurance/improvement programmes available to providers, the BCCN note that:

> *...all of the above agencies would like to see the development of a national accreditation system for all quality programmes implemented in early childhood care and education services.* (BCCN, 2004:2)

1.5 National Research Context

At research level, little attention has been paid to the issue of quality in Ireland (CECDE, 2003). The Audit of Research conducted by the CECDE in 2003 concluded that:

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

Kiernan noted that although there were in excess of 1,000 publications in the Audit, only a minority related to quality. Thus our frequent discussions and debates regarding quality *"...are largely unsubstantiated by published Irish research, there is a tendency I think for us to draw more on international research."* (Kiernan, 2003:7) In an effort to address the dearth of research concerning quality in the Irish context, the CECDE have identified and are in the process of carrying out research on a number of strands (CECDE, 2004b). This includes the recruitment of four Ph.D students who will carry out research in areas such as parental involvement in Traveller pre-schools, the transition from pre-school to primary school, the use of play in pre-school services and the role of assessment in ECCE settings.

Horgan and Douglas (2001) synthesise the findings of a number of observational studies conducted on children in a variety of ECCE settings including junior infant classes, Montessori schools, community playgroups, junior infant classes in Gaelscoileanna[1] and Naíonraí[2]. In an overview of their findings, Cleary *et al.* suggest that:

> *...situations which allowed some degree of agency to children in progressing their own learning, within a structured programme, have the most positive outcomes.* (Cleary et al., 2001:xxv)

Other aspects of quality highlighted by Horgan and Douglas (2001) in their review of research included the attitude of the ECCE practitioner, the importance of training and a child-centred curriculum.

1 Gaelscoileanna are primary schools in which the Irish language is used as the medium of instruction.

2 Naíonraí groups are preschool settings in which the Irish language is used as the medium of communication.

1.6 Context of the Review

One of the key pieces of work to be undertaken by the CECDE is the production of a National Framework for Quality (NFQ) in ECCE. The development of this framework can be divided into three key tasks:

1. The development of a set of core standards which will define quality in the Irish context;
2. The development of a system of inspection or assessment to ensure that this quality is achieved and;
3. The development of an infrastructure to support all those working in the sector to accomplish quality as defined by the standards. (CECDE, 2004c:6)

Four independent but interrelated pieces of work will be involved in the development of the NFQ:

- A Conceptual Framework on how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland;
- A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research in relation to Quality in ECCE;
- An International Review of Quality in ECCE;
- A report of a series of Consultative Seminars with stakeholders in ECCE, *Talking About Quality* (CECDE, 2004c).

This review is one piece of work undertaken as part of the development of the NFQ. The terms of reference of the review are:

- The review of international policy, practice and research pertaining to quality in ECCE will focus on at least 6 countries including, for example, Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, Northern Ireland and Italy.
- The review of international policy, practice and research will examine ECCE for all children, including those experiencing educational disadvantage and those with special needs.
- The review of international policy, practice and research will culminate in

recommendations for the development of the NFQ.

- It is anticipated that the review will be undertaken over a period of 10 weeks with the end of March 2004 as the completion date.
- Desk/documentary research methods will be employed to undertake this review.
- The commissioned body will work closely with the CECDE Director and Assistant Director to produce an interim and a final draft.
- The commissioned body will have access to the CECDE's information resources and assistance.

1.6.1 The Value of Cross-National Work

According to Moss (2000), the question of the value of cross-national research has emerged as a result of the two developments in the ECCE sector; firstly the rapidly growing literature based on cross-national comparisons and secondly the:

> *...increasing tendency to refer to research from a variety of countries in support of particular conclusions.* (Moss, 2000:4)

There are several reasons why a cross-national review of policy, practice and research pertaining to quality in ECCE is of value. A cross-national review can provoke critical thinking. Examining issues in other countries can provide one with a new focus and make the familiar look strange, leading to the questioning of assumptions and practices that are otherwise taken for granted:

> *The lens of Country A may make it easier to see in Country B what is uncritically taken for granted and make the invisible visible and familiar strange, so enabling dominant assumptions, discourses and constructions in Country B to be questioned.* (Moss, 2000:4)

A cross-national review can reveal the particular understandings of childhood, learning, care, and work with children, which influence the shaping of both policies and practices (Moss *et al.*, 2003).

A cross-national review carries the potential for change (Moss, 2000) as it can highlight the range of approaches adopted by countries in terms of the development of ECCE provision (OECD, 2001). While not suggesting that policies and programmes can simply be exported from one country to another, one of the benefits of cross-national work is that it illustrates alternative ways of thinking and acting. Even if a decision is made to progress with current policies and practices, a review ensures that this decision will be a considered choice, based on the evaluation of a number of possibilities (Moss *et al.*, 2003).

Any review of policy, practice and research across several countries can contribute to policy development and innovation in ECCE (OECD, 2001). Research studies from one country are often used to justify policy initiatives in another and policies from one country are often modified and adapted for use by another (Moss *et al.*, 2003).

A cross-national review can also provide information on international trends in policy and service delivery, for example, the growing tendency to adopt an integrated approach to service delivery in ECCE (OECD, 2001).

1.7 Rationale for Choice of Country

Using Esping-Andersen's (Esping-Andersen, 1990) Typology of Welfare States as a framework for selection, six countries were chosen for this review in consultation

with the CECDE. These countries were Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Germany, Northern Ireland and New Zealand. This Typology of Welfare States was seen as useful in selecting countries as different welfare regimes reflect and reproduce particular ways of thinking and acting. This is particularly relevant with respect to relationships between the family, the market and the State, all of which influence and impact on the provision of ECCE services.

Esping-Anderson proposed three main types of welfare state, distinguishable in terms of decommodification[3] and social stratification (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This typology was criticised by feminists for ignoring the gender consequences of welfare states, for example, it did not take account of social policies that supported working mothers such as public provision of childcare, maternity and parental leaves (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994). Esping-Andersen (1999) responded to this criticism by adding the variable of *'defamilialization'* to his analysis to include the family as a unit of welfare provision in addition to the State and the market (Estévez-Abe, 2002). The addition of this variable was an attempt to capture to which degree welfare regimes facilitated equal labour market participation by women, and hence to what extent social reproduction was guaranteed by either State, market or family (Engelen, 2003). Defamilialization refers to:

> *...the degree to which households' welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed - either via welfare state provision, or via market provision.*
>
> (Esping-Andersen, 1999:51)

Both public provision of social services and the availability of relatively cheap private care services lead to defamilialization (Estévez-Abe, 2002). Esping-Andersen (1999) noted that while some welfare regimes defamilialised care, others did not. The three main types of welfare state proposed by Esping-Andersen are outlined below.

1.7.1 Social Democratic/Nordic Welfare Regime

According to Engelen (2003), in decommodified and defamilialized welfare regimes, the level of welfare protection against the exigencies of the market is high, and social reproduction is largely taken over by the State. Public employment is high, providing a generous job outlet for women in particular. Significant levels of taxation imply limited opportunities for low value-added service activities. Countries that can be classified as social democratic welfare states include the Nordic countries of Norway and Sweden.

1.7.2 Continental Europe/ Conservative Welfare Regimes

In decommodified and familialized welfare regimes, the level of welfare protection is generally just as high as that found in social democratic welfare states, but social reproduction is largely a matter for the household or the extended family. According to Engelen (2003), this results in a high wage/high skill economy and a low level of female labour market participation. This type of welfare regime is characteristic of the countries of Continental Europe such as Portugal and Germany.

1.7.3 Anglo-Saxon/Liberal Welfare Regimes

In commodified regimes, the difference between defamilialized and familialized in terms of the welfare regimes is

3 Esping-Andersen explains de-commodification as follows "In pre-capitalist societies, few workers were properly commodities in the sense that their survival was contingent upon the sale of their labor power. It is as markets become universal and hegemonic that the welfare of individuals comes to depend entirely on the cash nexus. Stripping society of the institutional layers that guaranteed social reproduction outside the labor contract meant that people were commodified. In turn, the introduction of modern social rights implies a loosening of the pure commodity status. De-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market." (Esping-Andersen 1990:21-22)

unimportant (Engelen 2003). These regimes are characterised by a high degree of marketisation, limited collective welfare protection and a prevalence of private arrangements for social reproduction. As State responsibilities are limited (means-tested benefits etc.), non-wage labour costs are low, making low wage activities economically viable. Countries that fit this model tend to be English speaking and include Northern Ireland and New Zealand. Ireland most broadly fits into the Anglo-Saxon/liberal welfare regime in terms of Esping-Andersen's Typology of Welfare States.

As noted above, different welfare regimes have engaged to varying degrees in processes of defamilialization, for example, they may have developed policies regarding childcare, enabling women to reduce their family responsibilities, especially for the care of young children (Moss *et al.*, 2003). Defamilialization entails significant investment in ECCE services. The Nordic welfare regimes are notable for the extent to which they have pursued and achieved processes of defamilialization, while the countries of Continental Europe are highly familialistic (Moss *et al.*, 2003).

There is considerable diversity among countries grouped within the same welfare regime; in particular, this is true of those countries classified as Conservative welfare states. There are stronger similarities between those countries with Nordic welfare regimes and among those countries with liberal welfare regimes (Moss *et al.*, 2003).

In the selection of countries for this review, an attempt was made to ensure equal representation from each of the three types of welfare regime. It was also felt that it was important to include Northern Ireland as in Ireland, harmonisation of policies is a critical objective in light of the Good Friday Agreement (Northern Ireland Office, Accessed at: http://www.nio.gov.uk/issues/agreement.htm, 14th March, 2004).

Included

Though the way in which quality is defined may vary from country to country, there is a general consensus among researchers regarding the elements of ECCE that are associated with positive outcomes for children. These include:

- Adequate investment;
- A co-ordinated policy and regulatory framework;
- Efficient and co-ordinated management systems;
- Adequate levels of staff training and working conditions;
- A pedagogical framework and other conditions;
- Regular systems of monitoring and;
- Equality and diversity (OECD, 2001).

The way in which quality is defined is further explored in Chapter 2. In this section, the way in which information was categorised by headings and the reasons for looking at particular aspects of quality are outlined.

Countries vary in the way in which they define, measure and support quality. Under each country heading the review is organised into four sections:

1. Defining quality;
2. Measuring quality;
3. Supporting quality and;
4. Educational disadvantage and special needs.

Each chapter concludes with implications for the development of the NFQ in Ireland. What is included under each of these headings varies from country to country, according to the particular features of that country's ECCE system. For example, some countries regulate for staff qualifications in ECCE settings. In such countries, the issue of training is included when looking at defining quality. In other countries with no requirements for qualified staff in ECCE settings, training is located under the

1.8 Aspects of Quality

heading supporting quality. Thus information in relation to defining quality focuses primarily on the regulatory context, while information under supporting quality focuses on the measures that aim to raise quality above minimum standards. Measuring quality focuses on the inspection framework for ECCE.

A variety of components of quality were examined across the six countries. This section provides a brief outline of the reason for the inclusion of these issues, highlighting their links with the issue of quality.

1.8.1 Philosophy

The philosophy, or the way in which ECCE, and more broadly childhood itself, is viewed in any particular country has a significant effect on the determination of what constitutes quality in any particular country. Bennett (2000:6) notes that:

> *...the organisation of a national network of quality child services is a complex process embedded in a much larger system that includes macro policies and ideologies. Failure to understand the contexts and systemic decisions that influence the lives of children places too much weight on the importance of early childhood services in themselves, and in particular, on the practitioners who have direct contact with children.*

1.8.2 Policy Approach

A co-ordinated policy framework was identified by the OECD (2001) as one way in which quality in the early years could be supported. Ideally, the OECD view one department with overall responsibility for ECCE, working in cooperation with other departments, as the best approach to adopt in achieving coherent and participatory policy development. Where the responsibility for children is divided between two different departments (such as education and welfare), provision has a tendency to operate as two distinct systems (Moss *et al.*, 2003). According to Moss (1994), the integration of a variety of provision under one department provides a coherent approach to quality. Naturally, the policy approach adopted by a country has implications for the financing of the ECCE system.

1.8.3 Funding

An important contextual factor in promoting high quality childcare is funding (Childcare Resource and Research Unit [CRRU], 1997:15). Candappa *et al.* (2003) remark that the choice of funding mechanisms varies across countries and is linked to the type of welfare regime adopted. Candappa *et al.* (2003) outline three main types of funding for services; public funding, employer levy or tax and parental fees. It is suggested that ECCE provided by welfare systems usually involve a contribution from parents, while those based on education systems are free (Candappa *et al.*, 2003). However, the use of demand or supply subsidies is not always straight-forward. The Nordic countries are more likely to use supply subsidies, the English language countries are more likely to utilize demand subsidies, while some countries use both.

When services are provided by private entrepreneurs responding to parental demand, Myers (2000) suggests that the government can lose some control over standards, and thus the quality of services. Myers (2000:85) questions whether, in this situation, parents have the *"...knowledge and energy to monitor and demand quality in the centers..."* and questions whether the *"...profit motive..."* can lead providers to cut corners that result in a lowering of the quality of the service. Other researchers have also questioned the reliance on the market as a provider of quality childcare. Friesen (1995) carried out a study in Canada, looking at childcare in

the province of Alberta. At the time of the study, the regulatory framework was weak and there was an average vacancy rate of approximately twenty per cent across centres. Despite this Friesen (1995) found that the competition for users was not sufficient to motivate for profit centres to provide a higher quality of childcare.

Mahon (2001:10) is also cautious of the use of the markets and demand subsidies when it comes to quality:

> *The choice of policy instruments, focused on the demand side, does little to encourage the development of a high quality childcare infrastructure, offering good jobs to those who provide care. Nor does it do much to counteract inequality in market power, though enrichment programmes for designated areas may improve access for the very worst off.*

1.8.4 Auspice (Delivery Strategy)

The term *"auspice"* refers to the operator of a service. Friesen (1995) identified three different types of auspice in childcare:

1. Non-profit organisations;
2. For-profit organisations and;
3. Municipal levels of government.

The organisational goals of profit and not-for-profit childcare facilities are different and these goals drive decisions regarding level and type of employee; permitted employee behaviour, the physical facility and the programme. Friesen (1995:9) suggests that:

> *...all these organisational characteristics have a direct and very important impact on the level of quality of service offered.*

In terms of global measures of quality, studies conducted in the USA using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) suggest that non-profit centres provide a higher quality of care than profit centres. Caregivers in non-profit centres are more likely to engage in appropriate interaction with children and are more sensitive to their needs (Whitebook *et al.*, 1990). Friesen (1995), in a review of studies that have examined auspice and quality, notes that for-profit centres have more children than not-for-profit centres, that caregiver education is higher in not-for-profit centres and that the turnover rate of staff is lower in not for-profit centres. Friesen (1995:14) concludes that *"...quality is more likely to be found in a non profit centre."*

Research in New Zealand also suggests that community-owned childcare facilities employ a significantly higher proportion of staff with a teaching qualification and a lower proportion of staff with no ECCE qualifications than privately owned childcare facilities (Mitchell, 2002). Differences between community and private childcare facilities also emerged in New Zealand in terms of actions taken following a funding cutback (Mitchell, 2002). Private childcare facilities were more likely to reduce overheads by making negative changes to staff (poorer ratios, bigger groups, redundancy, less in-service training), staff working conditions, the non-replacement of equipment or buildings etc. Community-based facilities were more likely to look for savings in areas that kept staff and conditions intact (Mitchell, 2002).

1.8.5 Staff Qualifications

Research has highlighted the link between professional education and the provision of a high quality ECCE service (Blenkin *et al.*, 1996; Abbott and Pugh, 1998; Feeney and Freeman, 1999). Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997:3) note that:

> *...childcare and education services outside the compulsory school system - and particularly services for young children - are currently expanding in*

> *many countries. The demand for professional workers will invariably increase. ... staffing is one of the key quality factors in centre based settings. Decisions made about staffing will be decisions made about the quality of the service.*

Workforce training is identified as a key component of quality childcare provision (OECD, 2001). According to Ball (1994:16) *"...the calibre and training of the professionals are the key determinants of high-quality provision."* One way in which governments attempt to improve the quality of ECCE offered is through raising the training and status of staff. The professionalisation of the ECCE sector was one of the key themes to emerge from the OECD Thematic Review (OECD, 2001).

1.8.6 Regulation

There is ongoing debate about the nature of the relationship between regulation and quality (O'Kane and Kernan, 2002). On the one hand, a large body of research literature, particularly in the USA, has linked regulations to quality childcare. O'Kane and Kernan (2002) note that States in the USA with the most stringent regulations produce higher quality childcare than States with less stringent regulations. Philipsen *et al.* (1997:301) concluded in a study of childcare quality across four States that:

> *...higher quality was found in the states with the most stringent regulations...These findings suggest that childcare regulation does have an impact on the quality of care that children experience.*

Regulations impact not only on structural aspects of quality such as staff-child ratios but also influence process quality. Research carried out in the USA (Philipsen *et al.*, 1997) suggests that structural features of pre-school classes can be used to predict process quality.

However the link between aspects of quality that can be regulated and process quality is complex; Cryer *et al.* (1999:354) note that *"...there is no one single powerful predictor of process quality."* However, they further suggest that:

> *...regulation might not only concern setting standards for structural characteristics of programs, but also be written to ensure the specific care and educational opportunities for children that are found in accepted definitions of process quality.* (Cryer et al., 1999:354)

Others caution against using structural indicators as an indication of process quality. Lamb (1998) remarks on the fact that the existence of structural quality cannot be taken as a proxy for process quality. He further suggests that process quality which relies to a great degree on interactions has a lot to do with the adult and the level of their training and motivation. The issue of structural and process indicators of quality is further discussed in Chapter 2.

Some have expressed concern about association of regulations with any standard of quality, apprehensive that these minimum standards might become synonymous with quality (O'Kane and Kernan, 2002). Additionally, the impact of regulations varies depending on the ECCE context. Mooney *et al.* (2003) suggest that regulations are more important where there is little public subsidy for childcare and where levels of training and wages for practitioners may be low:

> *In countries where the private market predominates and where structural features of early years and childcare services are rather poor, (e.g. low levels of staff qualifications) external evaluation and conforming to standards may be a particularly strong approach* (Mooney *et al.*,

2003:5).

McGurk *et al.* (1995) highlight the importance of external regulations for staff ratios and other staffing features, where services are dependant on parental fees. They suggest that regulations may be less important where ECCE is publicly funded. Significant public funding for childcare reduces the pressure on childcare facilities to limit labour costs by reducing staff:

> *Under conditions where most provision depends on parental ability to pay, and where financial survival and profit for many providers is precarious, external regulations to ensure adequate ratios and other staffing features is essential. It is an important protection for children and parents against an understandable but potentially damaging pressure to cut staffing - the major expense.* (Mc Gurk et al., 1995:25)

In looking at research examining the link between administrative auspice and quality of provision, Mitchell (2002) found that not-for-profit services provided a higher standard of care and education than for profit centres. Mitchell (2002:2) suggests that one feature which seems to weaken the linkage between high quality and private or community based childcare facilities *"...is a stringent regulatory framework."*

1.8.7 Curriculum

Curriculum models are promoted as a way of increasing quality in ECCE, as a mechanism for the delivery of positive child outcomes and as a mechanism to ensure accountability:

> *Consistent implementation of curriculum models has the potential to raise the standards of care and education experienced by young children. In light of uneven expectations for teachers' professional preparation and variability across the states in child care licensing standards, early childhood curriculum models can improve programmatic quality through the consistent implementation of well-articulated curriculum frameworks, thereby lifting the floor of program quality in early childhood education.* (Goffin, 2004:1)

Horgan (2002) notes that a curriculum is always a socio-cultural construction. Curricula divide broadly into two types; official curricula issued by ministries or based on ministry guidelines and curricula developed by voluntary and other organisations such as developmentally appropriate practice, e.g. Froebel, High/Scope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Steiner (Bertram and Pascal, 2002). There are two types of approaches found in official curricula; instructionist and constructionist (McQuail *et al.*, 2002). The instructionist approach emphasises preparation for school and is focused on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The constructionist approach views childhood as a stage in its own right and focuses on children as competent co-constructors of knowledge (Mc Quail *et al.*, 2002).

1.8.8 Professional Development

According to Mitchell and Cubey (2003), professional development has an impact on three domains; it enhances pedagogy, enhances children's learning and contributes to the building of linkages between the ECCE setting and other settings. Eight characteristics of quality professional development are outlined by Mitchell and Cubey (2003:xii):

- That professional development incorporates participants' own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding into the learning context;
- That professional development provides theoretical and content knowledge and information about alternative practices;

- That participants are involved in investigating pedagogy within their own ECCE settings;
- That participants analyse data from their own settings. Revelation of discrepant data is a mechanism to invoke revised understanding;
- That critical reflection enabling participants to investigate and challenge assumptions and extend their thinking is a core aspect;
- That professional development supports educational practice that is inclusive of diverse children, families and community;
- That professional development helps participants to change educational practice, beliefs, understanding, and/or attitudes;
- That professional development helps participants to gain awareness of their own thinking, actions, and influence.

Structural conditions also impact on professional development (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). The duration and intensity of professional development, characteristics of professional development participants, the professional development adviser and organisation of the service are influential in supporting or hindering the ability of participants to learn from professional development and to change their pedagogical practice.

1.8.9 Accreditation

Accreditation schemes aim to encourage providers to raise their standards above the minimal requirements set by national regulations and standards. Mooney *et al.* (2003) suggest that accreditation schemes are more commonly found in countries with low levels of publicly funded ECCE services. Accreditation schemes can be offered by national or local governments or by professional or voluntary organizations. Because accreditation is voluntary, participation rates can be low. The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System in Australia is one example of an accreditation programme that aims to improve the quality of ECCE by defining quality childcare, providing a way to measure the quality of care made available by the service and identifying areas for ongoing quality improvement (National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc., Accessed at: http://www.ncac.gov.au/quality_systems/quality_systems_index.html#whatarequalitysystems, 14th March, 2004).

1.8.10 Evaluation

Podmore *et al.* (2000) view evaluation as closely connected to the provision of a high quality ECCE service. Evaluation is utilised as a tool for quality assurance and quality improvement. Cubey and Dalli (1996) suggest that it is important to ensure the involvement of staff in the evaluation of programmes, that evaluation criteria are not simply externally imposed.

Self-evaluation has become increasingly important in the provision of a quality service in ECCE. From a practitioner perspective, evaluation can examine whether a particular programme is effective in its outcomes and may highlight those aspects of practice that have been particularly effective (Curtis, 2000). Self-evaluation is an important tool in the development of the reflective practitioner (Cubey and Dalli, 1996) and brings with it the possibility of change (Money *et al.*, 2003).

1.8.11 Research

Research on the issue of quality in the ECCE sector is also examined as this may be used as a basis for decision-making. Research also has an important role to play in evaluating the effectiveness of quality initiatives.

1.8.12 Inspection

One way in which governments can ensure

compliance with the standards of quality laid down is through inspections. In some jurisdictions compliance with regulations is seen as the main objective of the inspection process, while others view the provision of support and advice as a key objective of the inspection process (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). Some countries have centralised inspection services while others have devolved responsibility for inspection to the municipalities (Mooney *et al.*, 2003).

1.9 Overview of the Report

Quality is the main focus of the remainder of the report. Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the issue of quality, which includes looking at the way in which quality is defined, measured and supported. A post-modern critique of quality is also included in this chapter.

Chapters three to eight present issues of quality for each of the individual countries profiled in this review. As noted above, the countries profiled are grouped together according to welfare regime. Norway and Sweden, the two representatives of the Nordic countries are profiled first. The Continental welfare regimes of Portugal and Germany are profiled in chapters five and six. Lastly, issues of quality in the Liberal Welfare regimes of Northern Ireland and New Zealand are profiled in Chapters seven and eight. Each country's profile concludes with a list of implications for the development of the NFQ in Ireland. Chapter 9 presents a synthesis of some of the main findings regarding quality in the countries included in the review and discusses some recommendations for the Irish context, based on the evidence presented in this report.

Under each country heading the review is organised into seven sections:

1. Introduction
2. Context for quality
3. Defining quality
4. Measuring quality
5. Supporting quality
6. Educational disadvantage and special needs
7. Implications for the development of the NFQ.

Chapter 2

Quality

2.1 Introduction

The issue of quality and what constitutes quality is a prevalent question in the ECCE sector. There is no one definition of quality and all attempts at a definition is context-linked and time specific. As French (2000:12) notes:

> *...quality is no longer viewed as one standard of excellence identified for all children in all services, but rather a set of core criteria towards which services may progress and against which their progress can be measured.*

Another perspective is offered by Farquhar (1999:1), stating that the term is a:

> *...convenient adjective, because it saves thinking of a more precise term and also it has a nice sound to it and gives importance to one's topic of research.*

Nevertheless, given the complexity of the term 'quality,' the exact nature of the concept, how it is defined, described and measured cannot be ignored. In this chapter, the concept of quality is examined. Section 2.2 focuses on some of the reasons why quality has come to the fore in debates regarding the care and education of young children. The third section considers what is meant when one looks at quality and outlines some of the common components of the definition of quality. The role of a variety of stakeholders in determining the way in which quality is viewed is discussed in section four. Mechanisms to measure quality are examined in Section 2.5, while section 2.6 focuses on the ways in which quality and quality improvement can be supported. Section 2.7 presents a critique of the discourse of quality.

2.2 Quality in Focus

Internationally there is much interest in the issue of quality in ECCE. *"The issue of quality has both a professional and an administrative dimension"* (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2000:2) and it is for these two main reasons that quality has emerged as such a topic of concern in ECCE.

In part, this can be seen as the result of changes in the economic and political sphere (DJELR, 2004), in particular the crisis in the welfare state that has focused attention on social spending. According to Bennett (2000:22), this has led to a greater scrutiny of social and educational budgets and *"...great attention has been given to cost efficiency, financial management and the use of resources"*. This change is characterised by a shift in concern from inputs (such as expenditure, investments etc.) towards measuring comparative outputs (literacy, numeracy levels at particular ages, extent of children's learning etc). In this context, the concept of quality is used to defend spending on ECCE programmes. The concept of quality has moved from the private to the public sphere (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999) and has become increasingly important in economic and political life:

> *The concept of quality has been wholeheartedly embraced by those seeking to rationalise and shake up the public sector in the UK...because it includes notions of efficiency, competition, value for money and empowering the customer ... that the welfare system can justify their cost in terms of tangible benefits and measurable efficiency.* (Williams, 1994:5)

There has been a change in the social context of ECCE, in part as a result of the increase in the female labour force participation rate. In many European countries, responsibility for the care and education of children has been transferred from the family domain to public institutions. This growth in demand for childcare institutions has led to a greater focus on the pedagogical role of early childhood institutions and interest in the role played by these institutions in the provision of support to families (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2000:2). In Ireland, the labour force participation rate of women increased significantly throughout the 1990s and the *National Childcare Strategy* identified the increased participation of women in the workforce as *"...one of the most important factors currently influencing the demand for childcare."* (DJELR, 1999:2)

Traditionally in Ireland, mothers of very young children were the most likely to stay out of the labour market, while mothers who left employment when their children were small were likely to re-enter the labour market as their children reached school going age (DJELR, 1998:20). Recent evidence suggests that this trend is changing with mothers with one child under five more likely to be in employment than mothers with children over the age of five (ADM, 2003c).

Concerns about the nature of quality and ECCE in childhood institutions has also been fuelled by the ideology of motherhood, the particular views that Western societies have regarding the care of young children (Mooney and Munton, 1997). The ideology of motherhood refers to the belief that young children need exclusive maternal care for successful development and that that care outside the home may be damaging to children's development. Research has found this view to be held by a significant proportion of those involved in the care of young children, particularly concerning care for children in the first year (Mooney *et al.*, 2001). It is a view that emerges in the

media from time to time, examples can be see with headlines such as *"The damage that work can do to your child"* (Humphreys, Irish Times January 27th, 1998) and *"Worried about leaving your children with minders while you work away from home? You should be."* (White, Irish Times, December 1st, 2001)

The ideology of motherhood gains strength from the uncritical attitude we have regarding parental care and the view that *"...any particular mother will give care to her child that is at least good enough."* (Helburn and Bergmann, 2002:60) This ideology of motherhood automatically places any alternative sources of care in the negative position. Childcare research has been influenced by this particular ideology of motherhood, as evidenced by the numerous studies focused on attachment theory. Attachment theory suggested that successful social and emotional development on the part of the child depended upon the development of a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with the primary caregiver, defined in the early literature as the mother (Mooney and Munton, 1998).

In a review of the literature, Rutter (1995) concluded that although empirical evidence supported the key features of attachment theory, some areas needed revision. Rutter noted that the healthy development of the child did not depend entirely on children becoming attached only to their mothers, that the formation of multiple, simultaneous attachments was quite normal on the part of the child. As Rutter (1995:562) explained:

> *Children can cope well with several adults caring for them, provided it is the same adults over time and provided that the individuals with whom they have secure relationships are available at times when they are tired, distressed or facing challenging circumstances.*

The ideology of motherhood combined with the increasing use of childcare has focused attention on the issue of quality in ECCE services.

2.2.1 The Rights of the Child

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Ireland in 1992. This convention argues for a new attitude towards children, based not on meeting children's needs, but rather on the recognition of children's rights as a matter of entitlement (Carroll, 2002). Article 6 of the Convention states that the child has a right to life, survival and development. A holistic view of child development is taken; hence child development includes health and nutrition, and the spiritual, moral and social development of the child where the child's personality, tastes and abilities are encouraged (UN, 1989:Article 6).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is focusing in 2004 on *Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood* (UN, Accessed at: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm, 1st July, 2004) in an attempt to broaden understanding and raise awareness about the rights of young children. Discussions will focus on two areas; starting sound practices early (including the rights to survival and development of young children, the rights to health, nutrition and education; and the rights to rest, leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities) and young children as full actors of their own development (focusing on participation in the family, in the school setting and in the community and the role of day-care, early childhood programmes, pre-school, pre-primary and first years of primary education in promoting the child as a right-holder) (UN, Accessed at: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm, 1st July, 2004).

Gotts (1988) identifies childcare as an arrangement whereby adults from outside

the family assist children with important aspects of their development. As the UN Convention states that children are entitled to special protection, support and facilities, this leads Gotts (1988) to conclude that childcare should be regarded as a right for children. Childcare as a right of all children is a view that has been articulated in Ireland both by the government and the voluntary agencies working in the ECCE sector in Ireland. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, in a speech in 2000 at St. Andrew's Resource Centre stated that *"Our children are our future. They have a right to quality childcare and it is our duty, indeed our obligation, to ensure that their rights and needs are met"* (DJELR, Accessed at: http://www.justice.ie/80256996005F3617/vWeb/wpJWOD4TFJHN, 1st July, 2004) while the principles of voluntary organisations in the childcare sector such as the BCCN include that *"All children have the right to a high quality early childhood care and education service."* (BCCN, Accessed at: http://www.bccn.ie/leafbccn.htm, 1st July, 2004)

The National Children's Strategy (DHC, 2000) reflects the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and a high standard of quality in ECCE services is clearly a key aim of the Strategy. One of the three national goals for children presented in the Strategy is that *"Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development"* (DHC, 2000:11). In addition, one of the objectives of the Strategy is that *"Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services..."* (DHC, 2000:50). These aims are reflective of the view of quality in terms of ECCE services as a right of all children.

2.3 Defining Quality

It is important to note that quality is a relative concept. Quality as defined by the Collins English Dictionary is a degree or grade of excellence or worth (Harper Collins, 1999:669). In other words, quality is a term that expresses a relationship between two distinct points. For example, if standards are exceptionally low, then what might in other circumstances be seen as middle standards become high, but only relative to your boundary conditions. This is important as the acts of defining and measuring quality (while profiled separately in this review) cannot be separated. Quality will always be expressed in terms of certain standards (measurements or indicators) and these measurements will in turn constitute the definition of quality in a particular context.

While the importance of quality in terms of childcare services is acknowledged and well documented, no single definition of what constitutes quality in childcare provision exists. The idea of a universally accepted standard of quality has been rejected. Moss and Pence (1994:172) acknowledge quality is in the eye of the beholder and it is recognised that:

> *...quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interests, rather than on objective and universal reality.*

As quality is a relative, value-based concept, any definition of quality is subject to change over time and defining quality is an ongoing process (Kamerman, 2001).

Definitions of quality will depend on the cultural values and constructions of childhood present in any particular society. For example, what constitutes a high quality service will differ in a society that views childhood as a time in and of itself, compared with a society that views childhood as a process of becoming involved in the preparation of the child for his/her role as a future citizen. The concept of quality always needs to be contextualised ecologically and temporally to recognise cultural and other forms of diversity. In a

comparison of quality in pre-school classrooms across five countries using the ECERS, it was found that:

> *...there is little convergence in the quality characteristics which score relatively high and low in Germany and Austria when they are compared with Spain.* (Tietze et al., 1996:463)

This illustrates the important role that context plays in any determination of quality.

The way in which quality is defined also depends on the purpose of the ECCE service. Functions of ECCE include the promotion of child development, meeting the needs of parents for affordable care, providing a safe environment for children deemed to be at risk or encouraging respect for the group as well as the individual child.

Any definition of quality is also as a result of interplay, negotiation and possible conflict between, and sometimes among, those stakeholder groups. Moss and Pence (1994) suggest that it is more accurate to talk about quality perspectives than a universal standard of quality.

However, there are many common elements in definitions of quality. One common feature of many definitions of quality is that it tends to distinguish between the dynamic (interactional) and the static (structural) features of the childcare environment (Love *et al.*, 1996). Three dimensions of quality that are most often included in definitions of quality include structural features (static), process features (interactional) and outcomes, either from a parental or the child's perspective. Wangmann (1995) distinguishes between two components of quality in childcare, components that contribute to quality and components that determine quality. Wangmann outlines four developmentally appropriate practices that contribute to quality:

1. Sensitive, responsive staff-child interactions;
2. Implementation of appropriate curricula;
3. High standards of health and safety and;
4. Demonstrated staff-parent co-operation (Wangmann, 1995:73).

Components that contribute to quality are those that provide favourable conditions in which good quality outcomes are most likely to occur.

Researchers using Bronfenbrenner's theory of human ecology have divided quality into three components; process quality, structural quality and the quality of the adult work environment (Kontos *et al.*, 1995). These three components are seen as interrelated and as associated with children's behaviour and development in childcare. Process quality forms the base of the model as it is most directly related to children's behaviour, while at the second level of the model are structural and adult work environment quality components.

Thus, quality is most often defined in terms of a series of indicators or outcomes. These outcomes can in turn determine the extent to which any particular service is defined as high quality. Any definition of quality cannot therefore be considered separately from quality indicators. Aspects of these elements of quality as cited in the research literature on ECCE are outlined below. However, any description of these elements should be mindful of the fact that they have been developed in the economically advantaged regions of the world (Europe and North America), in particular socio-cultural contexts (Woodhead, 1998). In so far as they contribute to a description of quality, they are limited to a particular time and place and connected to particular macro structures at a societal level. It should be noted that the different key features of quality rarely operate independently and this notion of interdependence between quality indices is

an important one (Mooney and Munton, 1997).

2.3.1 Structural Features

Structural features of quality, what Katz (1993:1) terms the *"...top down..."* perspective on quality includes elements such as the level of public funding, equity in terms of availability and affordability, staff qualifications and training, working conditions for staff, group size and staff-child ratios (Moss *et al.*, 2003). Many research studies focus on what is termed *"...the iron triangle..."* - group size, adult-child ratios and provider education/training (Phillips, 1988 cited in Kontos *et al.*, 1995:9) while Love *et al.* (1996) acknowledge that one of the most commonly measured variables of quality is staff-child ratios.

There is substantial evidence (Vandell and Wolfe, 2000) to suggest that these setting features do predict some of the effects of ECCE programmes. Optimal structural conditions create opportunities for more favourable process conditions to occur in childcare settings, and these, in turn, lead to more positive child outcomes (Howes *et al.*, 1992). For example, when an adult is responsible for providing care to a smaller group of children, she is more likely to tailor care to the particular needs of each child (Kontos *et al.*, 1994). Adults who have more formal education and specialized training tend to use this knowledge when they interact with children, and this enables them to be more sensitive and responsive in their caregiving (Kontos *et al.*, 1994; Helburn, 1995).

There has also been considerable debate about whether group size or staff-child ratios could be seen as the critical factor in terms of structural quality. It is probably true to say that there is broad agreement among researchers and practitioners that smaller class sizes enable teachers to provide better quality education on the assumption that there is more time for interactions which may be considered an important mediating mechanism for development and learning. Large scale studies in the USA have found that a reduction in class size to 15 children for children aged 5 to 8 years leads to increased achievement in reading, maths and sciences in later school and fewer repeat years (Bowman *et al.*, 2001).

In a report from the Tennessee Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project, Finn and Achilles (1990) are categoric in their conclusion that small classes yield significant and long-lasting improvement in academic achievement. When compared to counterparts in regular classes, children attending classes of 18 children or less reached more advanced levels of achievement in maths, reading and word study skills. The gains were greatest for those students identified as low-income or minority. These findings were also found when the STAR students were compared to students in larger classes where the adult-child ratio was improved by the presence of teaching assistants. Other research considering whether group size or ratio is the critical factor has also found that improving adult-child ratio by the addition of staff to the group is not as effective as decreasing class size (Mosteller, 1995 cited in Bowman *et al.*, 2001).

The research, however, is not conclusive, and some research suggests that while smaller class sizes do benefit young children, there are questions about the merit of generalising the results and that simply lowering the class size may be insufficient to guarantee positive effect (Goldstein and Blatchford, 1998; Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2000). The dynamic of the system and the impact of contexts nested within the classroom itself must also be taken into account. There will, for instance, be a different impact on the child of whole group work in a group of thirty children compared to the impact of working in one of six groups of five children.

Moss (2000:13) suggests that there is considerable difference in the research interest on the issue of staff-child ratios as a measure of structural quality in different countries, with *"...ratios seem to figure more prominently in the US than in some other countries"*. Staff-child ratios are more likely to be an issue for government regulation in countries where the private sector contributes significantly to the provision of ECCE services. It is suggested that the level at which staff-child ratios are set is a key determinant of staff costs, and so influences the ability of the private sector to provide affordable childcare places. In countries where the private sector does not provide a considerable number of childcare places, staff-child ratios seem to be less of an issue.

Structural features of quality in ECCE services are the easiest aspects of quality to implement, as they are objective and quantifiable (CECDE, 2003) and are seen to be the most enforceable aspects of quality. Due to the ease with which data on the structural aspects of quality can be collected, regulators often depend heavily on measures of structural quality which are concrete, objective and quantifiable (Doherty, 1997 cited in Taylor *et al.*, 1999).

However, care must be taken when looking at structural features, as they may not provide a guarantee of quality (Larner and Phillips, 1994). Hayes *et al.* (2003) highlight the dangers of equating quality with lists of structural features; the danger of checklist quality. Lamb (1998:75) notes that *"...centres that are characterised by good adult-child ratios and are staffed by well trained providers may still provide care of poor quality."* Layzer *et al.* (1993) suggest that structural factors may only be important because they may strongly influence the quality reflected in classroom processes. In the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes* study in the USA, structural features only accounted for about half of the difference in quality among providers (Helburn, 1995). Blau (1997) suggests that individual structural quality characteristics may be less important to quality than the distinctive non-observed features of the centre, such as the quality of centre management and leadership.

2.3.2 Process Features

Process or interactional features of quality refer to what happens in the setting, in particular, the activities of children and the interactions between children and adults (Moss *et al.*, 2003). It includes activities such as socially appropriate play with adults and peers and the exploration by children of materials in ways that fit their age and developmental stage (Helburn and Howes, 1996). Interactional features of quality include elements such as caregivers responding to children's behaviour in a sensitive and positive fashion, caregivers being involved in children's play and learning activities, and the absence of harshness in the management of children's behaviour. Another important aspect of process quality is child-child interactions. As Shonkoff and Phillips (2000:313) note:

> *...high-quality care is associated with outcomes that all parents want to see in their children...the ability to initiate and sustain positive exchanges with peers.*

Child-child interactions can be used as an indicator of children's exposure to social and language experiences (Hayes *et al.*, 2003). A growing awareness of the importance of child-child interactions in any determination of quality led to the addition of child-child interactions to the revised ECERS scale. The importance of interactions with peers in children's determinations of quality is also discussed in looking at stakeholders perspectives on quality.

Childcare Aware (2001) suggest some additional indicators of process quality childcare may be needed for children with special needs. These include that every

child is seen as individual and unique, that children and families be treated in a respectful way, that learning activities, books and pictures reflect diversity, that children with special needs can access therapeutic services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy on site and that staff have completed training in special needs.

Helburn and Howes (1996) consider process quality to be an integral part of quality, as it is directly related to children's behaviour in the childcare environment. Process features have been linked to high quality care and positive outcomes for children. Children in settings that score high on measurements of process quality have higher scores on cognitive, social, and language measures of development (Helburn, 1995). For example, children with responsive and sensitive caregivers who talked more to them did better than others on assessments of cognitive and language development (NICHD Early Childcare Research Network, 2000).

The International Child Care and Education (ICCE) project examined quality in centre-based ECCE programmes for children aged 3 to 6 across five countries, incorporating Germany, Austria, Portugal, the USA and Spain (Tietze *et al.*, 1996). Data was collected in 1993-1994 using the ECERS and the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS). A subsequent study used the data collected to investigate the structural factors that were most significant in predicting process quality (Cryer *et al.*, 1999). Notable differences were found, for example, the most significant structural factors predicting process quality in Germany were positive scores on teacher tenure, teacher-child ratios, group size, and space afforded per child within settings (Cryer *et al.*, 1999:346). In Portugal, positive scores on teacher experience, physical size, enrollment and director wages were related to process quality, while in the USA, teacher education, tenure, experience, age, wages, teacher-child ratios, proportion of pre-schoolers and director education and experience were found to be related to process quality.

Cryer *et al.* (1999) conclude that four countries examined from the original study had adopted different balances of the structural characteristics associated with process quality. In comparing Germany and the USA for example, Cryer *et al.* (1999) remark that in Germany, the level of teacher training, teacher tenure and director experience was higher than in the USA. However, despite this, the quality of care offered in both countries was not significantly different. They suggest that:

> *...when planning to improve the process quality that children experience, manipulation of quality of one or two significant structures may well appear to be a "best bet" for change. (Cryer et al., 1999:356)*

This suggests that an understanding of how structural characteristics impact on quality within a specific national system will be needed as the first step in any quality improvement process. When looking at implementation, process features of quality can prove to be more difficult to define and measure than structural aspects of quality (Hayes *et al.*, 2003).

2.3.3 Outcomes

Another way in which quality can be defined is in terms of outcomes. Outcomes can focus on cognitive or school readiness skills which children can achieve or parents satisfaction with the service.

Quality in ECCE is often defined in terms of outcomes for children, as it is recognised that good quality services maximise the potential of the children for whom it provides; thus quality can be defined in terms of the abilities of children (Munton *et al.*, 1995). Most of the evidence on outcomes emanates from English language countries, particularly the USA (McQuail *et*

al., 2002) and a concern with outcomes for children is often associated with intervention projects. Peisner-Feinberg *et al.* (1999:1) note that:

> *...high quality child care is an important element in achieving the national goal of having all children ready for school....The current phase of research shows that this lack of quality care is having negative effects on children's readiness for school and on their development during the early school years.*

The NICHD study of ECCE conducted in the USA concluded that high quality childcare was statistically significant for young children's outcomes in terms of their cognitive development and their use of language (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996). Another American study, The *Cost, Quality and Outcomes* study focused on the longitudinal outcomes of childcare for children across four American States. Results of this study indicate that children who attended higher quality early education programmes had better outcomes at age seven than children who attended a lower quality ECCE programme, and that this effect was particularly noticeable for children of less educated mothers (Piesner-Feinberg *et al.*, 1999).

Research has illustrated links between ECCE quality and improved social competence, co-operation and fewer behavioural problems. Greater competency in communication, social skills, perseverance and children's cognitive progress were also evident (McQuail *et al.*, 2002) .

Increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the contribution of high quality ECCE to the development of children who experience economic and social disadvantage (Barnett, 1995). Provision of high quality ECCE services and of high quality early intervention programmes is seen as having an important role to play in fostering the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research suggests that ECCE programs can produce significant short-term benefits for children in areas such as standardized tests of intelligence and academic ability (Barnett, 1995). In the Irish context, teachers of children who attended the Early Start programme identify children as having better cognitive and language abilities than children with no experience of an ECCE programme, and also see these children as being better prepared for school (Educational Research Centre, 1998).

A review of studies conducted in the USA, which focused on the long-term effects of childcare programmes on disadvantage concluded that high quality childcare had positive and persistent impact on achievement, grade retention, special education, high school graduation and socialization. It suggested that the evidence for the effect of childcare and early education on high school graduation and delinquency was particularly strong (Barnett, 1995).

Similarly, while initial evaluations of the Rutland Street project (a State-funded pre-school intervention programme for children in inner-city Dublin) did not show favourable outcomes in terms of children's linguistic and cognitive development, longitudinal research found more beneficial results in terms of emotional and social development (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). There is strong evidence to suggest that high-quality pre-school programmes have greater positive impacts on the development of children from families living in poverty (Burchinal, 1999) and that the provision of high quality childcare has a stronger impact on the outcomes of those children at risk of educational disadvantage. Caughy *et al.* (1994) found that while early entry and/or more years in childcare services produced a larger effect on reading scores than fewer years for children from disadvantaged backgrounds,

conversely, effects were negative for children in the highest-income families. Similarly, in a summary of the research undertaken in childcare in Ireland, the National Childcare Strategy concluded that:

> *...the impact of early education is found in all social groups but is strongest in children from disadvantaged backgrounds.* (DJELR, 1999:53)

It is recognised that high quality ECCE has positive benefits for the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children with special needs (Coolahan, 1998). Quality interventions can reduce the prevalence of certain disabilities and help to prevent additional problems. In addition, interventions can play a role in supporting families caring for children with special needs (CECDE, 2003). The Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education noted that:

> *...in considering the nature and quality of early educational experiences for young children with special needs, the views of participants were remarkably cohesive in calling for policies of inclusiveness and programmes that would be relevant to children's individual needs and, where possible, delivered in integrated settings.* (Coolahan, 1998:94-95)

A focus on outcomes, and in particular on developmental outcomes, as a measure of quality can be criticised as it relies heavily on one particular research discipline and paradigm, developmental psychology (McQuail *et al.*, 2002). In light of the importance of other factors which impact child development, measurable outcomes may not be the most important when it comes to determining quality in ECCE services.

According to Dahlberg *et al.* (1999), the spread of definitions of quality from the private to the public sphere has led to an emphasis on the consumer and consumer satisfaction. In ECCE, this entails the inclusion of parental satisfaction in any definition of quality. At the heart of this determination of quality is the view of the individual customer, seeking personal satisfaction from a product purchased within the private market; a neo-liberal position. Quality is determined in relation to the satisfaction of consumers with the product.

2.3.4 Customer Satisfaction

A focus on parental satisfaction, on parents as consumers and on customer satisfaction as a key determinant of quality can be problematic for several reasons. Consumers may not have the knowledge to avoid a product that is of low quality. Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) note that there may be problems with customers expressing themselves, as in the context of social services, users may be frightened, alienated or members of weak, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Viewing childcare services in terms of a private market with customer satisfaction determining quality ignores the possibility that the free market might contain sellers whose product is of low quality or even dangerous (Helburn and Bergmann, 2002). It also discounts the possibility that consumers, especially those with low incomes, might be under pressure to settle for low quality products.

2.3.5 Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Another way in which quality in ECCE provision is characterised is through the concept of developmentally appropriate practice. Hayes (1995:12) states that an important element of quality is the *"...developmental appropriateness of activities and expectations."* The concept of developmentally appropriate practice is particularly important in the USA. The largest American early childhood

professional organisation, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasises that quality means developmentally appropriate practice, i.e. that children's activities are organised around what is known in terms of how children develop and learn (NAEYC, Accessed at: http://www.naeyc.org/, 1st July, 2004).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice is a widely used indicator of quality in care arrangements for young children, *"...drawing attention to the ways their play and learning is promoted, and the approach to teaching adopted by caregivers"* (NAEYC, Accessed at: http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/dap3.htm, 16th July, 2004). The NAEYC proposed the following principles of developmentally appropriate practice:

1. Domains of children's development, physical, social, emotional, and cognitive are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains;
2. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired;
3. Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child's functioning;
4. Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children's development; optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning;
5. Development proceeds in predictable directions toward greater complexity, organisation, and internalisation;
6. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts;
7. Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them;
8. Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in;
9. Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development;
10. Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery;
11. Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know;
12. Children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure. (NAEYC, Accessed at: http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/dap3.htm, 1st July, 2004)

While it is acknowledged that there are universal features of development, much of which has been taken to be universal, is in fact, cultural (Woodhead, 1998). Woodhead presents several examples of the influence of culture on child development. For example, research on adult-child relationship patterns, relating to learning of language and communication, found that care giving styles, through which infants were encouraged to become partners in *"...proto conversations..."* facilitated the development of language in infants (Woodhead, 1998:10). However, cross-cultural studies indicated that caregivers in Papua New Guinea rarely engaged infants in dyadic communicative exchanges and those exchanges that did take place were directive rather than reciprocal. Yet these infants also picked up language normally. Woodhead uses this example to highlight the dangers of interpreting these observations made of infants and mothers in the USA as part of a generalised theory

of language acquisition (or worse still as prescriptive guidance about what style of care giving is developmentally appropriate) (Woodhead, 1998:10).

According to Woodhead (1998), the idea of developmentally appropriate practice applies a universalistic, decontextualised view of what constitutes quality and does not take the cultural aspects of development into account. Thus developmentally appropriate practice can be criticised as:

> *...children from different subcultures learn in different ways, that these differences may not be adequately accounted for within the standard model, and that failure to incorporate these approaches can inhibit learning by children from minority subcultures*. (Helburn and Bergmann, 2002:76)

2.3.6 Implications for Ireland

The research literature suggests that there is no universally acceptable definition of quality; rather quality is shaped by a variety of factors. It is a relative concept, tied to culture and context and the process of defining quality is complex and continuous. It is not possible to determine universal characteristics of quality in ECCE; any definition of quality needs to encompass a variety of both structural and process variables.

Research findings on definitions of quality in ECCE suggest several implications for any process of defining quality in ECCE in Ireland. As quality is context specific and is linked to culture, any definition of quality cannot be simply imported from abroad, but will have to take account of the particular context of the ECCE sector in Ireland and Irish culture. Any definition of quality that is adopted will need to have a balance between standards that can be applied to all services, while at the same time being sufficiently broad to support diversity amongst services. While structural features of quality may be easier to define and measure than process features, both are important in any conceptualisation of quality. Some research suggests that overall structural features may be less important than process features of quality. The relationships between structural and process features of quality and child outcomes is complex and there is no single factor that will ensure the provision of a high quality service. Researchers agree that indicators are interdependent; there is no single indicator that will have a determining effect on quality. This suggests that a range of both structural and process features must be considered in the search for high quality care.

2.4 Stakeholders and Quality

Definitions of quality differ considerably among stakeholder groups and across countries (OECD, 2001). (Woodhead, 1998) points out that a range of different people have an interest in the determination of quality in ECCE services, these include parents, children, programme managers, teachers, community leaders and child development experts. As (Moss, 1994:5) asserts:

> *Defining quality is, therefore, a political process. It involves interplay, negotiation and possible conflict between, and sometimes among, those stakeholder groups who are included and who may have different perspectives about objectives and priorities arising from different values and beliefs, interests and needs.*

Farquhar (1990) identified a range of different perspectives that are influential in determining quality. These include the child development perspective, the

government/regulatory perspective, the social services perspective, the parental perspective, the child perspective, the social policy perspective, the staff perspective and the cultural perspective. In this section, the nature of quality from the parental, the staff and the child's perspective will be examined.

2.4.1 Staff Perspective

Recently, there has been some interest in staff perspectives on quality, and in particular, on the relationship between working conditions and quality. Current research suggests practitioners are more likely than other stakeholders (i.e. parents and children) to view quality in terms of structural and process characteristics and child outcomes. Katz (1993) argues that there are three important components to this perspective; relationships between colleagues, relationships between practitioners and parents and the relationship between practitioners and managers. In addition, recent research has explored the link between quality and working conditions for staff, and in particular the link between wages and provision of a high standard of care.

2.4.2 Parental Perspective

Although the importance of parental involvement and partnership with parents has long been recognised, until recently, the views of parents were usually not considered when it came to determining quality in ECCE provision.

The parental perspective can be linked to the idea of the parent as a consumer. This view sees the choice by parents of a particular service as an expression of what constitutes quality for that parent, that quality can be determined in relation to the choice parents make (Larner and Phillips, 1994). In other words, any, or at least most care that parents choose is viewed as of an adequate quality (Helburn and Bergmann, 2002). However Larner and Phillips (1994) question the view of quality care as determined by parental choice, noting that parents often have little choice when it comes to care for their children and that it is more accurate to characterise the selection of childcare provision as a search process, rather than as a matter of choice. This view is supported by research, which suggests that as many as 65 per cent of parents believe they have little choice among childcare options (Galinsky *et al.*, 1994). Parents also are constrained by their own values and practices and the relevance of the fit of particular childcare options to the family environment and circumstances (Larner and Phillips, 1994). Larner and Phillips (1994:57) note that:

> *...to get the quality they want on the dimension that matters most to them (for instance, cultural or language similarity), they must often accept alternatives that are disappointing in other ways.*

Smith and Farquhar (1994) suggest that in deregulated markets, the main ingredient in policy designed to improve quality is parental choice. It is up to the parent to choose the type of centre that best fits their values and needs, and market forces determine the survival of any particular facility:

> *If parents have some knowledge and understanding of the things which make up good quality care and education and they have access to centres which offer these things, then there is no problem with this theory.* (Smith and Farquhar, 1994:137)

However, Howes and Stewart (1987, cited in Smith and Farquhar, 1994) suggest that evidence points to the fact that parents with the most financial and educational resources choose the best quality centres. Research in education in the United Kingdom (UK) highlights the fact that parents with access to cultural capital[4] have

the most choice in selecting from amongst a range of schools for their children. In a study of parental choice of childcare facilities in Sweden, Prieto *et al.* (2002) found that relying on parental choice resulted in pre-school institutions that were economically, socially and culturally segregated. The authors suggest that relying on parents right to choose may lead to the creation of socially and culturally homogenous private pre-school facilities.

Parents' views of quality diverge from those of other experts in the childcare sector. Though most of the care observed in the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes* study in the USA was categorised as mediocre, the vast majority of parents felt that their children were receiving excellent care (Helburn, 1995). Parents may assign substantially higher quality scores to their children's classrooms than trained observers (Cryer *et al.*, 2002). Research suggests that parents pay relatively little attention to indicators of quality that professionals suggest they use to screen childcare options such as ratios and caregiver training. The most important aspects of an ECCE program for parents are the provision of a safe and pleasant environment ,which will promote the development of their child (Larner and Phillips 1994). Parents may also be more likely to choose childcare that reflects their own cultural values (Wise and Sanson 2003). Evans (1996) suggests that parents are concerned with four issues when looking at the extent to which any service meets their needs, the safety of the setting, the degree to which it meets with the needs of the family, the cultural support the service provides for the child and the degree to which the service will provide the child with adequate preparation for school.

The age of the child is an important factor in determining parental views on quality; parents have a tendency to view childcare as a substitute for parental care for children under the age of three, while childcare is seen as providing important educational opportunities for children over the age of three (Larner and Phillips, 1994).

2.4.2.1 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is seen as an important aspect of the provision of a quality service:

> *...parental involvement in their children's early education enhances parents' understanding of appropriate educational practices and improves children's educational outcomes.* (Mooney et al., 2003:22)

In a summary of the literature concerning parental involvement, Elliott (2002:1) notes that parental engagement is seen as *"...an important component of and contributor to service quality"*. Mooney *et al.* (2003) discuss different models of parental engagement. Marginal engagement is where there is no clear policy for parental involvement and practitioners make no effort to involve parents. Regarding formal engagement, practitioners utilise strategies such as staff-parent meetings, home visiting, parent-teacher associations, provision of information to parents and representations on managing bodies to involve parents in the service. Informal engagement describes informal meetings between practitioners and parents that occur when parents drop off and collect children. These times are often used by providers to share information with parents. Participatory engagement involves parents taking an active part in the programme; parents may participate in activities, outings or celebrations. According to Mooney *et al.* (2003), this form of engagement is sometimes formalised in contracts or agreements with parents and is sometimes required by

4 Cultural capital refers to the ideas, practices and artefacts that are highly valued in our society (Tovey and Share, 2000) such as certain culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards (Webb et al., 2002). Cultural capital can exist in three forms "*...in an embodied state, that is in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalised state, resulting in things such as educational qualifications...*" (Skeggs 1997:7).

legislation. Managerial engagement refers to cases where parents have responsibility for making decisions about the programme, management, staffing and budgets. The involvement of parents in services is seen as having beneficial effects for children; they achieve more, have a more positive sense of self and self-esteem and exhibit fewer discipline problems. (Elliott, 2002).

Though it is recognised that parents should have considerable influence and involvement in the provision of care and education services, Smith and Farquhar (1994) argue that parental involvement is a significant challenge for many providers.

2.4.3 Children' Perspective

In the past few years, the value of consultations with children as important stakeholders in the ECCE sector has been recognised. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland in 1992, raised awareness about children's right to be consulted and to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. The *National Children's Strategy "Our Children, Their Lives"* promotes a vision of *"An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own..."* (DHC, 2000:10) and one of the three national goals of the Strategy is that *"children will have a voice."* (DHC, 2000:11)

A small body of international research has been completed that gives a voice to children as stakeholders in determining quality in ECCE provision. Research has shown that even young children have strong opinions about their everyday lives (Langsted, 1994) and children's lives can be improved by listening to them and taking their opinions into account. The child perspective defines quality in relation to children's experiences in the setting and includes children's likes and dislikes and the enjoyment children get from participating in the programme (Hayes *et al.*, 2003).

According to Langsted (1994), children regarded other children as by far the most important factor in determining the quality of their childcare provision. Activities, toys and nice staff were also identified as contributing to quality from the child's perspective. Consultations with children carried out in the UK have also identified a range of factors important in determining quality for children. Friends, food, a variety of games and activities including role playing, story time, books, outdoor space and the opportunity to take responsibility for activities and do things for themselves were all identified by a sample of three and four-year-old children as important to children's enjoyment of the service (Daycare Trust, 1998). Clark and Moss (2001) note that factors such as places to hide, outside space for imaginative games, playing with friends, visiting siblings in other parts of the centre and playing with bikes are important aspects of quality for children. Mooney and Blackburn (2003:3) assert that:

> *Children have clear views about what makes for a good childcare service and these views relate to the environment, the programme of activities, characteristics of staff, refreshments, rules and decision making. Their views have implications for which indicators of quality are assessed in childcare settings.*

Mooney and Blackburn (2003:26-27) list a range of quality indicators based on a study investigating children's views on quality. These included:

- Children's friendships are encouraged and supported;
- Older children can *"hang out"* with friends with minimum supervision;
- There is a range of activities, which are regularly reviewed and changed or modified to retain children's interest;

- Activities and space are organised to accommodate the different needs and interests of both younger and older children;
- Children and staff appear to have a fun time;
- Children feel safe in the setting and there is a clear anti-bullying policy;
- Staff facilitate activities/play and avoid interfering or telling older children what to do;
- Staff avoid raising their voices when speaking to children;
- Staff show respect for children, are caring and take time to listen;
- In their interactions with children, staff take account of children's age, maturity and special needs;
- Both male and female staff are employed;
- Staff turnover is low to facilitate close relationships between children and adults;
- Children have sufficient indoor and outdoor space;
- Outdoor space is freely available for older children;
- The setting is comfortable with places to be quite and relax;
- Toilets are secure, clean and equipped appropriately;
- The setting offers places where children can be *"out of the eye"* of adults;
- Children have a choice of food, which is attractive and enjoyable to eat and ready access to a drink;
- Children are encouraged to participate in decisions about the programme. Their views are seen as important and there is evidence that they are taken seriously.

When determining quality from children's perspective it is important to note that children's perspectives will vary by age, gender and interests but:

> *...imaginative play, gross motor activity, arts and craft, books, and going on trips are particularly popular.* (Mooney and Blackburn, 2003:24)

2.4.4 Implications for Ireland

Traditionally, the approach to defining quality has been exclusionary, limited to a small number of stakeholders. It is clear that there is an increasing awareness in the ECCE sector of the importance of the recognition and inclusion of a range of stakeholder perspectives in any determination of quality. In particular, the views of parents and children are important in any conceptualisations of quality. It follows that the views of these stakeholders must be taken into account for discussions about quality in Ireland. This implies the adoption of a range of effective strategies for the exploration and incorporation of parents and children's views of quality in any developments in the ECCE sector.

2.5 Measuring Quality

Any measurement of quality depends to a large extent on the way in which quality is defined:

> *A prerequisite of quality assessment is recognition that there is no single set of indicators that can prescribe for a quality environment in a once-and-for-all way.* (Woodhead, 1998:15)

Additionally process elements of quality are more difficult to measure than structural elements of quality:

> *Williams has argued that though measurement of the static elements of quality (structural characteristics) is characterised by objectivity and rigor, measurement of the dynamic elements (process) is characterised by an intuitive, subjective approach.* (Hayes et al., 2003:233)

Hayes *et al.* (2003) note that there is

currently a great deal of interest in developing measures of quality, and particularly, instruments that can accurately measure process quality.

Any measure of quality is context-specific, based on a consensus as to what the content and aims of ECCE are, and thus measuring tools are often unsuitable for transfer from one context to another. There are two distinctive approaches to measuring quality (Mooney *et al.*, 2003), one of which uses standardised observation scales and external research assessments of effectiveness. The other involves all stakeholders in the development of quality objectives for a particular service and develops in conjunction with these stakeholders mechanisms for the evaluation of these objectives. Observation scales and external research instruments usually result in the production of quantitative data while the development of objectives and the evaluation of a service in relation to these objectives represent a more qualitative approach to measuring quality. Both of these are examined in turn.

2.5.1 The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale

Observation scales are often used in the measurement of elements of both structural and process quality. One of the best known observational tools for the measurement of quality is the ECERS, which was developed in the USA (Harms and Clifford, 1980), revised in 1998 (Harms *et al.*, 1998). The 1980 version of the ECERS is a 37-item instrument that focuses on whether programs include developmentally appropriate materials, activities, and interactions over seven dimensions:

1. Personal care;
2. Furnishings and display for children;
3. Language-reasoning experiences;
4. Fine and gross motor activities;
5. Creative activities;
6. Social development and
7. Adult needs (Sakai *et al.*, 2003).

The ECERS is scored on a 7-point scale (7=excellent, 5=good, 3=minimally adequate and 1=inadequate care). Even-number scores indicate that some of the requirements of the higher rating are met, but others are not (e.g., a score of 2 indicates that the centre is better than a score of 1 and meets some but not all the requirements for a score of 3). The revised edition of the ECERS (ECERS-R), published in 1998, looks at 43 items over seven slightly different dimensions:

1. Personal care routines;
2. Space and furnishings;
3. Language reasoning;
4. Activities;
5. Programme structure;
6. Interaction and;
7. Parents and staff.

Scoring is once again on the aforementioned 7-point scale. However unlike the original ECERS, a slightly different scoring convention is used for even-number scores. For the ECERS-R, even number scores indicate that half or more (but not all) of the requirements of the higher rating are met. The ECERS has also been adapted for use with infants and toddlers (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms and Clifford, 1990) and in the family day care environment (Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) (Harms and Clifford, 1989). In 2003, an amended version of ECERS, the ECERS-Extension (ECERS-E), was published (Sylva, *et al.*, 2003). This supplements the ECERS-R by the addition of four new sub-scales, namely Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Diversity, analysed under 18 items. It employs the same scoring convention as the ECERS-R.

The ECERS has been criticised on several fronts, including the fact that it fails to take account of key components of culturally sensitive practice, such as communicating with families in their home language (Sakai *et al.*, 2003). The ECERS also concentrates largely on the childcare environment and a high standard of quality in the childcare

environment does not necessarily guarantee high quality interactions and experiences for the child.

The CIS provides an observation of the behaviour of caregivers in their interactions with children. It consists of 26 items that are rated on a 4-point scale. Included on the scale are items such as the caregiver speaking warmly to the children, caregiver being critical of the children, caregiver listening attentively when children speak to him/her, caregiver seems distant or detached from children and caregiver seems to enjoy the children. Each item is scored as *"not at all"* (0 per cent) = 1; *"somewhat"* (1-30 per cent) = 2; *"quite a bit"* (about 50 per cent) = 3; *"very much"* (60-100 per cent) = 4, upon completion of an observation of several hours by a trained observer. Completion of the scale results in one of four subscale scores, positive interaction, punitiveness, permissiveness and detachment (Arnett, 1989).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Pre-primary Project utilised time sampling procedures in the identification and measurement of elements of process quality (Hayes *et al.*, 2003). The time sampling procedures were designed to collect quantitative descriptions of behaviour. The observations yielded counts of child behaviours such as verbalisations, interactions with other children and interactions with adults. Adult behaviours such as teaching and child management were also recorded. These counts are expressed as a percentage of total observations made and can be used to provide a quantitative measure of several aspects of quality in ECCE settings.

Another approach to measuring quality involved the participation of all stakeholders in specifying the components of high quality provision and the evaluation of the service provision on the basis of these components. This method of measuring quality can be found in Scandinavia and in some regions of Northern Italy. Mooney *et al.* (2003:9) state that this approach to measuring quality is found where *"...the structural conditions of quality are already in place..."*.

2.5.2 Implications for Ireland

Two main approaches emerged from the research literature regarding measuring aspects of quality in ECCE; standardised observation scales and the evaluation of aspects of the service based on the determination of quality by a range of stakeholders. The first approach is quantitative while the second is more qualitative in orientation. The adoption of any instrument for the measurement of quality is dependent on the way in which quality is defined and the key concerns regarding the measurement of quality. While structural variables are more easily measured than the process elements of quality, an examination of structural features will present a limited picture of quality unless process features are also included. This highlights the importance of the adoption of mechanisms for measuring quality that are capable of capturing both structural and process features of quality.

2.6 Supporting Quality

Different perspectives on measuring quality are reflected in different approaches to regulation and quality assurance (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). Both evaluations and accreditation are important aspects of quality assurance (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). Wangmann (1992) distinguishes between programme evaluation and programme accreditation:

> *Like accreditation, program evaluation monitors quality in the program, usually as a result of self-evaluation, using quantitative and*

> *objective indicators as measures of quality. The chief difference between program evaluation and program accreditation is that in the latter, recognition is given to those programs that substantially comply with the established criteria.* (Wangmann, 1992:4)

According to Podmore *et al.* (2000), self-assessment or self-evaluations and accreditations processes follow a similar cycle. Initially a baseline evaluation or a period of reflection takes place, where providers look at a specific set of topics or questions. These results are studied and evaluative conclusions are formed. An action plan is then developed and implemented, (sometimes with the aid of external agencies). The support provided for this process will vary. Following an additional period of self-reflection or evaluation, the service will decide if it is ready to be assessed by an external trained validator. According to Podmore *et al.* (2000), if accreditation is the final goal, then centres will either be accredited or not. Accreditation will usually last for a specific pre-determined time period and may also lapse if there are significant changes in the service e.g. when the person responsible for the service leaves. According to Podmore *et al.* (2000:41)

> *Overall, it appears that voluntary adopted evaluation and accreditation processes may lead to some improvements. However, they may not necessarily be associated with very high quality.*

While all involved in the ECCE sector recognise the importance of establishing and measuring quality in the early years, there are several different approaches that can be taken when it comes to quality assurance. Some of the main approaches taken are outlined below.

2.6.1 Regulation

An important feature of childcare quality is the regulatory context. Regulations can address issues such as child health and safety, group size, allowable number of infants, number of children per adult, discipline etc. (Kontos *et al.*, 1995). Regulation is one mechanism for promoting and maintaining quality in ECCE provision. Mooney *et al.* (2003:27) suggest that:

> *...where quality is variable and there is little publicly funded provision, standardisation, regulations and enforcement may be required to ensure quality of an acceptable standard..*

However, regulations are not sufficient to assure quality and such regulations must be complemented by external supports to ensure services meet these requirements. (CECDE, 2003:51). As French (2000:12) asserts:

> *Quality is no longer viewed as one standard of excellence identified for all children in all services, but rather a set of core criteria towards which services may progress and against which their progress may be measured.*

This can be accomplished through the aforementioned processes of accreditation or self-evaluation.

2.6.1.1 Accreditation

Accreditation is defined by Doherty-Derkowski (1994:113) as:

> *...a process by which a representative body, recognised by both the service community and the community in general, establishes standards for services. The standards are above the minimum regulatory requirements of the government. Programs can apply*

> *on a voluntary basis for evaluation against the standards and if found to meet or surpass them, are granted a certificate which recognises this fact.*

In many cases, accreditation involves providers evaluating their services in terms of standards set by a professional organisation. Due to the fact that accreditation is usually voluntary, the participation rates can be low, for example, less than ten per cent of childcare centres in the USA are accredited by the NAEYC (Mooney *et al.*, 2003:14). When accreditation is linked to public funding or other benefits, participation is much higher. The extent to which quality is supported by accreditation also depends on the stringency of the validation process.

2.6.1.2 Self-evaluation

> *Self-evaluation is an increasingly important aspect of quality assurance in many countries. ... Self-evaluation encourages reflective practice and the possibility of change. (Mooney et al., 2003:15)*

Self-evaluation can take several forms, one of which is where providers, sometimes aided by parents and children, evaluate their service against a set of quality criteria.

One example of self-evaluation is the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project in the UK (Pascal, n.d., Accessed at: http://www.ecdu.govt.nz/publications/convention/Pascal.pdf, 1st July, 2004). This project is based upon the theoretical position that quality is a value-laden, context-specific concept, influenced by cultural norms and societal values. The project aims to capture the essence of quality as reflected in practice. One of the key aims of this project is to facilitate quality evaluation and improvement in a diverse range of settings in which children are being educated and cared for. This is achieved through the implementation of a process of externally validated self-evaluation, which leads directly to action planning and improvement. Practitioners have responsibility for most of the evaluation and improvement process, but are provided with the support and validation of an EEL External Adviser at key points during the process.

Using the EEL framework, quality is evaluated by taking the participants through a systematic and rigorous four stage process of "Evaluation and Improvement" which takes between nine and twelve months to complete. In Stage 1, "Evaluation", researchers and participants including staff, parents and children work together to document and evaluate the quality of early learning within the setting. In Stage 2, "Action Planning", participants meet together to identify priorities for action and to generate an Action Plan. In Stage 3 "Improvement", the Action Plan to improve the quality of provision is implemented and in Stage 4 "Reflection", participants are encouraged to reflect upon the evaluation and development process and to review the impact of the Action Plan in the light of their experience. There are ten dimensions of quality:

1. Aims and objectives;
2. Curriculum/learning experiences;
3. Learning and teaching styles;
4. Planning, Assessment and record keeping;
5. Ratio of trained staff;
6. Physical environment;
7. Relationships and interaction;
8. Equal opportunities;
9. Parental involvement and home and community liaison and;
10. Monitoring and evaluation (Pascal and Bertram, 1993, cited in Alcock, 1996).

2.6.2 Pedagogical Documentation

Another approach to quality improvement has been developed in Reggio Emilia in Italy. As Mooney *et al.* (2003:16) describe:

> *Rather than using observational*

> *scales or a set of quality indicators for self-evaluation, staff continually review and reflect on their own practice and theories of learning using documentation of the individual child, the group and the work of the centre.*

The Reggio Emilia approach utilises pedagogical documentation as a tool of quality improvement. Katz and Chard (1996) draw a distinction between documentation, in the forms of observation of children and extensive record keeping, and the pedagogical documentation of Reggio Emilia. They suggest that documentation in Reggio Emilia focuses more intensively on children's experience, memories, thoughts, and ideas in the course of their work. The pedagogical documentation of Reggio Emilia involves the documentation of samples of children's work at several different stages of completion. This illustrates not only the final product but also the way in which the child planned, carried out and completed the work.

Katz and Chard (1996) propose that this approach to the documentation of children's work and ideas contributes to the quality of an ECCE program in several ways. High quality documentation has the potential to enhance the child's learning. Preparing and displaying documentaries of the children's experience and effort can provide children with the tools to reflect on their own process of learning. This process leads to a clarification, deepening and strengthening of their new understanding (Katz and Chard, 1996:2). Careful attention to documenting children's learning and the production of attractive documentary displays coveys to children the message that their efforts, intentions, and ideas are taken seriously:

> *Taking children's work seriously in this way encourages in them the disposition to approach their work responsibly, with energy and commitment, showing both delight and satisfaction in the processes and the results.* (Katz and Chard, 1996:2)

Pedagogical documentation provides a mechanism for the ongoing planning and evaluation of work undertaken in the ECCE institution. Documentation also facilitates the process of parental engagement in ECCE settings. As Malaguzzi (1993:64) noted, documentation:

> *...introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations. They re-examine their assumptions about their parenting roles and their views about the experience their children are living, and take a new and more inquisitive approach toward the whole school experience.*

In learning about the work in which their children are engaged, parents can actively contribute with insights from home and practical help. Documentation also facilitates the building of linkages between the home and the ECCE institution and between parents and practitioners.

2.6.3 Implications for Ireland

There are a variety of different approaches to support quality that can be adopted. These include State regulations, which are usually based on the minimum standards for ensuring the health and safety of those involved in the service. Evaluation and accreditation schemes usually involve standards, which tend to be more stringent and comprehensive than those included in government regulations. Research literature suggests that the adoption of evaluation or accreditation as an approach to supporting quality can have positive effects on the standard of care and education provided. It is also suggested by some that in countries where the provision of ECCE is dependent on the free market, evaluation and accreditation mechanisms

are more likely to be adopted in an effort to improve the quality of service provision.

2.7 Critique of the "Discourse of Quality"

Dahlberg *et al.*, (1999) use a post-modern perspective to question the utility of the term quality and its dominance in the field of ECCE, presenting a critique on what they term the *"discourse of quality"* that dominates this sector. While the authors do not question the concerns that have led to interest in defining, measuring and supporting quality, they suggest that the concept of quality itself is problematic. As Tait (2000:231) notes:

> *In recent years, this notion has extended beyond the simple status of a mere generalised signifier - loosely representing the reasonable desire to provide the best care possible for the children - to constitute instead a reified and totalised discursive framework.*

The argument put forward by Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) is an attempt to problematise the theoretical underpinnings of the discourse of quality. They note that quality is a socially constructed concept with roots in the project of modernity and in particular the discipline of developmental psychology. They suggest quality is a normalising concept that governs the way we see, think and talk about ECCE. The centrality of developmental psychology in conceptualisations of quality can be seen in the way in which developmental psychologists have played a lead role in the work on quality, most notably in the ways in which quality is defined, the development of mechanisms for the measurement of quality and work on quality standards. This means that quality is related to particular forms of government and particular operations of power (Dahlberg *et al.* use Foucault's conceptualisation of power in their analysis). Developmental psychology like all modernist disciplines is *"...prompted by concerns to classify, measure and regulate..."* (Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999:35) and has played an influential role in the way in which childhood and early childhood institutions are viewed. According to these authors:

> *Categories and concepts used to talk about early childhood care and education become productive themselves of how we understand the child, they shape our understanding both of what is desirable and what is possible in early childhood institutions.* (Dahlberg et al., 1999:39)

Hence, it is suggested that developmental psychology produces (in Foucault's terms) a particular *"regime of truth"*, organising our everyday experience of the world, governing our ideas, thoughts and action, determining what can be said and not said, what we consider normal or not normal, appropriate or inappropriate (Moss, 2001). Categories and concepts begin to function like true models of reality and are influential in shaping policies, practices and relationships. A key point about these categories and concepts is that they are not value free but are imbued with power.

The authors are critical of both developmental psychology and the discourse of quality as they adopt a decontextualised approach (or at best use context as an explanatory variable), separating the child and the institution from concrete experiences, everyday life, the complexities of culture and the importance of situation. This reflects Bloch (1992), who points out that the domination over the course of the twentieth century of psychological and biological child development perspectives in ECCE resulted in a lack of recognition or acceptance of alternative theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) introduce an alternative conceptual framework, a post-modern approach to the *"discourse of quality"*, which they term the *"discourse of meaning making"*. Farquhar (1999) views this framework as more of a very strong critique of the dominant approach than a fully developed alternative approach. The discourse of meaning making:

> *...speaks first and foremost about constructing and deepening understanding of the early childhood institution and its projects, in particular the pedagogical work - to make meaning of what is going on.* (Dahlberg et al., 1999:106)

Consequently meaning making is about deepening our understanding of what is going on in early childhood programmes, making judgments about the value of what goes on and possibly seeking some agreement with others about these judgments. This approach explicitly incorporates both moral and political choices and recognises ethical and philosophical positions and judgements of value.

Several examples of the discourse of meaning making are mentioned by Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) including the Stockholm project (which is informed heavily by the ideas and practices of Reggio Emilia), the practice of pedagogical documentation and thinking on minority status in early childhood education with reference to the aboriginal peoples of Canada. The project *Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World* was established in 1993 in a district of Stockholm and was based on the Reggio Emilia approach. The project was praxis[5] orientated (Lind, 1998) and involved teachers, parents, children and politicians and administrators from the local community (Dahlberg, 2000). Practitioners adopted a social constructionist perspective recognising the operation of power inherent in processes of representation. Important pedagogical tools associated with this approach include the process of pedagogical documentation, the role of specialist staff such as *atelierista*[6] and *pedagogista*[7] and the time built into the working week for the practitioner to analyse, debate and reflect on pedagogical practice.

Even with the adoption of a discourse of meaning making, Dahlberg *et al.* (1999) acknowledge that the power and attractiveness of the discourse of quality will be slow to diminish and suggest that there is nothing to prevent the adoption of a discourse of meaning making alongside the discourse of quality by policy makers and practitioners:

> *We recognise that the discourse of quality might be particularly useful for certain highly technical issues, perhaps for example food hygiene or building standards to ensure the physical safety of young children in early childhood institutions. (Dahlberg et al., 1999:119)*

The critique of the discourse of quality is valuable, as it has generated research that is strengthening understanding of what constitutes quality in early childhood care and education provision for young children.

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be suggested that the issue of determining quality is complex. Quality is a relative, value-based concept, determined and influenced by contextual factors, as well as the discipline of

5 Praxis is defined as the translation of an idea into action; a concrete theory put into practice.

6 An atelierista is an art teacher who is trained in the visual arts and works closely with other teachers and the children.

7 A pedagogista is a specialist in the early years who is available to centre staff for consultation, planning, and assistance with the management of individual children. The pedagogista not only develops relationships with centre staff, families, and children but also engages in problem solving with staff, exploring new options and reflecting on what is going on in the centre.

developmental psychology. Ideas about what constitutes quality may vary from country to country, from social group to social group and from researcher to researcher. The way in which quality is defined will impact on the measurement instruments used and on what will be identified as appropriate support structures. What is defined as quality will also change over time. Perhaps as Hayes (2002c) suggests, when we think of quality, we should think in terms of a never-ending journey where quality is constantly discussed, debated and created.

Chapter 3

Norway

Terms Used

Barnehage	Kindergarten/ Pre-school setting
Barnehager	Kindergartens/Pre-school settings
Pedagogiske Ledere	Pre-school Teacher
Storting	Nordic Parliament
Styrere	Head Teacher

3.1 Introduction

Quality in ECCE has been a primary concern in Norway for more than a decade. In a White Paper to the parliament in 1987, the central aims were to improve both access and quality in the *barnehager*[8] (OECD, 1998a). In general, research concludes that the Norwegian *barnehager* have high quality services. According to the OECD (1998a:23) background report:

> *In Norway the regulations on educated staff, the Framework Plan and the emphasising of close cooperation with the parents are the basis for quality.*

3.2 Context for quality

3.2.1 Philosophy

Section 1 of the Day Care Institutions Act states that the first purpose of the ECCE institutions is:

> *...to provide children of under school age with sound opportunities for development and activity in close*

8 Barnehage is the direct translation of the German word Kindergarten. This word is a common term for different types of ECCE under the legislation of the Norwegian Day Care Institution Act, covering the age group 0 - 5 years.

> *understanding and collaboration with the children's homes. Day care institutions shall assist in giving the children an upbringing that accords with Christian values.* (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2004)

ECCE is viewed as essential for good child development regardless of the employment status of the mother (Clearinghouse, March 2003b). Childhood as a life-phase has a high intrinsic value, and children's own free time, own culture and play are fundamentally important (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2004). ECCE is therefore viewed as part of the family policy in Norway (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). The provision of ECCE in Norway has two main aims; to make it possible for parents with small children to work outside the home and to contribute to equality between men and women.

3.2.2 Policy

The Ministry for Children and Family Affairs has the primary responsibility for policy making regarding ECCE but the responsibility for delivery lies with local authorities (OECD, 1998a).

Administrative responsibility for ECCE services in Norway lies with the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs (OECD, 1998a). Currently there is an ongoing debate about whether or not administrative responsibility for childcare should be transferred to the Ministry of Church, Education and Research Affairs, which is responsible for education and schools. This debate was prompted by the development of the first national curriculum for childcare institutions, which highlighted the educational function of childcare institutions (*barnehager*) and tied them more closely with the education system (Choi, 2003). However, the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs believes that *barnehager* should act as an interface with families, not with the educational system.

3.2.3 Funding

The State provides grants for the establishment and operation of public as well as private day care institutions, and all institutions are eligible for funding subject to the approval of the municipal authorities. Therefore, the main form of subsidy for childcare costs in Norway is a supply funding strategy, though one parent of children aged between birth and 12 months receive 80 per cent of their salary to stay at home with the child. In addition, parents of children aged between 12 and 36 months receive a flat rate benefit if they do not use a publicly funded service, to be used either to support a stay at home parent or as a contribution to the cost of private childcare arrangements (Candappa *et al.*, 2003).

The Norwegian *Storting* (the National Parliament) has approved the sharing of the running costs for *barnehager* at 40 per cent, 30 per cent and 30 per cent, divided among State funding, funding from municipalities and parental fees. However, in practice, parents' fees vary from municipality to municipality. In some municipalities, the fees are the same for all children; in other municipalities they vary with the parents' income. Many parents pay more than 30 per cent of costs, especially in privately owned barnehager. The contribution from the State and municipalities does not always match the Storting's intention. On average, municipalities pay 27.9 per cent of the total running costs in public institutions owned by the municipalities, but only 8.2 per cent of total running costs in private institutions. A national maximum price scheme for participation in day care programmes has been adopted and will be introduced over a period or time. The government has also agreed to a new funding formula to be put in place by 2005, whereby government funding for barnehager will be increased to 50 per cent (Eknes, 2000).

The government has provided grant aid for those building new ECCE centres (Eknes, 2000). In July 2003, each municipality became officially responsible for administering a joint application process for admission to its public and private day care facilities and for ensuring that its day care institutions could meet local enrolment needs. In 1997, the compulsory school age was lowered from seven to six years (OECD, 1998a), meaning that childcare institutions now provide care and education for children under the age of six.

During the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, government policy gave priority in access to children over the age of three, by subsidising places for these children at a proportionately higher level than places for children under the age of three (OECD, 1998a). This meant that access varied among age groups, with older children more likely to attend childcare institutions and to attend for longer periods of time.

The Norwegian government is moving towards a position of universal provision. According to the OECD report (OECD, 1998a), one goal set by the Norwegian government it that all children whose parents wish it should have a place in barnehage, either on a full time or part time basis, by the year 2000 (OECD, 1998a). By 2002, 69% of children between the ages of one and five attended Kindergarten (Statistics Norway, 2003).

3.2.4 Delivery Strategies

In Norway, both public and private institutions provide day care. *Barnehager* vary considerably in terms of ownership, management and funding. Some are owned and managed by a local authority while others are privately owned. Private *barnehager* are managed in a variety of ways by parent groups, non-profit organisations, for-profit businesses etc. According to the OECD (1998a) report, there were there were 6,240 *barnehager* in Norway in 1997, 47 per cent of these were public and 53 per cent private. The private institutions were on average smaller than the public institutions. Private *barnehager* accommodated 42 per cent of the children and 58 per cent of the children were in public *barnehager*.

In July 2003, each municipality became officially responsible for administering a joint application process for admission to its public and private day care facilities and for ensuring that its day care institutions can meet local enrolment needs.

3.3 Defining Quality

3.3.1 Regulations

There is a national legislative framework for *barnehager* provided for by the *Barnehager* Act (1995). This act sets down some regulations regarding the operation of *barnehager*. For example, under the Act, both the *styrere*[9] and the *pedagogiske ledere*[10] must be educated pre-school teachers and there must be one educated pre-school teacher per 14-18 children over the age of three and per 7-9 children under the age of three. The regulations only cover family day care providers that are part of an authorised family day care system. In family day care, there must be one pre-school teacher per 30 children, and no more than five children over the age of three in each family day care home.

The *Barnehager* Act gives considerable discretion to municipalities and institutions in terms of structural features of quality such as staff ratios (OECD, 1999b). Under Section 17 of the Act, the total number of personnel must be sufficient to enable all staff to carry out satisfactory educational activity. This demand allows the owner of

9 Styrer can be roughly translated as headteacher. A styrer is an educated pre-school teacher who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the barnehage.

10 A Pedagogisk leder is an educated pre-school teacher with responsibility for a group of children in a barnehager.

the *barnehager* to relate staff numbers to the needs of the children attending. Therefore, the adult-child ratio may be different from *barnehager* to *barnehager,* depending on the needs of the children attending.

3.3.2 Curriculum

The Framework Plan is a national curriculum for all *barnehager*. It was introduced in 1996 for both public and private *barnehager* (OECD, 1998a). All *barnehager* are obliged to follow the plan under the Act. This *Framework Plan* is based on the assumption that the barnehager are part of the education system (Chio, 2003) and view education in the early years as an important foundation for life long learning. The framework discusses methods for the teacher to use when working with children and how the teachers can use the *Framework Plan* in their own planning and evaluation (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). The Norwegian framework gives teachers:

> *...a detailed framework for their work with suggestions for content, methods to be used, and expected outcomes.* (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999:5)

There are three main parts to the framework (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). Part one states the objectives and basic principles underlying the work carried out in the *barnehager*. Part two focuses on content and areas of experience and learning, including the *Framework Plan*:

- Totality and interpretations;
- Social interaction;
- Play and day to day activities;
- Culture and curriculum and;
- Sami language and culture.

Part three focuses on implementing the plan and includes planning, implementation and evaluation, responsibility, forms of operation and collaboration and development of day care institutions.

Included in the *Framework Plan* are five subject areas, which all pre-school children should experience:

1. Society, religion and ethics;
2. Aesthetic subjects;
3. Language, text and communication;
4. Nature, environment and technology and;
5. Physical activity and health (OECD, 1999b:17).

The *barnehager* have a high degree of freedom within the *Framework Plan*. The plan does not impose detailed guidelines for the activity or prevent freedom, adaptations and variation at the local level. For example, programmes from abroad such as the Italian Reggio Emilia, the American High/Scope and the Dutch Marte Meo are used in some *barnehager*.

Individual *barnehager* decide how to apply the *Framework Plan*, through the production of an annual plan (OECD, 1999b). A concrete evaluation programme must form part of the annual plan in each *barnehage*. The annual plan defines what is to be evaluated, the criteria for evaluation, how information is to be compiled, who shall evaluate and when, and how the basis for evaluation is to be presented and discussed.

3.3.3 Staff Training

The *Framework Plan for Day Care Institutions - A Brief Presentation* states that:

> *The day care institution's most important resource is the people working there.* (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2004:41)

One of the most important factors in achieving high quality *barnehager* is a

well-educated staff (OECD, 1998a:28). The *Barnehager* Act (sections 16 and 17) states that *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* must be educated pre-school teachers. In Norway, just over a third of the ECCE workforce are trained pedagogues (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2002). There is a shortage of qualified pre-school teachers and in 1997, 19 per cent of the persons employed as *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* worked with dispensation from the educational requirements. There are no demands in terms of the educational qualifications of pre-school assistants.

There is one benchmark qualification in Norway for practitioners working in the ECCE field and all pre-school teachers complete a three year educational programme (Alcock, 1996). Admission to pre-school teacher education normally requires the completion of three years of study at upper secondary level. This qualification includes both a theoretical and practical perspective (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2002). Students undertake pedagogical/didactic theory and practical training, relevant subject and practical training and in-depth study in the third year of study.

Assistants undertake an upper second level vocational qualification. This apprenticeship model normally consists of two years of school and two years of apprenticeship which may take place in a *barnehager* (OECD, 1998a). In Norway, much work is currently being done to recruit minority groups to the ECCE professions (Rhedding-Jones, 2002). For example, at the beginning of 2001 the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs launched a programme on how to recruit more men into ECCE (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2000).

3.3.4 Professional Development

The Framework Plan states that:

> *The individual day care institution owner should therefore draw up long-term training plans for his/her employees. Development work, refresher training and guidance should be planned for a period of several years.* (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 2004).

Since 1990, funds have been given for educational/pedagogical development work in all counties. From 1995, county governors were required to establish courses for the *barnehager* staff about using the plan and to date, many have done so in collaboration with the colleges for pre-school teacher training. Decentralised pre-school teacher education has also been organised in several locations in recent years.

3.3.5 Parents

Parental involvement is seen as one aspect of quality in ECCE in Norway. The 1995 *Barnehager* Act stipulates that each *barnehager* must have a parent's council and a co-ordinating committee comprising representatives of parents, staff and owners. The parents' council promotes the parents' shared interests and has the right to express an opinion in matters of parents' relationship to the *barnehager*. The co-ordinating committee formulates an annual plan for the educational activity based on the *Framework Plan* and local guidelines:

> *Questions related to basic views on education, content and priorities should also be discussed by the parents' council and by the co-ordinating committee as part of the work on the annual plan.* (OECD, 1998a:15)

This means that parents have significant influence on the content of the *barnehager*'s programme.

3.3.6 White Paper 1999-2000

In the White Paper on ECCE policy, it was proposed that a quality programme be launched in 2001-2003 within the ECCE sector. As Kosiander and Reigstad (2000:94) state:

> *The objective of this programme is that each barnehager will operate a system to maintain and develop quality by the end of 2003.*

There are three main components to this programme:

- **A *barnehager* for all children,** which includes children with special needs (from ethnic and cultural minorities and children with additional needs);
- **Provision of a flexible institution** based on children's needs and parental demands. This means that ECCE services must give children influence and encourage their participation alongside developing an institutional program that takes into account parents' working hours, studies and income;
- **Competent personnel** means having enough educated personnel, both licensed teachers and assistants, to meet the new demands within the ECCE sector in the future (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2000:94).

3.4 Measuring Quality

3.4.1 Municipalities

According to section 10 of the *Barnehager* Act, municipalities maintain the local supervision of the *barnehager* and all *barnehager* must be approved by local authorities. Local authorities set standards in terms of structural issues, such as staff ratios. The local authority is responsible for the implementation of the *Framework Plan* in individual *barnehager* and local authorities may ask for the annual plans from the *barnehager* in connection with their supervision. The overall responsibility for building and operation of day care institutions lies with the municipal authorities, who are also in charge of monitoring compliance with existing legislation.

3.4.2 Self-evaluation

The *Framework Plan* requires that a concrete, explicit evaluation programme be formulated and implemented as part of the annual work plan of each institution. The OECD Country note for Norway states that:

> *The concept of evaluation contained in the Framework Plan for Barnehager is distinctive, complex and challenging. It emphasises observation and documentation, analysis and interpretation, contemplation and self-reflection, and children's involvement.* (OECD, 1999b:35)

The OECD report noted that some *barnehager* have put explicit evaluation plans in place which emphasise building group confidence, social competence and securing the quality of personal relationships (OECD, 1999b:35).

3.5 Supporting Quality

3.5.1 Research on Quality

Statistics Norway[11] gathers information annually regarding dimensions of quality, such as the composition of the staff and the number of children with special needs. These statistics are presented in the publication *Child Care Institutions* in December of each year. Statistics Norway also carries out a bi-annual survey of parental fees in *barnehager* operated or

11 Statistics Norway is responsible for the official statistics of Norway (OECD, 1998a) and is the principal agent for the collection of official statistics on the ECEC sector (OECD, 1999b).

part-financed by the municipalities. Another function of *Statistics Norway* is to collate and provide information from the annual financial statements submitted to the Ministry by private *barnehager*. The OECD background report notes that *"...the Storting pay a lot of interest in these figures."* (OECD, 1998a:41)

The Ministry has also initiated other pieces of research regarding barnehage. The main purpose of this research is two fold; to gather information for the purposes of policy making and to investigate the level of success of various initiatives.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has funded two projects concerned with quality in ECCE entitled *"Quality in Day Care Institutions and the Child's Value"* and *"The Values of the Barnehager - An Analysis of Knowledge"*. Both of these studies were carried out by the National Institute of Public Health. The report *Quality in Day Care institutions and the Child's Value* (OECD, 1998a:41) highlights the fact that quality is related both to structure and values. Structural definitions of quality may lack criteria that are directly related to children's development and health, job satisfaction, educational ideas and the parents' satisfaction with the quality of service provided. The summary and conclusions in the report suggest that the challenge for the future is to keep and develop the well-established *barnehager* tradition:

> *To manage this, the staff must identify with all aspects of the quality in their local barnehage in close collaboration with the parents and authorities. A broad involvement and discussion about quality in barnehager is an important premise.* (OECD, 1998a:42)

The report The *Child's Value and the Values of the Barnehager - An Analysis of Knowledge* (OECD, 1998a:42) focuses on different pieces of research concerning children and *barnehager*. The report notes that the high quality in the Norwegian *barnehager* is a support to Norwegian parents, and makes parenthood a positive experience. The report concludes that Norway has good statistics and research on several areas of ECCE. These include living conditions for families with small children, pre-school teachers professional development and their professional experience, as well as good knowledge about children's language development and special educational work for small children. The research proposes the establishment of a centre for *barnehager* research.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has also conducted an evaluation to ensure that the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* was being implemented (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2000). This stated that:

> *...most of the institutions had implemented the Framework Plan as intended even if there was no systematic programme or special efforts from the ministry to do so.* (Kosiander and Reigstad, 2002:97)

A range of other research has been funded by the government or government agencies and carried out in Norway. A research project between 2002 and 2004 funded by the Norwegian Research Council, *"Gender, Complexity and Diversity in Pedagogical Institutions for Children Aged 0-10: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations,"* looked at issues of gender and diversity (Rhedding-Jones, 2002). The Ministry has funded projects looking at the system of State grants for bilingual assistants, projects looking at the impact of the Cash Benefit Scheme and a project on the roles and relations in family day care (OECD, 1998a). The OECD background report noted that the Research Council was involved in four projects focused on children in *barnehager* (OECD, 1998a).

3.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

According to the Primary School Act, children with special needs have a legal right to special education or special educational help before school age and there is no lower age limit set for this assistance (OECD, 1998a). The municipalities are responsible for the provision and funding of this assistance (OECD, 1998a).

Children with disabilities are given priority admission to a place in a *barnehager*, provided that it is deemed by expert assessment that the child will be able to benefit from attending. The local authority is responsible for providing and financing additional support that may be required for the child, for example additional staffing (OECD, 1999b). According to Kosiander and Reigstad (2002), most children with special needs still attend public rather than private institutions. As stated by Kosiander and Reigstad (2002:92):

> *...it is emphasised that topics of special education are integrated in all subjects, especially in the practical and didactic training.*

Municipalities are responsible for child welfare. The *barnehager* also has a role to play in terms of child welfare as a place in *barnehager* is often the first way of helping young children at risk. Research has been carried out with children with disabilities resulting in the production of reports such as *"Of Course they should be given Priority Admission"* (OECD, 1998a) and *"The Children who are not here, are not Disabled."* (OECD, 1998a) A research programme was initiated in 1993 (OECD, 1998a) entitled *"The Development of Knowledge and Initiative in Special Education."* The aim of this programme was to:

> *... ensure that initiatives are taken to carry out projects that can help bolster knowledge regarding the measures and service needed to give children, young people and adults with special needs quality educational services in their local communities, primarily in local barnehager and schools.* (OECD, 1998a:43)

The project examined why the integration of disabled and/or different persons is difficult, even in institutions that have had integration as a goal for several years.

Children from linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities have no additional legal right of access to *barnehager* (as in the case of children with disabilities), but the State gives special grants to the municipalities who provide *barnehager* for these groups. For example, the State provides grants to enable the employment of bilingual assistants. The State also finances 15 hours weekly attendance in *barnehager* for a period of eight months for newly arrived refugees.

3.7 Implications for Ireland

3.7.1 Regulations

In Norway, regulations are set down in legislation in relation to some structural aspects of quality, such as the education of pre-school teachers. However the regulations give considerable discretion to municipalities and childcare institutions regarding many of the structural aspects of quality such as staff-child ratios.

3.7.2 Curriculum

The curriculum for pre-schools forms the basis for quality in childcare institutions in Norway. Under legislation, all pre-schools, both public and private, are obliged to implement the curriculum (*Framework*

Plan). The *Framework Plan* includes five subject areas which all pre-school children should experience, as well as suggestions for content, methods to be used and expected outcomes. The way in which the plan might be used by teachers for planning and evaluation purposes is also highlighted. The *Framework Plan* is sufficiently broad to be implemented in conjunction with programmes such as High/Scope or Marte Meo at local level. Pre-school institutions are required to draw up a plan on an annual basis, indicating the way in which they will apply the curriculum and the way in which they will evaluate their programme.

The *Framework Plan* has been supported at government level with the introduction of legislation which makes it mandatory for all pre-school institutions and the provision of funds to local authorities for the delivery of professional development programmes to ECCE professionals.

3.7.3 Staffing

Competent personnel are identified as pivotal in the provision of high quality in ECCE in Norway. Currently more than one third of all those employed as pre-school teachers or head teachers have completed a three-year tertiary education programme.

3.7.4 Professional Development

Professional development on an on-going basis is also identified as very important and under the *Framework Plan*, all employers are required to draw up long term training plans for the professional development of staff over several years. The government provide funds for the provision of educational/pedagogical work at local level.

Training measures in Norway are considered in conjunction with training measures for other agencies working with children in municipalities, or in association with colleges offering pre-school teacher training. A partnership approach in the delivery of professional development training is adopted.

3.7.5 Diversity

It is recognised that as society becomes more diverse, this diversity will need to be reflected in the ECCE profession. In Norway there are efforts made to recruit minority groups to the ECCE profession and a programme has recently been launched with the aim of increasing the number of men entering the ECCE profession.

3.7.6 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is stressed as an important component of quality in Norway and legislation sets out that parents must be involved in the ECCE institution. All pre-school institutions must have a parent's council and parents must also be represented on the co-ordinating committee of each institution. The co-ordinating committee is comprised of parents, staff and owners and is responsible for the formulation of the annual plan for the educational activities of the institution. This means that parents have a voice in the annual educational plan of each childcare institution.

3.7.7 Evaluation

While local authorities set standards regarding things such as staff-child ratios, local authorities are also responsible for the implementation of the *Framework Plan* in ECCE institutions. This ensures that one of the main mechanisms for measuring and promoting the quality of service provision is the use of self-evaluations, as all institutions are required to formulate and implement an evaluation programme as part of an annual work programme. Local authorities can ask for each institution's annual work plan in connection with their

supervision. While the exact evaluation programme is not set down in the *Framework Plan*, it is suggested that any evaluation should include observation and documentation, analysis and interpretation, contemplation and self-reflection and children's involvement.

3.7.8 Special Needs

Children with special needs are given priority admission to a place in an ECCE institution and the local authority is responsible for providing and financing additional supports that may be required for the child, for example additional staffing. The State also provides special funding for municipalities who provide ECCE to children from linguistic, cultural and ethnic minorities.

3.7.9 Data Collection

A wide range of statistics is collected by Norway on an annual basis. Information is collected annually in dimensions of quality such as the composition of staff in ECCE institutions and the number of children with special needs. These statistics are used to monitor and evaluate the effects of policy decisions and to investigate the level of success of various new initiatives that are introduced. The information gathered is provided to the *Storting* and is regarded with much interest by its members. This ensures awareness about these measures of quality and allows for informed policy making in ECCE.

3.7.10 Research

Research funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs highlighted the fact that both structural and process elements of quality must be considered. This research suggests that quality is related both to structure and values and that structural definitions of quality may lack criteria that are directly related to children's development and health, staff job satisfaction, their educational ideas and the parents' satisfaction with the quality of service provided.

3.7.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from Norway, a number of features of quality can be identified which are worth considering in the development of a quality framework for Ireland:

- Provision for all children under the age of six is co-ordinated under one government department, thus providing for the integrated provision of care and education for all children.
- Regulations give considerable discretion to local municipalities regarding many of the structural aspects of quality. However, legislation has been introduced obliging all ECCE institutions to implement the curriculum.
- The curriculum is a key tool utilised in defining quality. The curriculum identifies the importance of values in any determination of quality. Implementation of the curriculum is possible due to the highly qualified staff. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of staff development and of partnership with parents as integral aspects for the provision of a quality service.
- Currently, there are initiatives underway to ensure adequate representation of minority groups and men working in ECCE settings
- The main mechanics for the measurement of quality in Norway is the use of planning and self-evaluation, another requirement of the curriculum. This is undertaken at local level.
- The collection of statistics on a range of structural features of quality in Norway is an integral part of central government policy regarding ECCE and provides information on an annual basis.
- Children with special needs have a right to services as early as they will benefit from them and are integrated into ECCE services.

Chapter 4

Sweden

Terms Used

Alternativ Drift	Alternative Provision
Barnskötare	Nursery Worker/Childcare Assistant
Dagbarnvårdare	Family Day Care Provider
Enskild	Private Service
Förskolan	Journal for Early Years Practitioners
Förskollarare	Early Childhood Educator
Laerarforbundet	Teacher Union in Sweden

4.1 Introduction

The issue of quality has been prominent in debates regarding ECCE in Sweden; in part the concern for quality is a reaction to the decentralisation of the ECCE system (Lindon, 2000). The 1998 School Act devolved major responsibility for ECCE from the Ministry of Education and Science to the municipalities. The concern also results from the economic recession and accompanying crisis of the 1990s, which led many municipal authorities to introduce administrative reforms affecting the quality and quantity of day care through an increase in group sizes and decrease in staff-child ratio (Pestoff and Strandbrink, 2002). For example, there was an increase of one child per group between 1998 and 2002, the number of children per annual employee increased from 4.4 to 5.7 children between 1990 and 1998 (National Agency for Education, 2003:24). This raised concerns about the quality of ECCE in Sweden, for example, the increase in staff-child ratios was seen as detrimental to the quality of some provision (Lohmander, 2002).

Most notable when looking at the issue of quality in Sweden is the lack of centralised definitions and the absence of mechanisms for monitoring quality at a national level. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with the local authorities and individual settings (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). The government once regulated ECCE services in a strict manner in Sweden and raised the standards and the expectations of service users nationally. According to Mooney *et al.* (2003:12):

> *Once services are generally of a high standard and communities have come to expect this level of service, governments appear more able to devolve responsibility for quality assurance and have less need of a centralised approach.*

4.2 Context for Quality

4.2.1 Philosophy

ECCE in Sweden is linked to a societal vision for children in the future. Childcare in Sweden has two primary aims; to support and encourage children's development and learning and to enable parents to combine their childcare responsibilities with education or employment (OECD, 2001). ECCE has had high priority for several decades and is a central component of family policy in Sweden (Kamerman, 2001). Lohmander (2002) describes childcare as a cornerstone of the Swedish publicly funded social welfare system. There is a strong belief that childhood should be valued in and of itself (Mooney *et al.*, 2003) and the provision of high quality ECCE service is seen as an important task for society (Lohmander, 2002). Pre-school provision is also identified as the first step in the life-long learning process (Prieto *et al.*, 2002) and the need for a smooth transition from pre-school to school has been a concern of policy makers in Sweden for many years. In Sweden, special emphasis is placed on well-educated staff, size and composition of groups and the suitability of the premises and *"...the declared goal is childcare wholly free of charge."* (cited in Pestoff and Strandbrink, 2002:16)

Mayall (1996:56) notes there has been a change in the conceptualisation of children in Sweden in recent years as a distinct social group, with a shared responsibility for them between parents and the State

4.2.2 Policy

In Sweden, the locus of policymaking regarding ECCE is both national and local (Kamerman, 2000). While overall national goals and guidelines for ECCE are set at national level (these goals are set out in the 1998 School Act, the curriculum and other ordinances), the municipality decides how the goals should be made concrete (OECD, 1999a). The National Agency for Education monitors the fulfilment of these goals. Municipalities are charged with providing sufficient numbers of pre-school and leisure time places, with monitoring the quality of ECCE services and with providing sufficient resources. Following the decentralisation of responsibility for ECCE, most local authorities established committees to deal with issues of relevance to children and adolescents (Lindon, 2000). Teachers, heads of ECCE centres and of out of school provision are represented on these committees.

In 1996, responsibility for public childcare was transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science. This represents recognition of the educational benefits of ECCE services and a desire to facilitate the integration of the childcare and the formal education system (OECD, 1999b).

4.2.3 Funding

The main source of subsidy for parental childcare costs is supply funding (Candappa *et al.*, 2003) in the form of

vouchers. Since 1992, private for-profit commercial firms were eligible to receive public funding for running day care services (Pestoff and Strandbrink, 2002).

In January 2002, a nation-wide fee ceiling known as the *"Max Tax"* was introduced (Petrie *et al.*, 2003), meaning that fees cannot exceed a certain sum, which had the effect of reducing the cost for many families (OECD, 1999b). Under the *"Max Tax"*, the parental fee for one child attending a pre-school centre is three percent of household income, before tax, up to a maximum of SEK1,140 a month (€122 as of July 2002); for a second child parents pay two percent of household income and for a third child one percent. No fees are charged on fourth and subsequent children. According to Pestoff and Strandbrink (2002:25), this has standardised the funding of childcare provision through the voucher system for all children in Sweden

The 1998 School Act requires local authorities to provide childcare at a pre-school, at a leisure time centre or in a family day care home without undue delay (generally interpreted as within a three month period) to facilitate parents to work or study (Swedish Institute, 2001). From July 2000, local authorities are required to offer a pre-school place for at least three hours a day to children of unemployed parents. From January 2002, this also applied to children from families where one of the parents is at home on parental leave looking after a brother or sister (Swedish Institute, 2001). As of January 2003, all four and five year olds are entitled to three free hours of pre-school a day from the autumn term of the year they turn four. Provision of this is mandatory by local authorities but children's attendance is voluntary.

Though compulsory schooling begins at seven, since 1998 municipalities have been obliged to provide all six year olds with a place in a pre-school class for at least 525 hours per year. Though attendance at these classes is voluntary, virtually all six you olds attend. Sweden is moving to universal provision; the government's long-term goal is the provision of free childcare facilities, which are available to all (Skolverket, 2000).

4.2.4 Delivery Strategy

The delivery strategy in terms of ECCE in Sweden is a supply strategy, as most provision is publicly funded and publicly delivered. However non-municipal provision of day care services (*alternativ drift* [alternative provision] or *enskild* [private] services) expanded following 1985 (Pestoff and Strandbrink, 2002).

In 1991, the conservative government introduced the idea of freedom of choice; that pre-school provision would be privately organised but publicly funded. This led to an increase in non-municipal day care services. Pestoff and Strandbrink (2002) note that the development of non-municipal day care services has proceeded very unevenly with privately owned services more likely to develop in urban than rural and sparsely populated areas.

Non-municipal day care services include parent co-ops, voluntary organizations, worker co-ops, organizations with special pedagogies, and a combination of these or other forms. In particular, parent co-ops witnessed an increase in the early 1990s, as they were often the only chance for parents to obtain a day care place. Parent co-ops are based on parental participation and influence, and parents have more roles than in municipal day care services. In 1986, there were only eighteen parent co-ops in Stockholm, but by 1990 it had grown to 140, and by 1995 there are about 200 parent co-ops (Pestoff and Strandbrink, 2002).

According to Pestoff and Strandbrink (2002), nearly two-thirds of the non-municipal day care facilities in 1995 were either provided by parent and worker

cooperatives or voluntary organizations. At the beginning of 1995, about twenty per cent of all day care was provided by private facilities in Stockholm, most of which were cooperative.

4.3 Defining Quality

4.3.1 Regulation

When it comes to regulating quality in ECCE in Sweden, there are no national standards; rather standards are established by the municipalities. However, it should be noted the devolution of responsibility for setting standards followed a period where ECCE was strictly regulated:

> *...covering everything from types of buildings and child/staff ratio to the number of square meters per child, these regulations gradually loosened up and became more flexible.* (Lohmander, 2002:102)

The School Act 1995 stipulates that municipalities must provide pre-school activities of high quality and outlines quality indicators for ECCE services in Sweden:

> *In the ECEC settings there should be staff with the requisite education or experience capable of satisfying the child's need for high quality care and education. The size and composition of the groups should be appropriate. The premises should be suitable for their purpose. Activities should be based on the individual needs of the child. Children who need special support for their development should receive care related to their needs.* (OECD, 1999a:44)

It is up to local authorities to decide the way in which these indicators are interpreted and implemented. The private non-State sponsored sector is not regulated in Sweden but this sector is quite small.

4.3.2 Curriculum

The pre-school curriculum is identified as important in developing quality in the pedagogical work of the pre-school (OECD, 1999a). The first national guidelines for pre-schools (Educational Programme for Pre-schools) were developed in Sweden in 1988 (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). In 1998, a new curriculum, *"Curriculum for Preschools,"* came into effect. While this curriculum only relates to publicly funded pre-schools, it can be used as a guide by private pre-schools. The current pre-school curriculum is linked to the curricula for first and second level education and encompasses shared views on knowledge, development and learning (OECD, 1999a), providing a single framework for children's educational experience.

The curriculum consists of two parts, *"Pre-schools' Ground Values and Mission"* and *"Goals and Directions concerning the educational work of preschools"* (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). Five groups of Goals and Directions are specified, including norms and values, development and learning, children's influence, pre-school and home and co-operating with school (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999). The focus of the curriculum is on democratic principles, on the development of an ethical code of democracy on the part of the children, and to this end, activities should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Documentation of the work carried out is seen as important in informing the development and implementation of the curriculum.

The curriculum does not indicate the methods to be used to reach the specified goals, and as such Alvestad and Samuelsson (1999) see it as more or a philosophical framework, than a traditional curriculum. It is the role of the municipalities to decide how the goals and guidelines will be implemented. All communities have a sum of money to use to educate pre-school staff on the goals of the

new curriculum (Alvestad and Samuelsson, 1999).

4.3.3 Staff Training

Cameron *et al.* (2003) note that the educational levels, training requirements and working conditions of staff in Sweden are high. *Förskollarare* (early childhood educators) are employed by the municipalities to work in publicly funded childcare facilities and are employed to work both in pre-schools and pre-school classes. *Förskollarare* undergo three years of university training and about 60 per cent of those employed in pre-schools have this level of training.

Barnskötare (nursery worker or childcare assistant) complete three years of upper second level training. The OECD report (1999a) notes that it has been difficult for *Barnskötare* to find employment in recent years as many municipalities try to increase quality by increasing the employment of *Förskollarare.*

Cameron *et al.* (2003) note that Sweden is currently integrating its occupational models within the education system, based around the concept of a single worker (a teacher) qualified to work in pre-schools, schools and out-of-school services. All teachers will undergo three and a half years of training at degree level, of which 18 months will be common to all students and the remainder is specialised according to the intended type of teaching (pre-school teachers/pedagogues, free time teachers and teachers across the whole school range). All staff will be known as teachers (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, 2000). It is hoped that the:

> *...provision of a common training framework should facilitate the building of linkages across the different phases of lifelong learning (OECD, 2001:99).*

Dagbarnvårdare (family day care providers) are not required by the State to obtain any training, though it is recommended that they complete a training course. Most municipalities have instituted special training of about 50-100 hours as an introduction for *dagbarnvårdare.* About three-quarters of those providing family day care have either a childminder certificate or have undergone 50-100 hours of mandatory training from municipal employers (Cameron *et al.*, 2003).

4.3.4 Professional Development

It is the responsibility of the municipalities to provide in-service training for ECCE practitioners. A variety of training opportunities are provided in conjunction with universities ranging from short courses to longer term courses covering a variety of subjects, including children with special needs, intercultural education and educational administration (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). Petrie *et al.* (2003:13) describe the in-service training for centre based services in Sweden as *"...well developed."* However in-service training is not so developed for family day care providers.

The Lerum Competence Development Project began in 1994 and aimed to develop a model for educator in-service training to improve the quality of day care (Sheridan, 1995). The training provided was based on facilitating day care providers' awareness of a range of issues and topics. The project used a variety of methods to deliver the training including external lectures, literature studies, learning organisations and self-evaluation. Teachers received training on their actual needs based on results measured by the ECERS (Sheridan, 1995).

4.3.5 Public Awareness

In Sweden, parents recognise and expect provision of a high quality (Mooney *et al.*,

2003) and parental and societal expectations are an important component of quality assurance (Alcock, 1996). One example of this is in the small rural town of Trelleborg where parents demonstrated publicly and successfully when the local municipality was considering increasing group sizes to twenty. The general concern about the reduction in municipal spending in ECCE, and its effects on structural features of quality such as group size and staff ratios, also reflect a high level of awareness and concern about the issue of quality at a societal level.

4.4 Measuring Quality

Municipalities are responsible for monitoring the quality of ECCE, and as a result, monitoring varies between municipalities (OECD, 1999c). In recent years, traditional inspectors have been replaced with advisers who are viewed as having a support and development role (Mooney *et al.*, 2003). The Educational Inspectorate of the National Agency for Education inspects at local authority level to ensure that all children have access to a high standard of childcare.

4.5 Supporting Quality

4.5.1 Pedagogical Documentation

Pedagogical documentation is a mechanism of quality assurance that is prominent in Sweden (Alcock, 1996). Pedagogical documentation is about making practice visible. Documentation is seen as the principle mechanism for articulating the curriculum. Pedagogical documentation is inclusive of multiple perspectives on quality as it integrates different perspectives on quality. As well as observations, the documentation seems to include a broader concept of data gathering, including children's explanations and descriptions of experiences/works (Alcock, 1996). Theme work was prevalent and documented to enable the theme to be explored at a deep level over an extended period of time. Themes may be a way of including conceptual content, knowledge and skills into a possibly empty developmentally appropriate curriculum. Theme work is explicitly promoted in the Swedish and Norwegian early childhood curriculum frameworks.

4.5.2 Networks

According to Alcock (1996), organised networks of early childhood educators or centres are viewed as a quality system in Sweden, as they promote the exchange of ideas and facilitate ongoing professional development amongst ECCE professionals.

One important network centres on the Reggio Emilia Institute based in the teacher training college in Stockholm. The Reggio Emilia Institute promotes networks throughout Sweden at local, national and international levels (Alcock 1996). The teachers' union (*Laerarforbundet*) plays a strong role in providing ongoing professional development amongst ECCE professionals through networks and seminars.

Stockholm municipality uses a network format to provide professional development courses for early childhood educators. ECCE practitioners meet together regularly over a nine month period for lectures, discussion and reflection around such topics as pedagogical leadership and reflective discourse (Alcock, 1996). A journal produced for ECCE practitioners (*Förskolan*) has a circulation of 50,000 per issue (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997).

4.5.3 Research

Cameron *et al.* (2003) note that since the 1960s, Sweden has collected statistics annually on dimensions of quality such as

group size, ratios and staff education, which are used to monitor and evaluate the effects of policy decisions. The National Agency for Education is responsible for these official statistics which give municipalities a basis for monitoring developments including changes in quality.

Other surveys are carried out periodically, such as surveys focused on access to childcare for children with unemployed parents, productivity and quality in childcare, analysis of factors influencing parents of small children and children in need of special support in childcare. These surveys provide information about the different municipalities in Sweden (OECD, 1999a).

In recent years, research has turned its focus on quality as evidenced by the concern with the development of new programmes such as new parent-staff communication programmes, educational programmes, organisational development programmes and with the evaluations of these programmes (OECD, 1999a). Other important areas of programme development that have received funding include age-flexible entry dates into schools, pre-schools for all children, pedagogical methods for working with the youngest children, group orientated work methods in ECCE groups with a large number of children, programmes linked to environmental protection and conservation and male personnel in ECCE settings (OECD, 1999a).

Municipalities working together in networks on the same programme development area can avail of special funding to complete this work. One example is immigrant children in childcare (OECD, 1999a). The network uses seminars and other fora to disseminate information. The National Agency for Education is also involved in several pieces of research, for example, a forecast of future recruitment needs in the pre-school sector and leisure time pedagogues, studies aimed at monitoring the integration of the pre-school class and the school and work on identifying and establishing quality indicators in ECCE:

> *Documentation of pedagogical activities as a basis for evaluation and quality improvements is being studied in a different project. Tied to this project is the production of study materials to assist in implementing pedagogical documentation as a working method in ECEC-settings.* (OECD, 1999a:64)

The National Agency for Education has also commissioned research reviews of children's learning from the early years onwards.

Prieto *et al.* (2002) conducted a study of parent's choice of pre-school care facility which focused on whether or not pre-school institutions could be seen as meeting needs. A survey was carried out among 1,584 mothers of children born in 1995, which examined parents' choice of pre-school care facility in the city of Uppsala. The study found that parents' use of the right to choose between pre-school facilities was economically, socially and culturally segregated. Furthermore the authors suggest that the choice of pre-school facility in Uppsala leads to the creation of socially and culturally homogenous private pre-school facilities, which makes it impossible for them to achieve the goal of being meeting places.

4.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

> *Since the 1960's, Sweden has tried to move away from a simple classification of "children at risk" and "children with special needs" related to a deficit concept and the role of*

> *institutions being to make good that deficit.* (Dahlberg et al., 1999:124)

Municipalities have responsibility for children in need of special support and must offer a place in an ECCE setting to all these children, whether their parents work or not. Children with additional needs are entitled to a three-hour session in a pre-school, free of charge, throughout the whole of their childhood (OECD, 1999a). The group of children needing special support is not clearly defined, for example, it can include disabled children, children with difficulty concentrating or children with psychosocial troubles (OECD, 1999a). One of the principles for those needing special supports is that their needs are primarily to be met in regular childcare and not by singling them out for special treatment (Swedish Institute, 2001). Integration is the basis for special support and involves the careful planning of daily activities (OECD, 1999a). Other adjustments that can be made to the childcare environment include the provision of additional support personnel or a lower adult-child ratio. More than 90 per cent of municipalities have funds earmarked for children in need of special support. Most municipalities have routines for placement, follow-up and action plans for pre-school children in need of special support. However, half have specific goal led documents and these are often not linked to specific funding or resources.

Many children in Sweden have roots in other cultures and these children are often in need of special support. One of the specific objectives of childcare in Sweden is the support of children's dual cultural affiliations and their chances of actively developing bilingual skills (Swedish Institute, 2001). The government has made funds available to provide children from bilingual backgrounds with a free three-hour session of day-care on a daily basis from the age of three. Special mother tongue teaching tuition is provided to children whose first language is not Swedish (Swedish Institute, 2001).

4.7 Implications for Ireland

4.7.1 Regulations

There is a lack of centralised definitions of quality in Sweden and an absence of monitoring mechanisms at a national level; rather responsibility for quality assurance lies with local authorities and individual settings. This follows a period in which quality was strictly monitored and controlled.

4.7.2 Curriculum

The pre-school curriculum is identified as important in developing quality in the pedagogical work of the pre-school. In Sweden, a new curriculum for pre-schools sets out the goals and directions of the educational work of pre-schools and emphasises the development of an ethical code of democracy on the part of children. However, the curriculum does not indicate the methods that are to be used to reach these goals. Documentation for the work carried out in pre-schools is identified as important in informing the development and implementation of the curriculum. It is broad in design and it is the role of the municipalities to decide how the goals and guidelines will be implemented.

4.7.3 Care and Education

One trend clearly visible in terms of ECCE is the development of a unified system of care and education for all children. In Sweden, responsibility for public childcare was transferred to the Ministry for Education and Science in 1996. The newly developed curriculum for pre-school education is linked to the curricula for first and second level education, thus ensuring that there is a single framework for a child's educational experience in Sweden. Sweden is also currently integrating its occupational models within the education system, based around the concept of a single worker (a teacher) qualified to work in pre-schools,

schools, and out-of-school services.

4.7.4 Staffing

The availability of well-trained practitioners is seen as important in the provision of high quality care and education in Sweden. Three years of university training is the standard for those working in the ECCE sector. Whereas previously, assistants with three years of upper second level training were employed in ECCE institutions, those with this educational qualification have experienced difficulty in gaining employment over the past few years.

4.7.5 Professional Development

Professional development is also identified as very important and the municipalities are responsible for the provision of training to ECCE practitioners. A range of training opportunities is provided in conjunction with the universities. For example, all municipalities have been provided with funds to provide training to pre-school staff on the goals of the new curriculum.

4.7.6 Inspection

While the municipalities are responsible for monitoring the quality of ECCE, traditional inspectors are now viewed as having a support and development role in terms of promoting and supporting quality.

4.7.7 Networks

Organised networks of early childhood educators or centres have the potential to support the development of quality, as they facilitate both the exchange of ideas and ongoing professional development. The development of networks of practitioners is facilitated and encouraged in Sweden and these networks are used to provide professional development courses for ECCE practitioners and to disseminate learning from pilot projects.

4.7.8 Parental Involvement

In Sweden, parents recognise and expect provision of a high quality, and parental and societal expectations are an important component of quality assurance. This has been seen in recent years in the public concern about the trends regarding increasing group size and staff child ratios in ECCE institutions. In some areas of Sweden, parents have demonstrated publicly and successfully against an increase in group size.

4.7.9 Research

Different conceptualisations of high standards have been explored in Sweden and in particular the project *Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World* looks at the development of high standards in ECCE institutions from a post-modern perspective.

4.7.10 Data Collection

Sweden has collected statistics annually on dimensions of quality such as group size, ratios and staff education. These statistics are used to monitor and evaluate the effects of policy decisions and give municipalities a basis for monitoring changes in pre-school provision. Some research has focused on new programmes introduced such as a new parent/staff communication programme, new educational programmes and organisational development programmes.

4.7.11 Special Needs

Municipalities are required to offer a place in an ECCE institution to all children with special needs. Integration is the basis for the provision of support for children with special needs and this involves the careful planning of daily activities and the adjustments to the ECCE environment. Children from a non-Swedish cultural background also receive additional supports.

4.7.12 Pedagogical Documentation

Pedagogical documentation is a mechanism of quality assurance and is pervasive in practice in ECCE institutions. It is an approach that is inclusive of multiple perspectives on quality as it integrates different perspectives on quality.

4.7.13 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from Sweden, a number of features of quality can be identified which are worth considering in the development of the National Framework for Quality in Ireland:

- A unified system of care and education is an important feature of ECCE in Sweden.
- There is a single framework for a child's educational experience at pre-primary, first and second level education.
- There is no single definition of quality and considerable discretion is given to local municipalities regarding aspects of quality. The curriculum provides a unifying framework for quality in ECCE services. Highly qualified practitioners support this curriculum with access to professional development opportunities.
- While municipalities are responsible for the monitoring of ECCE, inspectors are now viewed as having a support and development role in promoting, supporting and developing quality.
- One unique feature of the ECCE sector in Sweden is the use of networks to support quality in the ECCE sector.
- Other mechanisms for supporting quality include the widespread use of pedagogical documentation and a general awareness and concern at a societal level regarding some of the aspects of high quality childcare.
- The collection of statistics on a range of structural features of quality in Sweden is an integral part of central government policy regarding ECCE and provides a basis for policy decisions.
- An integrated approach is adopted for children with special needs.

Chapter 5

Portugal

Terms Used

Centros de Área Educativa Centros	Education Area Centres
Regionais de Segurança	Regional Social Security Centres
Departamento da Educação Básica	Department of Basic Education
Direcções Regionais de Educação	Regional Office of Education
Educadores de Infância	Trained and Licensed Pre-school Teachers
Escolas Superiores de Educação	School of Higher Education
Gabinete para a Expansão e Desenvolvimento da Educação Pré-Escolar	Bureau for the Expansion and Development of Pre-school Education
Grupo de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento da Educação de Infância	Study Group for Child Education and Development
Inspecção Geral de Educação	Inspector General for Education
Jardin de Infância	Non-formal Educational Contexts for 3 to 5 Year Old Children
Licienciatura	Honours Degree
Misericórdias	Charitable Organisations with a Special Status

5.1 Introduction

According to Wall *et al.* (2001:2):

> *Portugal is usually described as a country with a strong and explicit ideological commitment to the family, but a low profile as far as family and child policies are concerned. The idea of a rudimentary welfare State underlines the precariousness of state provision, especially of care services, which are compensated by traditional welfare guarantees stemming from strong families and informal support networks.*

Despite this, there have been some changes over the last two decades in the provision of care and education services for children.

Two distinct systems can be seen in Portugal, a system focused on the care of young children and a system focused on the education of children aged three to six. Pre-school education in Portugal is legally defined as education provided for children between the ages of three and six. Hence the term pre-school has a different meaning in Portugal than other European countries, where it is used to describe settings for young children from birth to the beginning of compulsory schooling. Policy relating to the development of formal childcare facilities for very small children below age three has not been as high on the political agenda as pre-school education.

5.2 Context for Quality

5.2.1 Philosophy

In focusing primarily on pre-school education for children over the age of three, childcare in Portugal *"...has essentially been envisaged from the point of view of the child's education career, rather than from the point of promoting the reconciliation of work and family life."* (Wall *et al.*, 2001:4).

5.2.2 Policy

Policy responsibility for ECCE in Portugal is shared by two ministries, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity. This mirrors the division that exists in Portugal between provision that is deemed to have an educational function and provision that is deemed to have a caring function (OECD, 2001). The Ministry of Education has responsibility for pedagogical quality in all educational settings. The Ministry of Labour and Solidarity has responsibility for family support provision for children aged 3 months and older (OECD, 2001). All published legislation is the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity (OECD, 1998b).

While policy is conceptualised, defined, planned, co-ordinated, inspected and evaluated at national level, the OECD (2000a) notes that there is a great degree of de-concentration, if not full decentralisation, in pedagogical action and the support provided to the management of human, material and financial resources. In the case of the Ministry of Education, this is achieved through the *Direcções Regionais de Educação* (DRE or Regional Office of Education), which integrate the *Centros de Área Educativa* (Education Area Centres) at the district level (OECD, 2000a). The DRE give co-ordination and support to the educational settings and manages human, material and financial resources in these settings. Within the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity, decentralisation is achieved through the *Centros Regionais de Segurança Social* (CRSS or Regional Social Security Centres) and their sub-regional services. The CRSS support the social aspects of the child within educational contexts, organising and accepting financial responsibility for meals, transport and extracurricular activities.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity have attempted to co-ordinate their activities through the establishment of formal institutional lines to promote dialogue and co-operation. In 1996, a Bureau for the Expansion and Development of Pre-school Education (*Gabinete para a Expansão e Desenvolvimento da Educação Pré-Escolar*) was established, in an attempt to promote co-ordination in the ECCE sector. This Bureau brought together major stakeholders in the ECCE sector including the two Ministries, the Consulting Council of Representatives of the National Association of Municipalities, the Union of Private and Social Solidarity Institutions (IPSS), the Association of Private and Cooperative Education and the Unions of the *Misericórdias* and Mutual Trusts. The main aim of the Bureau is to provide a concerted framework to promote the expansion of the pre-school network as required and to contribute to the improvement of the quality of provision (OECD, 1998b).

A government *Programme for the Expansion and Development of Pre-school Education* was drafted in 1996 and was followed in 1997 by the *Framework Law*, which co-ordinated the diverse provision for young children, and included for the first time the three-to-six-year-olds within the realm of basic education. The government programme intends that the expansion and development of pre-school provision should take place in co-ordination with municipal, private and social welfare institutions, with central government assuming a guiding and regulatory role.

While there are moves towards decentralisation of ECCE in Portugal, these moves have been resisted by professionals who argued against the withdrawal of State responsibility (Oberhumeur and Ulich, 1997:27). Much of the implementation of ECCE in Portugal depends on municipality initiatives (Clearinghouse, 2003c).

5.2.3 Funding

The main source of funding in Portugal is supply side subsidies (Candappa *et al.*, 2003). In pre-schools belonging to the public network, the operating costs are shouldered by the M.E. (educational component) and the M.L.S. (social component), although financial responsibility for the *"social"* component may be transferred by agreement to the local authorities (Wall *et al.*, 2001). In pre-schools belonging to private non-profit institutions, the State pays for 62 per cent of expenditures and families pay for 38 per cent. Funding is carried out on the basis of the cost of each child, and the amount per child is fixed annually by the State (jointly by the M.E. and the M.L.S.) after hearing the organisations that represent the interests of these institutions. In private and cooperative school establishments, families pay for almost all expenditures (95 per cent); families are supposed to shoulder the costs here, but the law on pre-school education allows for some sponsorship in these schools via the establishment of special development programmes. Only the public sector requires no fees from parents. Average costs to parents for childcare amount to about 11 per cent of an average aggregate family salary.

In Portugal, compulsory schooling begins at age 6. According to Wall (2000:38):

> *...child care facilities are lacking in Portugal. There are hardly any nurseries for children below age three, because the state considers childcare a purely educational task. For this reason, the current offer only comprises pre-school day nurseries for children above three. Many care facilities are open only five hours per day and close during lunch.*

Historically, Portugal has had a relatively low level of day care provision for those under the age of three (Lindon, 2000). However there is growing awareness of the need for provision for 0-3 year old children

(Wall 2003) and the expansion of pre-school education is now a high government priority (Lindon, 2000).

Policy measures have been largely focused on the expansion of pre-school education. This involves free access to a five-hour pre-school session for all five year olds. It is planned to extend this provision to all four-year olds in the near future (OECD, 1998b). Female employment, social need and the population of three-six year olds in an area are the main criteria for government choice of where the expansion of pre-school services should take place.

Ninety percent of those aged five-six, seventy per cent of those aged four-five and sixty per cent of children aged three-four are enrolled in a pre-school (OECD, 2001). Among children under the age of three, almost 90 per cent are cared for by their families or through informal childcare arrangements. Just twelve per cent of children aged birth-three are cared for in crèches or by family day care providers (OECD, 2001).

5.2.4 Delivery Strategies

According to Wall *et al.* (2001), the main role of the State is as a coordinator, planner and financial supporter of services rather than a direct provider. The ECCE network in Portugal is both public and private.

In the case of children aged birth to three, services are either established by the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity itself or by other entities such as private individuals' co-operatives, IPSS or other non-profit institutions. Services for children under the age of three is largely provided by the voluntary sector (particularly non-profit social solidarity institutions and establishments belonging to the *Misericórdias* and parents who are responsible for paying for some of the costs of childcare arrangements. The State (M.L.S.) provides early childhood institutions for a small proportion of users (no more than one tenth of all users) while the State-supported *"third sector"* includes over 80 per cent of all users (Wall *et al.*, 2001:4). The private profit-making sector compensates for the remaining gaps.

Wall *et al.* (2001) note that in Portugal, responsibility for the development of pre-school education is shared by three distinct sectors, the public sector (establishments belonging to local authorities and to national government, either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity), the private non-profit making sector and the private (for profit) sector. According to Wall *et al.* (2001), in 1998-99, the private share (profit and non-profit-making) of establishments for the three to five age groups in terms of the proportion of users was 54 per cent (almost two thirds (63 per cent) of this share belonging to the private not-for-profit sector). The importance of the private sector is greater in urban areas such as Lisbon (75 per cent), Porto (67 per cent) and the Setubal peninsula (75 per cent).

5.3 Defining Quality

5.3.1 Regulation

The *Framework Law for Pre-School Education*, published in 1997, established the juridical framework for pre-school education in Portugal (Vasconcelos, 1998). Under this Law, pre-school education is viewed as the first step in basic education, providing an important foundation for life long learning (Vasconcelos, 1997b). The *Jardin de Infância*[12] is identified as a *"...transitional site between family and school."* (Vasconcelos, 1998:5)

The Framework Law outlines principles regarding the structure, organisation,

12 *Jardins de Infância* are non-formal educational contexts for three to five year old children, where both children and adults are supervised by specialised staff. Children are given opportunities to develop learning skills through self-discovery and communication with other children and adults.

pedagogical and financial aspects of pre-school education (OECD, 1998b) as follows; in article 5 (strategic role of the State), article 8 (Pedagogical and Technical Responsibilities), article 11 (Pedagogical Directives), article 18 (Staff), article 19 (Training and Provision of Cultural Activities), and articles 20 and 21 (Evaluation and Inspection) (OECD, 1998b). The role of the State is set out under Article 5:

> *To establish the general norms for pre-school education, especially in terms of organisational, pedagogic and technical aspects, and to ensure their fulfilment and application by means of monitoring, assessment and inspection. (Vasconcelos, 1998:13)*

Under Article 8, the State is responsible for defining the general guidelines controlling pre-school education (especially in pedagogic and technical terms) and has the power to define rules for the activities of nursery schools, to define syllabus objectives and guidelines, to define the qualification requirements of teaching and non teaching staff and to define and provide training requirements (Vasconcelos, 1998). The State also has the power to define the rules for assessing the quality of pre-school provision and to undertake monitoring and inspection.

The Framework Law appeals to the participation of local structures, parents' associations, residents' associations, civic organisations and others in the pre-school educational process. It requires parents to participate in pre-school education. According to Article 4, parents and guardians have a role to participate in the running of pre-schools, either through representatives elected for that purpose or through representative associations. Parents also have a role to play in developing a co-operative relationship with teachers and staff, voicing their opinion on the opening hours of the facility and participating under the pedagogical guidance of the educational context, as volunteers, in educational activities.

5.3.2 Curriculum

National curriculum guidelines for Pre-school Education were legally established in 1997 and became binding in 1998-99 (Vasconcelos, 1998). These require the *Jardin de Infância* to address educational issues, both public and private, whether they are organised by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity. The OECD (2000a) note that this shows the keenness of the State to accept responsibility for the raising of quality in ECCE. The curriculum guidelines:

> *...are a statement of what children should learn in pre-school. The curriculum guidelines aim to give greater visibility to pre-school education, facilitating educational continuity with elementary school. They also aim to improve the quality of pre-school education by introducing innovative dynamics that will stimulate pedagogical activity.* (Vasconcelos, 1998:8)

The curriculum guidelines are designed to help practitioners make day to day decisions about practice (Vasconcelos, 1998) and are a common reference points to guide the work undertaken by pre-school teachers. They are guidelines, not a prescriptive list of targets to be realised (Vasconcelos, 1998). The curriculum guidelines lay out the general principles and pedagogical aims of the Pre-school Law. In addition, they define the overall guidelines for the pre-school practitioner in relation to observing, planning, acting, assessing communicating and articulating (Vasconcelos, 1997a).

The introduction of curriculum guidelines for pre-school education is seen as an important measure in ensuring the quality of the national network of pre-school

educational facilities, whether public or private (Vasconcelos, 1998). As Vasconcelos (1996:12) states:

> *Curriculum guidelines are seen as an important part of the regulatory role of the state in order to provide educational quality to all pre-school programs.*

The curriculum guidelines are organised into three content areas:

1. Personal and social development;
2. Expression and communication (which includes mastering different forms of expression, mastering language and an initial approach to reading, writing and mathematics) and;
3. Knowledge of the world (Vasconcelos, 2002).

5.4 Measuring Quality

5.4.1 Inspection

Regulation is the responsibility of the State (OECD, 1998b). The Ministry of Education is responsible for the supervision and inspection of the pre-school education system. The *Inspecção Geral de Educação* (Inspector General for Education) is responsible for the regulation and co-ordination of pre-schools and can use legal, administrative, financial and eventually, disciplinary mechanisms to correct any situation found to be inadequate (OECD, 1998b).

The Inspector-General for Education is also responsible for the development of performance evaluation mechanisms (OECD, 1998b). According to the Inspector General, the main quality objectives of pre-school provision are as follows:

- Planning of educational activity;
- Administrative organisation;
- Organisation of the educational environment;
- Content development as described in curriculum guidelines;
- Children observation practices;
- Pedagogical relations;
- Resource management (OECD, 1998b:74).

Specific objectives, together with observation criteria measured on four-point quality scales, were set in all the above activity areas. Evaluations are carried out by an inspector on a national random sample of *Jardins de Infância*. The evaluative nature of the inspection process involves teachers in the discussion of the information gathered. Inspectors assess the quality of the *"implemented curriculum"* and the quality of the *"achieved curriculum"* (OECD, 1998b:75), as well as the quality of the learning experiences provided:

> *Thus, the aim of the Pedagogical Audit Project carried out by the Inspector-General of Education is to contribute to the quality control process of the educational provision offered by the Portuguese Jardins de Infância through a form of external evaluation based on joint diagnostic/improvement practices.* (OECD, 1998b:75)

Inspections identify the strengths and weaknesses of the operation and operational conditions of the *Jardins de Infância* (OECD, 1998b). Forms of childcare provision under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity are supervised and inspected by the Ministry's Inspector General, the Social Security Regional Centres and the Sub-Regional Services. According to its own Organic Law, the objectives of the Inspectorate General are to supervise and inspect the following operational aspects of all the Ministry's services and institutions:

- Abidance to the Law and the rules leading to the good operation of the services and institutions;

- Efficient management and administration, legality of processes and decisions adopted as well as the frequency of financial transactions;
- Adaptation of norms to requirements and eventual need for new strategies (OECD, 1998b:54).

5.4.2 Quality Measured Using ECERS

The ICCE project was a cross-national study that considered quality in centre-based ECCE programmes for children aged three to six years of age across five countries, including Portugal (Tietze *et al.*, 1996). Two scales, the ECERS and the CIS, were used to observe process quality in pre-school classrooms across these countries (Tietze *et al.*, 1996). Considerable effort was made to ensure that the scales were applicable to all countries selected and that interpretation of all items on the scales was consistent. In terms of ECERS scores, no classroom in Portugal was found to have scores in the lowest quality range (inadequate). However of the five countries, Portugal had the fewest classrooms in the highest quality range (Tietze *et al.*, 1996:464). Portugal was found to have highest scores across the dimension of providing more or less *"...personalised care..."* in settings but scored low on the dimension *"...availability and use of space and play materials..."* Adequate space and materials for a variety of play activities in order to encourage children to develop skills in many rather than a few developmental areas was necessary for a high score on this dimension of quality, and the results suggest that Portuguese pre-schools were lacking in this regard.

In looking at the relations between structural and process quality across several countries, Cryer *et al.* (1999) noted that in Portugal, teacher experience, enrolment size, hours opened and director experience were the structural characteristics that best predicted classroom process quality. The researchers also found significant regional variations in structural quality in Portugal, with ECERS scores significantly higher in southern as opposed to northern Portugal.

5.5 Supporting Quality

5.5.1 Staff Training

There is a recognition that no plan for the expansion of high quality ECCE will be possible without ECCE professionals (Vasconcelos, 1996). All *Jardins de Infância* are staffed by trained and licensed pre-school teachers called *educadores de infância* (OECD, 2000a). All pre-school settings have a pedagogical director who is a qualified pre-school teacher (OECD, 1998b). However, it is suggested that teachers working in private non-profit organisations have a lower level of training than those working in the public sector (OECD, 2000a).

Professionals that work in other forms of childcare provision, other than *Jardins de Infância*, include e*ducadores de infância*, nurses and social workers, all of whom have tertiary-level qualifications, and auxiliary workers who are not required to have a particular qualification. Even when qualified, staff working in these facilities have a lower level of status, pay and working conditions than those employed in the *Jardins de Infância*. Some action has been taken to raise the qualification of those working in these settings and under Framework Law, IPSS settings must have at least one pre-school teacher per classroom in order to qualify for government funding.

Educadores de infância undertake a four-year course of study leading to an honours degree (*licienciatura*) at either a university or a school of higher education (*Escolas Superiores de Educação*). Pre-school teachers who have completed the four year degree receive the same starting salaries in public pre-school provision as primary teachers who have received the same level

of training. By law, teachers have recognised working hours for the preparation of materials and have team meeting as well as parent meetings (Vasconcelos, 2002). They also have a professional association, the Association for Professionals of Early Childhood (Vasconcelos, 2002).

5.5.2 Professional Development

Vasconcelos (2002:52) notes that one political measure taken in the last few years was *"...systematic in-service training (if possible centre based) for all early childhood teachers, whether they work at public or private institutions."* In-service training is offered by a variety of different bodies, including training centres or by public and private entities, many of whom have developed training programmes in partnership with teacher training colleges. Training Centres are local municipal or inter-municipal centres established with the following aims:

- To contribute to in-service training promotion;
- To promote the exchange and publication of pedagogical experiences;
- To promote identification of training needs;
- To regulate training provision in accordance with national and local needs meeting, whenever possible, teachers individual requirements for assistance with training;
- To set up and manage resource centres (OECD, 1998b:84).

There are 211 centres operating in Portugal. Vasconcelos (2002) notes that courses have been offered to practitioners in order to complete their degrees.

5.5.3 Parents

Parents are recognised by law as partners in pre-school education (Vasconcelos, 2002) and are seen as essential for the achievement of maximum outcomes for children:

> *They need to cooperate in the organisation of kindergartens and they are expected to participate in parent associations. They are also represented in the Board of each kindergarten and have a word to say in the educational project of the kindergarten.* (Vasconcelos, 2002:53)

Parents are also consulted by the Ministry of Education regarding policy in ECCE. Mooney *et al.* (2003) state that the level of parental involvement in pre-schools in Portugal is low, despite the legislative importance given to parental involvement. They suggest that this may be due to the fact that Portugal has one of the highest rates of maternal employment among Western European countries, and on average, the longest working hours.

5.5.4 Research

Several research projects have been completed in the last decade in Portugal (OECD 1998b). For example, the *Departamento da Educação Básica* translated and adapted the EEL materials and provided teacher training throughout the country to adapt and disseminate a model of quality evaluation and improvement among ECCE professionals working in all three networks of *Jardins de Infância*. Other research carried out included research conducted by the Lisbon School of Education around curriculum, early development, and quality issues and research conducted by the Institute of Child Studies in the University of Minho. (OECD, 1998b)

According to the OECD (1998b) report, the *Grupo de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento da Educação de Infância* (Study Group for Child Education and Development) was preparing the first issue of a research journal in ECCE, covering children from

birth to the end of the first cycle of basic education.

The Development of Pedagogical Knowledge in the Education and Training Systems Research Centre (located in the University of Aveiro) was established by researchers from the University of Aveiro, the University of Algarve, the University of Coimbra and the Higher Institute of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra. It is currently carrying out several projects in ECCE. This includes a project entitled *Promoting Quality in Early Childhood Education*. Some perspectives of intervention and research have been identified and there are three quality approaches which frame the project. These are the:

- Enrichment of the environment (physical environment and learning experiences in different developmental areas - motor, cognitive-linguistic, affective-social...);
- Adult style (sensitivity, stimulation, autonomy promotion) and;
- Family and community involvement (University of Aveiro, Accessed at: http://www.ii.ua.pt/, 1st July, 2004).

Areas of training, intervention and research include initial and ongoing training for early childhood and elementary teachers, teaching practice, early intervention and work with families (University of Aveiro, Accessed at: http://www.ii.ua.pt/, 1st July, 2004).

Other projects undertaken by the university include the early intervention project of Aveiro (a promotion strategy for the well-being and global development of children less than six years of age and their families, identified as being at risk) and a project on constructing quality in infant day care. This project aims to develop a database of quality patterns validated by the scientific community, others professionals and parents. Furthermore, it aims to promote in the adherent day-care centres to the project, by means of a participatory process of analysis, a manual for quality, considering the proposed quality patterns and its own specifications (University of Aveiro, Accessed at: http://www.ii.ua.pt/, 1st July, 2004).

5.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

The OECD report (OECD, 2000a) notes that in Portugal, the identification of special needs was usually delayed until children enter primary school. The place of children with special needs within the pre-school system is strongly protected in law. Children at risk of disadvantage are given priority entrance into some services. Recent legislation has called attention to these children and provides for early intervention strategies to meet their needs. There is growing inclusion of children with disabilities in all branches of education and the policy goal in Portugal is inclusion within regular schools whenever possible.

There are sizeable numbers of children from linguistic, cultural and ethnic minorities centred especially around urban areas such as Lisbon, Setúbal and Porto. Several social integration programmes with an educational component have been sponsored by the High Commission for Ethnic Minorities, by government ministries and by municipalities.

In sparsely populated areas, where the number of children do not reach the minimum required for the setting up of a *Jardin de Infância* (i.e. fifteen), the Ministry of Education may establish an itinerant child education service (*Educaçio dê Infancia*) for three to five year old children. *Educaçio dê infamcia* are mobile sessional services designed to reach families in remote areas with little access to other forms of provision.

Community educational activities may be provided in Children's Community Centres in deprived urban areas. Five-year-old children who live in highly populated and/or deprived suburban areas, lacking in cultural and educational facilities, may experience these kinds of activities through buildings made available by the local community.

5.7 Implications for Ireland

5.7.1 Care and Education

There are two distinct systems involved in the provision of ECCE in Portugal; a care system focused on the provision of care for children from three months to three years of age and an education system focused on the provision of pre-school opportunities for children between the ages of three and six years. Reflecting this, policy responsibility is shared by two government ministries; the Ministry of Education is responsible for provision with an educational function and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity responsible for provision with a caring function. Efforts have been made in recent years to improve the co-ordination of ECCE with the establishment of the Bureau for the Expansion and Development of Pre-school Education, which brings together some of the major stakeholders in the provision of ECCE.

5.7.2 Regulation

One significant measure undertaken to improve quality, particularly in terms of the pre-schools in recent years, was the introduction of comprehensive legislation covering pre-schools (institutions providing educational opportunities to children between the ages of three and six). The Framework Law outlines principles regarding the structure, organisation, pedagogical and financial aspects of pre-school education. Under the Framework Law, the State is responsible for defining the general guidelines governing pre-schools, particularly in pedagogical terms. It is also responsible for the monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the guidelines. The Framework Law places on a legislative basis aspects of quality such as curriculum guidelines and parental involvement.

5.7.3 Parents

In Portugal, the importance of participation with parents in the search for quality in pre-school institutions is recognised and parents are recognised by law as partners in pre-school education. Parents are expected to participate in the running of the pre-school either through representatives or representative associations. Parents are seen as having a role to play in developing a partnership relationship with providers, in voicing their opinion on the opening hours of the facility and on participating in the educational activities of the pre-school.

5.7.4 Curriculum

Curriculum guidelines for all pre-school services, both public and private, are laid down in legislation in Portugal. These curriculum guidelines lay down what children should learn in pre-school. They aim to improve the quality of pre-school provision by stimulating pedagogical activity in pre-schools, and as such, are a common reference points that all practitioners can use in their work.

5.7.5 Inspection

Inspection is the main mechanism utilised by the Ministry of Education for the supervision and inspection of the pre-school educational system, however, this inspection is evaluative in nature. It is based on joint diagnosis and improvement procedures. An important part of the

inspection process is the involvement of pre-school teachers in a discussion of the information gathered.

5.7.6 Staffing

It is recognised in Portugal that suitably trained and qualified early childhood professionals are essential for the expansion of high quality ECCE. All pre-schools in Portugal are staffed by trained and licensed pre-school teachers and have a pedagogical director who is a qualified pre-school teacher. This means that pre-school institutions are staffed by teachers that have completed a four year course of study leading to an honours degree at either a university or a school of higher education. Pre-school teachers with this qualification employed in public pre-schools receive the same starting salaries as primary teachers with the same level of training.

5.7.7 Professional Development

The importance of ongoing professional development in promoting high quality ECCE is recognised in Portugal and one measure adopted by the government in recent years was the provision of in-service training for all pre-school teachers, employed in both public and private pre-school institutions. In-service training is offered by a variety of different bodies including training centres and a variety of public and private entities. Many of the training programmes on offer have been developed in partnership with teacher training colleges.

5.7.8 Special Needs and Disadvantage

Children at risk are given priority entrance into some early education services in Portugal. Some social integration programmes have been sponsored for children from linguistic, cultural and ethnic minorities. An itinerant child education service is provided in some sparsely populated areas and community educational activities are provided for children in some deprived urban areas.

5.7.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from Portugal, a number of features of quality can be identified, which are worth considering in the development of a quality framework for Ireland:

- In the development of the ECCE sector, co-ordination of developments between government departments is important and efforts have been made in Portugal in recent years to improve co-ordination between government departments.
- Quality in ECCE in Portugal is broadly defined; it includes features such as curriculum guidelines and parental participation.
- Emphasis is placed on suitably trained and qualified personnel and the provision of professional development in the promotion of high quality in ECCE institutions.
- The inspection of pre-schools is evaluative in nature, based on a partnership approach with pre-school teachers.
- Some social integration programmes are provided and services provided for children at risk of both urban and rural disadvantage.

Chapter 6

Germany

Terms Used

Bundesländer	German States
Erzieherinnen	Educators
Gymnasium	University Entry Level High School
Hauptschule	Second-level School offering Five to Six Years of Schooling
Jugendamt	Youth Office providing Statutory Youth Services
Kinderhort	After School Care
Kinderpflegerinnen	Nursery Auxiliary Workers
Lander	State
Realschule	Second-level School offering Six or Seven Years of Schooling
Schillerstraße	Schiller Street
Sonderkindergärten / Förderkindergärten	Settings for Children with Special Needs
Sozialpadagoginnen	Social Pedagogues
Tagesmutter	Family Day Care Provider
Trager	Provider
Vorklassen	Pre-school Classes

6.1 Introduction

The reunification of Germany in 1990 led to the integration of two different systems of care and education. Prior to reunification, provision of ECCE was more extensive in East Germany than in the West. All children from the age of three in the East were entitled to a place in a Kindergarten programme; the primary aim of this provision was to facilitate parents accessing the workforce. Tietze *et al.* (1996:445) note that: *"All programs offered free, full-day*

services. A centralised state-controlled curriculum was used." In contrast, the female labour force participation rate was lower in the West. Consequently, enrolment in ECCE programmes for children between the ages of three and school going age was lower in the West and many programmes offered only sessional care.

The Child and Youth Welfare Act (1990) created a legislative framework covering all childcare and educational services in the East and West. Though there is a greater diversity of provision in the Western States (Lindon, 2000), provision of day care services and particularly full day care for children under the age of three is still more limited in the West than the East.

There are no binding care guidelines for the country as a whole. This means that there are considerable differences between individual States with regard to the form of day-care centres for children. There is also a separation between education and care in Germany. Care services provide for children under the age of three, while children over the age of three access educational services (Pettinger, 1993).

Concerns about quality in Germany have emerged in the 1990s, partly as a result of the changing context of ECCE services, and partly due to the increasing importance of transparency and cost effectiveness. In Germany, the federal system impacts on quality. The commitment to provide a pre-school place for every child from the age of three also raised concerns for quality, as some felt that this legal entitlement would be obtained through the increase in group size and staff-child ratios. This was a real concern as this commitment was made at a time when Germany was experiencing financial restrictions. Consequently, quality assurance grew in importance (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997).

Some experts in early education in Germany believe that German pre-school education is fundamentally lacking in generally binding and measurable quality standards and that it is now at a very low level on an international scale. They are critical of the fact that though childcare policy aims to remedy quantitative deficits, such as a lack of Kindergarten places or opening times that are too short, it does little for the quality of the educational work (Goethe Institut, Accessed at: http://www.goethe.de/kug/buw/sub/ein/en24571.htm, 1st July, 2004).

6.2 Context for Quality

6.2.1 Philosophy

The Child and Youth Welfare Act (1990) determines that the primary aim of pre-school education is to facilitate the development of a responsible and socially competent child. Pre-schools are to provide support to parents in the upbringing of their child. Development is achieved through play and other suitable activities. Keaveny (2002) notes that children are introduced to communal living in Kindergartens, becoming familiar with organized daily routines and with basic principles of hygiene. The Kindergarten also provides important school preparation for children. Programmes are developed based on the educational aims of the institution and its philosophical, religious or educational principles. Gelder (2000:49) remarks that:

> *...the argument that children need routine - perhaps better called rhythm - is strong in Germany. It is an issue in textbooks for childcare workers and parents. The physical and emotional development process of children is seen to demand structure and it is believed that learning is supported by routines.*

6.2.2 Policy

Germany has a federal political structure

with sixteen States (*Bundesländer*). Overall responsibility for pre-school education in Germany lies with the central government. In Germany, pre-school education is part of the social welfare and not the education system (Griebel and Niesel, 1999). Under the Basic Law, the central government enacts legislation on child and youth welfare within the framework of public welfare. This includes legislation concerning pre-school education for children in day-care centers (Keaveny, 2002).

The Child and Youth Welfare Act (1990) empowered individual States to devise their own ECCE legislation. Under this act, the *Lander* (States) are required to give concrete form to the general outlines of the law on pre-school institutions through their own legislation. *Lander* experience a great deal of autonomy, and as a result, legislative and administrative structures differ from *Lander* to *Lander*, with notable differences between Eastern and Western *Lander*. Most services are the responsibility of the social or welfare ministries at a local level. The implementation and financing of child and youth welfare legislation, including pre-school education, is the responsibility of the local authorities (Kultusministerkonferenz[13] , Accessed at: http://www.kmk.org/dossier/dossier_2002/3_preschool_2002.pdf, 15th July, 2004).

6.2.3 Funding

Funding varies from *Lander* to *Lander* (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997) but the main type of funding supplied for ECCE is supply funding (Candappa *et al.*, 2003). Kindergartens and other childcare facilities are funded from four different sources, the specific provider (trager), parental fees, local authority subsidies and State subsidies (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). In the case of Kindergartens, parental contributions are graduated accorded to income so that low-income families can afford a Kindergarten place. Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997) estimate that parental fees account for between ten and fifteen per cent of operating costs. Individual States subsidise some places and these are allocated by local authorities (Keaveny, 2002).

Since 1996, all children are entitled to a Kindergarten place from the age of three. Although attendance at a Kindergarten is not mandatory in Germany, the vast majority of children spend at least some of the day in a childcare centre. However, Kindergartens provide only sessional care for children. Spiess *et al.* (2003) note that places at full day care facilities for children under the age of three are limited and children of single parent families have priority. In West Germany, in 1998, only about twenty per cent of places available in Kindergarten were full day care places (Spiess *et al.*, 2003). There are significantly more childcare places for children under the age of three in Eastern Germany (Kreyenfeld *et al.*, 2000).

6.2.4 Delivery Strategies

Most institutions are run by non-profit providers and are heavily subsidised by the local community and the federal State. In Western *Lander*, about 70 per cent of all childcare and early educational services are run by voluntary agencies, mainly religious and humanistic organisations, while about 30 per cent are run by local authorities (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). In Eastern *Lander*, the majority of services are run by the municipalities (Lindon, 2000). Public authorities are required to establish facilities where appropriate provision cannot be made by other bodies (Keaveny, 2002).

There are only a limited number of private childcare institutions in Germany but these

13 The Standing Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Conference of Education Ministers (KMK) - for short) is an organization of the state ministers/senators responsible for education, colleges and universities, research, and cultural affairs.

do not receive public subsidies (Kreyenfeld *et al.*, 2000). Keaveny (2002:130) suggests that in recent years *"...the legislator has given priority to provisions offered by the private sector bodies in the field of pre-school education."*

6.3 Defining Quality

6.3.1 Regulations

In Germany, quality is generally regulated at the State level with a focus on structural features such as staff-child ratios, group size or building standards (Kreyenfeld *et al.*, 2001). The private non-subsidised sector is not regulated nationally in Germany (although low-income parents must use provision approved by the local authority to be eligible for subsidy).

The Child and Youth Services Act (1990) states that family day care providers do not have to seek permission from the *Jugendamt* (youth office providing statutory youth services), provided they do not care for four or more children, including their own. A registered *Tagesmutter* (family day care provider) can care for up to six children. If the family day care provider is subsidised, then the provider must be registered and may undergo assessment by the *Jugendamt*:

> *Land laws have the power to specify and regulate childcare services within the framework of the Act, for example to set the circumstances that warrant eligibility for subsidy and also the amount, which is paid directly to the childcare provider rather than the parents.* (Gelder, 2000:44-45)

6.3.2 Curriculum

In terms of curriculum, Keaveny (2002) notes that there are guidelines contained in the 1990 Child and Youth Welfare Act which *Lander* adapt according to their legislation. Furthermore, Keaveny (2002:131) states that:

> *...there is no centrally prescribed curriculum. The body responsible for the establishment defines its educational principles jointly with staff and the parents, on the basis of the essential educational aims of the Kindergarten and their own philosophical, religious or educational principles.*

6.4 Measuring Quality

6.4.1 Inspection

Childcare services run by voluntary agencies are inspected by State authorities (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). In *Lander*, assessment of family day care providers (usually those providers registered) are carried out by the *Jugendamt* (Gelder, 2000).

6.4.2 International Child Care and Education Project (ICCE)

The ICCE project examined quality in centre-based ECCE programmes for children aged three to six across five countries, including Germany (Tietze *et al.*, 1996). Data was collected in 1993-1994 and both the ECERS and the CIS were used to observe process quality in pre-school classrooms (Tietze *et al.*, 1996). In Germany, 69 per cent of classroom had ECERS scores that lay between minimal and good and 29 per cent of classrooms had ECERS scores that lay between good and excellent. Overall, a higher proportion of German pre-school classrooms achieved scores between minimal and good and between good and excellent than pre-school classrooms in the United States and Spain. Tietze *et al.* (1996) also suggest that the variation in quality found in the pre-schools in Germany was in part a reflection of the two different systems of ECCE that existed prior to reunification.

This study also examined the relative importance of groups of marker variables in the ECERS scale in determining quality in different countries. One dimension examined in this regard was the dimension labelled *"personalised care"*, which included variables from the ECERS scale such as item one (greeting and departing), item four (diapering/toileting), item five (personal grooming), item eight (furnishings for relaxation and comfort) and item nineteen (scheduled times for gross motor activity). High scores on item one indicated that children were greeted in a warm and personalised manner. A high score on item four and five indicated a concern for personal care as an individual learning experience, while a high score on item eight demonstrated personalised care for children by providing soft furnishings. Scheduled time for gross motor activity was viewed in a negative way, as scheduling is in contrast to a more informal relaxed environment, seen as conducive to personalised care. Of the five countries included in this study, Germany had the second highest score on this dimension, suggesting that personalised care was an important component of quality in Germany.

Another dimension examined by Tietze *et al.* (1996:467) was the dimension labeled *"...availability and use of space and material..."* ECERS variables included in this dimension included item seventeen (gross motor space), item eighteen (gross motor equipment), item twenty-four (sand and water), item twenty-eight (space to be alone) and item twenty-nine (free play). Tietze *et al.* (1996) note that the high scores on each of these items was closely related to the availability of space and the provision of physical resources for learning and play. Germany was the country to score highest in this dimension, suggesting that German pre-schools perform well on these aspects of quality. Mooney *et al.* (2003) suggest that these results reflect the fact that physical space is organised in German pre-schools to allow for free choice and exploration, rather than emphasising group activities.

Cryer *et al.* (1999) examined the structural factors that were most significant in predicting process quality across five countries. They note that the:

> *...strongest correlates of ECERS scores in Germany included as positive predictors teacher tenure, teacher-child ratios, group size, and physical size and as negative predictors teacher experience, enrollment size, hours open and director experience.* (Cryer et al., 1999:349)

Cryer *et al.* (1999) note that the strongest predictor of quality in the German context was adult-child ratios.

6.5 Supporting Quality

6.5.1 Training

A wide diversity of training exists in Germany for those working in the ECCE sector. There is no national agreement regarding training, though there are framework guidelines. There are three main types of professional training available, *Erzieherinnen* (educators), *Kinderpflegerinnen* (nursery auxiliary workers) and *Sozialpadagoginnen* (social pedagogues). According to Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997), educators are the largest group, accounting for 55.9 per cent of all those working in ECCE settings. Educators are not trained exclusively to work in Kindergarten but are trained to work in a variety of socio-pedagogical settings including Kindergartens, day nurseries, parents co-operatives, school age childcare, youth centres, youth organisations and youth hostels, children's wards and residential care settings. Educators undertake training at vocational colleges specialising in social pedagogy. About 60 per cent of these colleges are State run and

the remaining 40 per cent are mainly attached to religious organisations.

About one quarter of those embarking on training have already completed some form of vocational training or have been employed; the remainder complete a one or two year practicum. Training takes three years to complete. Nursery auxiliary workers undertake two years training at a vocational school. Social pedagogues are trained with social workers and complete between four and four and a half years of training. The first two years of study is focused on general studies in the areas of social work and social pedagogy. Following this, students specialise in one particular area such as childcare. Training in Germany is therefore broad based and extends beyond the ECCE sector. Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997:105-106) note that:

> *This calls for a form of training which allows on the one hand for general studies in the field, and on the other for specialization and in-depth study in one or two chosen fields, coupled with strategies for transferring this knowledge to other fields of work.*

They also observe that a better developed system of in-service education and advisory support is needed.

Training for family day care providers is often provided by the German family day care association, funded jointly by the federal State and individual *Lander* (Gelder, 2000). There is a recognition of the importance of training for the provision of quality childcare and in 1993, the German government financed a scheme *"Qualification of Tagesmutter in Rural Areas."* This scheme was focused on the States of East Germany (Gelder, 2000) and was an attempt to fill emerging gaps in day care provision and provide an income source for women. Gelder states that in one German *Lander* (Rostock), two training courses commencing in 1997 were provided free of charge to family day care providers with the assistance of the family day care association. One of these courses provided 100 hours of training to trained childcare workers (many of whom had worked previously in public day care facilities prior to reunification) and one course providing 180 hours of training for those with no formal childcare training.

6.5.2 Early Excellence Centre

The *Schillerstraße Child and Family Centre* is an Early Excellence Centre in Germany, established in association with the Pen Green Centre in England. Early Excellence Centres integrate teaching, care and education for the whole family into one centre. The *Schillerstraße Child and Family Centre* is studying ways in which it might implement the guiding principle of 'integrative family involvement in Kindergartens'. This involves getting parents involved in the education and development of their children, acknowledging parents as experts and redesigning Kindergartens as centres where children, parents and staff learn together.

The *Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus*[14] (PFH) consists of eleven Kindergartens, a training centre for teachers, a neighbourhood and family centre and social projects for young people. The PFH hopes to incorporate the experiences of this Early Excellence Centre model into its own training centres and to publish material regarding the project.

6.5.3 Parental Involvement

Since 1990, all Kindergartens are required to establish a parents' committee with the aim of increasing parental participation in publicly funded services (Lindon, 2000).

14 For more information on the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, visit http://www.pfh-berlin.de/english/1/history.html

6.5.4 Frankfurt Kindergarten Programme

The *Frankfurt Kindergarten Programme* was initiated in response to the programme of expanding pre-school provision undertaken in the 1990s (Penn, 2000). This building programme was embarked upon as part of the celebrations to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the city and was based on a belief that Kindergartens were symbols of contemporary life and living. Since the programme began, twelve Kindergarten have been completed, nine are under construction and there are plans for a further nine (Burgard, 2000).

In designing the Kindergartens, architects had to fulfil certain criteria. Each Kindergarten had to accommodate at least four group rooms and a *kinderhort* (After School Care) (Penn, 2000). Both facilities had to have spaces that were exclusive to children, where children could play or retreat from adults. A large hall or communal space was also to be included in the design of each building. This project led to a series of innovative designs including one Kindergarten designed as a small town with houses, a bridge, a street and a square (Burgard, 2000). Another Kindergarten was designed along the lines of a fairytale castle, with the entire building covered by a meadow on the roof planted with trees. Another was designed with graduated terraces over four stories, to compensate for the lack of open space.

Penn (2000) makes a number of key points in relation to this building programme. Firstly, the building programme recognised the important social function played by ECCE institutions and celebrated it. Secondly, the building programme was very well funded. Thirdly, many of the Kindergartens were located in low cost housing estates and in areas with a high proportion of immigrants. Fourthly, all Kindergartens incorporated some ecological features such as growing roofs and solar heating while all had access to an outdoor playspace. This building programme recognized the importance of the space that children occupy on a daily basis and tried to create a space appropriate for children.

6.5.5 National Quality Initiative

A National Quality initiative was launched in Germany in 2000. Under this initiative *"...quality indicators are to be developed in a joint research venture across the federal system and across a variety of providers."* (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2000:2)

A variety of different initiatives have been embarked upon under this programme. Two projects are focused on developing quality indicators and practical assessment procedures for evaluating the pedagogical work with children aged birth to six. These projects aim to develop a basic set of quality indicators for work with children from birth to six years, to develop assessment procedures for self-evaluation and internal quality assurance strategies and to develop an instrument for the external evaluation of quality. As a product, this project aims to produce accessible, flexible and relatively low cost printed material which will be easily available to ECCE institutions for self-evaluation and internal quality development procedures.

6.5.6 Research

Several pieces of research in Germany have examined the impact of quality childcare on children's outcomes. One early study in Germany (Tietze, 1987) employed secondary data analysis to look at the effects of the regional provision of Kindergarten places on school achievement. Findings indicated a positive relationship between ECCE programmes and school achievement, as measured by grade retention and special education placement. However this study looked at data for only one German State (North Rhine-Westphalia).

Spiess *et al.* (2003) highlight the results of a study carried out by Tietze *et al.*, (1996), which analysed the characteristics of quality in more than 400 Kindergarten. Results of this study demonstrated a positive relationship between quality of care and a child's cognitive and social performance. A follow up study of the cross-national analysis of ECCE across four countries was carried out by the ECCE study group in 1999. This study analysed the longitudinal effects of Kindergarten quality on child outcomes:

> *The results of this study indicate that the quality of ECP's after controlling for effects of child characteristics and characteristics of educational quality in families during the pre-school phase, accounts for 1 to 15 percent on inter-individual differences in the different measures of cognitive/school achievement and socio-emotional development of 8 year olds.* (Spiess et al., 2003:7)

Speiss *et al.* (2003) examined the relationship between community based ECCE programmes in the former West Germany and children's seventh grade placement in more or less academically demanding schools. In all German States, parents choose between three different types of secondary school which begin with the fifth grade, *Gymnasium* (university entry level high school), *Realschule* (six or seven years of schooling) and *Hauptschule* (five to six years of schooling). This choice of secondary schools has an important effect on the life chances of the student, determining whether or not the student attends university and affecting the students' future labour market chances. Spiess *et al.* (2003) found that 41 per cent of children without Kindergarten experience compared to 64 per cent of children who attended Kindergarten attended *Realschule* or *Gymnasium* at age 14. Speiss *et al.* (2003) also found that 51 per cent of immigrant children who had some Kindergarten experience attended *Realschule* or *Gymnasium*, compared to 21 per cent or immigrant children with no Kindergarten experience. One of the most important conclusions of the study is that:

> *...having attended Kindergarten care in West Germany significantly raises the probability of being placed into a higher educational level of school.* (Speiss et al., 2003:18)

6.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

Particular importance is attached to providing early assistance to children with disabilities. Two types of establishment fulfill this function: *Sonderkindergärten* (which are sometimes known as *Förderkindergärten*) care for and support children with disabilities only and integrative *Kindergarten* take care of children with and without disabilities (Kultusministerkonferenz, Accessed at: http://www.kmk.org/dossier/dossier_2002/3_preschool_2002.pdf, July 23rd, 2004). Penn (2000:86) comments that many children with disabilities are segregated into separate provision in Germany and that *"...there is no attempt to consider disabled access or any other building features that reflect the needs of the disabled."*

Some *Länder* have established so-called *Vorklassen* (pre-school classes) for five-year-olds who have not reached compulsory schooling age but whose parents wish them to receive assistance with their preparation for primary school. Attendance of *Vorklassen* is voluntary and children in these services learn through play.

6.7 Implications for Ireland

6.7.1 Regulation

Though overall responsibility for ECCE lies with the central government in Germany, under national legislation, individual States are empowered to enact their own legislation. This means that there is considerable variability in the legislative and administrative structures for pre-school education between the different federal States, regarding structural aspects of quality such as premises, staff-child ratios and group size. These regulations do not cover private, non-subsidised childcare services.

6.7.2 Staffing

There is no single qualification required of practitioners working in ECCE setting. More than half of the practitioners working in ECCE settings hold a three-year tertiary qualification designed to prepare practitioners for a variety of socio-pedagogical settings, including a variety of ECCE settings, youth organisations and residential childcare settings.

6.7.3 Inspection

State authorities inspect childcare Services that fall within the remit of the State's regulations.

6.7.4 Parents

The importance of parental participation for high quality ECCE is recognised in Germany and all Kindergarten are required to establish a parents committee with the aim of increasing parental participation in publicly funded services.

6.7.5 Research

In Germany, a variety of diverse initiatives exploring different ways in which the quality of ECCE can be improved have been launched. This includes the establishment of an Early Excellence Centre, based on the model of the Pen Green Early Excellence Centre in England. In addition, two projects focused on developing quality indictors and practical assessment procedures for evaluating pedagogical work carried out with children have been initiated. An integral part of these projects is the development of resources that will be easily accessible for ECCE institutions for self-evaluation and internal quality development procedures.

6.7.6 Special Needs

Providing early assistance to children with special needs is identified as important in Germany. While some children with special needs are integrated, many children with special needs are segregated into pre-schools, which only care for and support children with special needs.

6.7.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from Germany, a number of features of quality can be identified which are worth considering in the development of the NFQ for Ireland:

- There is no national co-ordinated framework for ECCE in Germany, leading to considerable variability in pre-school education between the different federal States.
- Quality is defined in terms of structural features and individual States regulate and inspect for structural aspects of quality.
- The importance of parental participation is recognised and all pre-schools are required to establish a parents' committee.
- A number of initiatives, designed to explore ways in which quality can be improved have been launched and an innovative building programme has

focused attention on the importance of the childcare environment in determining high quality in ECCE.

- While some children with special needs are integrated in settings, others are segregated into pre-schools designed to support their needs.

Chapter 7

New Zealand

Terms Used

A'oga Fa'asamoa	Samoan Immersion Education
Kohanga	Maori Language Immersion Centres
Tagata Pasefica	Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres
Te Reo Maori	The Maori Language
Te Whariki	New Zealand Curriculum
Ti Kanga Maori	Customs and traditions handed down over generations

7.1 Introduction

Quality has emerged as an overarching concern in the ECCE sector in New Zealand. May (2002b) cites government agencies such as the Early Childhood Development Unit and the Ministry of Education becoming more proactive as regards quality in ECCE in the 1990s. At the same time, the last decade of the twentieth century was characterised by a rolling back of the State and the adoption of a non-interventionist stance by the government in terms of ECCE (Dalli, 2003). Dalli suggests that this non-interventionist stance was linked to a decline in quality of ECCE. According to Dalli (2003), many of the developments designed to improve the quality of ECCE such as the curriculum, the code of ethics and the proposal for the future direction of ECCE emerged from the sector. These were a response to the non-interventionist stance of the government and the result of evidence which suggested that:

> *New Zealand's early childhood services could be doing better in the overall provision of quality.* (Early Childhood Education Project, 2000:7)

Dalli (2003) suggests that these developments were most successful when they aligned with government policy.

7.2 Context for Quality

7.2.1 Philosophy

In reviewing developments in the ECCE sector in New Zealand, May (2002b) identifies three different political perspectives which have influenced government rationale for interest and investment in ECCE in the twentieth century; the age of psychology, the age of equity and the age of quality. According to May (2002b:7):

> *... the emphasis from government was to encourage and/or require centres to establish policies, systems and processes for achieving "quality outcomes" for children.*

7.2.2 Policy

In New Zealand, the policy making locus is national and it is the Ministry of Education that provides the overall policy framework for ECCE. In 1986, administrative responsibility for all childcare services was transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education (Everiss and Dalli, 2003), which provides the funding available for ECCE services. The Educational Review Office (ERO) monitors childcare provision to ensure accountability and the Early Childhood Development Unit provides advice and in-service training. The Early Childhood Development Unit was integrated with the Ministry of Education in October 2003.

7.2.3 Funding

New Zealand utilises supply and demand funding subsidies (Candappa *et al.*, 2003). ECCE is funded by a mixture of government funding and parental fees (Clearinghouse, 2003a). Research suggests that the mixed funding model means that:

> *...family income (does) not seem to be a deciding factor in children's access to good quality early childhood education.* (Wylie, 1996:22)

Most funding comes from a grant-in-aid to services (Petrie *et al.*, 2003), known as bulk funding, paid by the Ministry of Education. Funding is paid on the basis of type of service, the quality standard met and the ages of the children enrolled (Ministry of Education, 2003b). In 2004, the bulk funding formula comprises four funding rates, based on an amount per child per hour, differentiated on the basis of whether the child is over two years or under two years.

The child per hour funding rates applicable from the 1st July 2004 are:

- Rate 1 - the base-funding rate for all licensed and chartered services excluding Kindergartens is $5.70 per hour per child for children under the age of two and $2.86 per hour per child for children over the age of two;
- Rate 2 - a higher rate is paid to chartered services that meet standards higher than licence requirements for staff-child ratios and staff qualifications. $6.51 per hour per child for children under two years and $3.26 per hour per child for children two years and over;
- Rate 3 - $4.23 per child-place per hour for children enrolled in a Kindergarten.
- Rate 4 - for licence-exempt centres is $1.18 for licence-exempt centres[15] (New Zealand Government, Undated, Accessed at: http:///www.beehive.govt.nz/families/facts.cfm, July 15th, 2004).

Services can claim funding for a maximum of six hours per child per day, with a limit of 30 hours per week (Ministry of

15 The exchange rate as of July 2004 was 1 New Zealand Dollar = €0.53.

Education, 2003b). A universal funding formula forms the basis for direct grant funding subsidies of chartered ECCE services.

An income related Childcare Subsidy is available to parents of pre-school children under five years of age (or under six for those eligible for a Child Disability Allowance) using a form of licensed childcare. Funding for license-exempt ECCE centres is administered by the Early Childhood Development Unit (Ministry of Education, 2003b).

7.2.4 Delivery Strategies

Though ECCE is largely publicly funded, provision is delivered mainly through the community and private sector. According to Meade and Podmore (2002), the majority of childcare services in New Zealand are community based and run by not-for-profit organisations. May (2002b) notes that there is almost total reliance on the market-place of community and private endeavour for provision. The Correspondence School, a State operated distance-learning service, is the main form of early childcare provision owned by the government (Meade and Podmore, 2002).

Mitchell (2002) examined the differences between privately owned and community owned ECCE provision in terms of the provision of quality education for children. Community owned centres were more likely to employ a significantly higher proportion of staff with a teaching qualification and a lower proportion of staff with no ECCE qualifications than privately owned childcare facilities. Administrative auspice was also significant in terms of the ways in which overheads were reduced at a time of diminished government funding. Private childcare facilities were more likely to reduce overheads by making negative changes to staff such as poorer ratios, bigger groups, redundancy, less in-service training, by changing staff working conditions, or by non-replacement of equipment or buildings etc. Community based facilities were more likely to look for savings in areas that kept staff and conditions intact (Mitchell, 2002).

There is concern in New Zealand about relying primarily on the market as the key mechanism for meeting the needs of parents and children, what Dalli (2003:5) calls the discourse of *"...purchasing services"*. Mitchell (2002) notes that researchers and commentators in New Zealand have been highly critical of the market approach to ECCE during the 1990s, with its assumption that markets are the best way to raise quality and meet the needs of families. For example, Smith and Farquhar (1994) are critical of the principle of parental choice, often the main policy component used to improve quality in a deregulated market. Under this principle, parents choose the type of centre that best fits their values and needs and market forces thereby determine the survival of any particular facility:

> *If parents have some knowledge and understanding of the things which make up good quality care and education and they have access to centres which offer these things, then there is no problem with this theory.* (Smith and Farquhar, 1994:137)

However the level of parents' knowledge of indicators of high quality care and education can be questioned.

7.3 Defining Quality

7.3.1 Regulation

In New Zealand, one set of childcare regulations covers the full range of ECCE settings (Ministry of Education, 2003b). Unless centres meet specific requirements for licence-exempt services, they are required to be licensed under the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (1998). Licensing regulations set minimum

standards for premises, group size and minimum staffing numbers, programmes, curriculum, organisation and management of early childhood centres (Ministry of Education, 2003b).

Family day care is regulated by the Education (Home Based Care) Order which is subsumed in the charter of the home-based service (Ministry of Education, 2003b). The Order has a strong focus on structural aspects of quality such as caregiver-child ratios, network size, co-ordinator qualifications and requirements for visiting caregivers' homes (Everiss and Dalli, 2003).

7.3.2 Charter

To be eligible for government funding, ECCE services are also required to be chartered (Ministry of Education, 2003b). The Charter system was a government directed reform introduced in New Zealand in the late 1980s. The charter was defined as:

> *...a contract between the Ministry of Education and the individual centre, drawn up through consultation with parents and the community. Charter documents contain an outline of centre policies, philosophies and characteristics. They are required to specify in what ways and how the individual centre intends to work towards standards of higher quality than the minimum licensing level. The charter is a quality assurance mechanism for the government.* (Farquhar, 1991:526)

The charter allowed for the inclusion of research-based criteria of quality (structural aspects of quality) determined at a national level alongside the values, culture and philosophy of individual services:

> *The concept of the charter was to maintain the diversity of programs, philosophies, and cultural values that existed in the New Zealand early childhood programmes while ensuring a national standard of quality child care.* (Golberg, 1999:11)

The importance of the Treaty of Waitangi[16], cultural survival and other cultural values was recognised in the Charter system and consultation with staff, parents and the community was seen as central in the development of the charter (Smith and Farquhar, 1994).

Initially the charter was to meet National Guidelines, which were set out in the Management Handbook distributed to all centres. These guidelines covered nine areas including Charter and Review Procedures, The Learner, Special Needs Children, Health, Safety and Equity, Staff Development and Advisory Support and Land and Buildings (Smith and Farquhar, 1994). Each area stated a non-negotiable principle and described what should be included in a centre's plan of work to meet this principle. The National Guidelines set down standards in areas such as staffing, curriculum, value issues and advisory support. These standards were higher than the minimum licensing standards. It was intended that centres that met minimum licensing standards and had a Charter committing them to higher standards would be eligible for additional government funding (Smith and Farquhar, 1994:126).

In 1989, shortly after the introduction of the charter system a change in government resulted in what Smith and Farquhar (1994:126) termed *"...some major losses, all of which impact on the achievement of higher quality"*. The Management Handbook was replaced by "The Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices"

16 The Treaty of Waitangi, was signed in 1840 in connection with the early settlement of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It was designed to protect governance, treasured sites and objects and land for Maori, and establish British rule for Pakeha settlers. The Treaty sets out overarching obligations and principles of partnership between the Maori people and later settlers in this country.

(DOPs). This was a less stringent and less prescriptive document, which removed the requirements to meet higher than minimum standards and the requirement to involve stakeholders in the writing of the charter (Golberg, 1999). For example, there was no mention of staff-child ratios in the DOPs (Smith and Farquhar, 1994). Only minimum standards were required to obtain funding.

Smith and Farquhar (1994) identify several areas where the implementation of the charter had a positive effect on quality in ECCE services. Quality in terms of some structural features, such as ratios, improved. For centres, the process of developing a charter highlighted awareness of some of the value issues central to the Meade report (Meade, 1988) such as biculturalism and equity. It encouraged centres to formulate their own values and goals and to implement practices that reflected these values and goals. Self-reflection on the part of staff was encouraged, as staff clarified and codified their practices and reflected on the philosophy and values of their service. However:

> *...the incentive to upgrade to a higher quality than minimum standards was largely removed with the introduction of the "Desirable Objectives and Practices"... (this) meant that many of the aspects of the charter which were intended to promote quality have disappeared.* (Smith and Farquhar, 1994:137-138)

7.4 Measuring Quality

7.4.1 Early Childhood Education Review

The ERO monitors whether or not centres are meeting their charter requirements (Smith and Farquhar, 1994). An Early Childhood Education Review is an external evaluation of the education and care provided for children in all early childhood education services (ERO, 2002a). There are three main stages in the review process. In the first stage, a review team collects information, including the written findings from the services self-review, and discusses the scope of the review with the service manager. In the second stage, the review team visits the service and in the third stage, the review team prepares a report (ERO, 2002a). ERO reports outline where services are doing well, where they need to improve and what steps should be taken to implement these improvements (ERO, 2002a). The external evaluation sees itself as having two main roles; that of accountability and educational improvement (assessment and assistance). However, it should be noted that while the ERO may be involved in the development of recommendations and the formulation of action plans, it has no involvement in the implementation of these plans.

The framework for review utilised by the ERO is based on four main strands:

- The quality of education;
- Additional review priorities;
- Areas of specific government interest and;
- Compliance issues (ERO, 2002b).

Strand A, the quality of education, deals with the quality of the programme offered, the learning environment and the interactions that take place there. Priorities for this strand are based on information provided in the self-review (ERO, 2002b). During the review process, more time is likely to be spent on Strand A when it is not necessary to focus on compliance issues (ERO, 2002b).

Issues such as the quality of educators and management are investigated in Strand B. These issues are important because they affect the quality of education provided, but their influence may be less direct than the quality of the programmes themselves. It has been suggested that the ERO

procedures for monitoring quality places great emphasis on compliance with government regulations to the detriment of other process variables of quality (Hurst and Smith, 1995).

7.5 Supporting Quality

7.5.1 Curriculum

Te Whariki, the national ECCE curriculum framework designed to cover children from the time of birth to school entry, was introduced in 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whariki* is a Maori word meaning *"...a woven mat for all to stand on..."*; the use of this work captures the idea that learning is a weaving of experiences (Dalli, 2003:6). *Te Whariki* is designed to recognise and support the diversity of types of ECCE provision that exists in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996). Meade and Podmore (2002:31) describe *Te Whariki* as a *"socio-cultural curriculum."* The curriculum:

> *...emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things.* (Ministry of Education, 1996:9)

It is designed to form the basis for the curriculum and programmes in all chartered services for children. *Te Whariki* outlines principles, strands and goals, which are distinctively appropriate for ECCE (Ministry of Education, 1996). In the introduction to the revised DOPs, *Te Whariki* is endorsed as an example of a quality curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1998). One of the aims of designing the curriculum was to *"...articulate a philosophy of quality early childhood practice."* (Carr and May, 2000:53).

Te Whariki is underpinned by the four principles:

- Empowerment;
- Holistic development;
- Family and community and;
- Relationships (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The strands describe five different areas of learning and development:

- Well-being;
- Belonging;
- Contribution;
- Communication and;
- Exploration (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The goals provide clear direction for the learning programmes built on the principles and strands (Ministry of Education, 2003b). For example, the strand 'well-being' includes the goals:

> *Children experience an environment where their health in promoted, their emotional well-being is nurtured and they are kept safe from harm.* (Ministry of Education, 1996:15)

Te Whariki is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and it is intended that children with additional needs will be integrated into childcare services. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) is to be developed for any children that require additional or alternative resources other than those usually provided within an ECCE setting (Ministry of Education, 1996). The Ministry of Education, (1996:11) asserts that the objectives of such plans *"...will be realistic, useful, and of value to the child and the family."* The service is to provide the equipment and activities that meet the objectives of the IDP/IEP.

Te Whariki emphasises the social and cultural context of children's learning and two distinctive contexts are specifically identified in the curriculum framework; Maori immersion programmes and the

Tagata Pasefica programmes (Pacific Islands early childhood centres). The curriculum framework highlights the importance of meeting the needs of these specific groups and includes examples that focus on these specific contexts. All the principles, strands and goals of the curriculum are designed to apply to all contexts.

The curriculum can be seen as moving ECCE in New Zealand away from the developmental framework:

> *As centres have been faced with the challenge of "weaving" their own programme within the framework of Te Whariki, a new terminology has developed about curriculum experiences for children, rather than activities for children, based on the concepts of well-being and belonging, contribution, communication and exploration rather than physical, intellectual, emotional and social development.* (Dalli, 2003:6-7)

An important aspect of the success of the curriculum has been the government support for it. Carr and May (1998) note that the government has provided funding for professional development focused on Te Whariki. According to Carr and May (1998:17), there have been issues around the implementation of Te Whariki:

> *...the low regulatory environment and funding levels make it difficult for centres to meet the high expectations of quality outlined in Te Whariki.*

Carr and May (1998) suggest that the holistic and bicultural approach to the curriculum may also be a challenge to practitioners who have traditionally focused on separate play areas and activities. Carr and May (1998) also note that the political climate has made more demands on practitioners in relation to curriculum assessment and evaluation. They suggest that greater funding and regulatory control are required to improve quality:

> *The feedback suggests that to implement Te Whariki fully requires a larger and bolder investment by government to support the infrastructure of early childhood than is currently available. Small increases in funding have not been sufficient to offset the costs of new quality criteria, and of concern are the number of centres that are not prepared to begin to climb the ladder of quality.* (Carr and May, 2000:68)

Cullen (1996) has questioned whether the *"soft"* approach of *Te Whariki* can deliver quality provision, given the realities of an under resourced and poorly trained sector. Professional development programmes in relation to *Te Whariki* have been limited. The Government's Education Review Office (ERO) was also critical of *Te Whariki*. Reviewers employed by the ERO have encountered difficulties in understanding and measuring the holistic strands, principles and goals of *Te Whariki*. Their report outlined the complexity of the curriculum and observed that a high level of training and/or guidance was necessary for implementation (ERO, 1998). The ERO found in a 1997 survey that sixteen per cent of centres reviewed were lacking in confidence to implement the curriculum while another 38 per cent needed to improve (ERO, 1998).

The ERO found in a 1997 survey of 200 childcare centres, 100 Kindergartens and 100 playcentres that 7% of centres had minimal awareness and use of *Te Whariki*, 16% were aware of but had yet to implement *Te Whariki* and 38% used *Te Whariki* as a base for their programmes, but they needed to improve one or more of the planning, implementation or evaluation processes (Educational Review Office, 1998).

During the 1990s, the New Zealand Ministry of Education funded several research projects that worked to develop frameworks for evaluation and assessment based on *Te Whariki*. These approaches have attempted to respond to a new conception of a curriculum from a socio-cultural and ecological perspective, with a new approach to evaluation and assessment through learning and teaching stories (Carr and May, 1998). Teaching and learning stories represent a narrative rather than a skills approach to assessment and innovation (Carr and May, 1998).

7.5.2 Learning Stories

The Project for Assessing Children's Experiences (1995 - 1997) was designed to identify key outcomes from *Te Whariki* and to work with practitioners across a range of ECCE settings in the development of a range of assessment ideas and procedures that would be useful in their work with young children (Podmore and Carr, 1999). There were three phases to the project; the establishment of a framework for assessment, the piloting of this framework in five different ECCE settings and the development of a resource pack for practitioners (Carr, 1998b).

In *Te Whariki*, children's learning outcomes were outlined in two ways; as working theories and as dispositions. The framework for assessment nested the idea of dispositions in the idea of working theories:

> *It looked for children's emerging working theories about what it is to be a learner and about themselves as learners. And it developed the idea that these working theories were made up of packages of learning dispositions.* (Carr, 1998b:15)

The framework focused on five broadly based behaviours (or learning dispositions) and a number of observable criteria for each of these behaviours. The learning dispositions included:

- Finding something of interest;
- Being involved;
- Persevering with difficulty;
- Expressing an idea or point of view and;
- Taking another point of view (Carr, 1998b:18).

Carr (1998b) notes that another way to view these dispositions is to see them as a chain or package of decisions and actions to accompany them, described as learning stories. The documentation of children's learning was seen as central to the learning stories assessment approach and a four-part assessment approach was laid out describing, documenting, discussing and deciding on progress.

In phase three of the project for assessing children's experiences, some resources for professional development programmes on assessment in ECCE settings were developed (Carr, 1998a). Three videos and an accompanying booklet and overhead transparencies were produced. The videos encourage practitioners to ask the following questions as they explore how to best weave assessment into their curriculum (*Te Whariki*):

1. What should we assess?
2. Why should we assess it?
3. How should we assess it?

The booklet provides guidelines for four workshops on assessment in ECCE settings based on the three videos:

1. What is assessment, what do we want to assess?
2. Learning Stories is an example of what to assess
3. Why assess, who are assessments for?
4. How do we assess?

7.5.2.1 Learning and Teaching Stories

Funded by the Ministry of Education, the project for developing a framework for self-evaluation of ECCE programmes aimed to identify the key elements of programme quality in relation to the strands and goals of the curriculum *Te Whariki* (Podmore and Carr, 1999). The project developed an assessment and evaluation framework called learning and teaching stories, which could be used to assess children and evaluate centre programmes. Central to the project was the idea that the evaluation of ECCE programs should be grounded in quality from the child's perspective (Carr *et al.*, 2000). The project focused on establishing a structure for the evaluation of the five areas of development and learning, as outlined in questions emanating from the child:

- Belonging - Do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family? (Do you know me?)
- Well-being - Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration? (Can I trust you?)
- Exploration - Do you engage my mind, offer challenges and extend my world? (Do you let me fly?)
- Communication - Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts? (Do you hear me?)
- Contribution - Do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of a wider group? (Is this place fair for us?)

In 1998, the project began a new phase, involving an action research trial which could be used as the basis for the development of resources for practitioners on assessment and evaluation (May and Podmore, 1998). Evaluation and assessment strategies based on these questions called action research tools were developed and piloted across a range of settings in partnership with practitioners:

Practitioners in the centres chose a child's question, then selected, adapted, or devised a self-evaluation action research tool for gathering data. They then observed, reflected, planned, and acted (in varying order). ...it was intended that, in a cycle of evaluation, the centre practitioners would put in place structures, systems and processes as appropriate to improve the implementation of Te Whariki... These were described as teaching stories. (Podmore and Carr, 1999:7)

7.5.2.2 Implementing *Te Whariki* in Pacific Island Centres

Mara (1998) examined the professional development provisions for the implementation of *Te Whariki* in Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres (PIECCs) and the current approaches used by PIECCs to assess children's learning and to evaluate *Te Whariki* implementation. Mara found that staff and management of most centres felt confident in planning and implementing *Te Whariki* strands. However, a particular challenge was implementing *Te Whariki* using their own Pacific languages and cultural values. Continuing concerns include meeting current requirements, using the appropriate language and having sufficient time for professional development. In 2000, the Ministry of Education released 'The Big Picture', the first video of a series on *Te Whariki* (May, 2002a).

7.5.3 Early Childhood Development (ECD)

ECD was a government-funded agency that provided advice, support and information about early childhood education and parenting to ECCE providers, parents and the wider community. ECD particularly focused on those less likely to avail of ECCE services (Ministry of Education, 2003a). Furthermore, ECD provided support to licence-exempt playgroups to provide ECCE in community settings. In October 2003, ECD was integrated into the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2003a).

The ministry currently provides information on aspects of care and education such as the establishment of an ECCE service, the running of an ECCE service, parenting, playgroups and other forms of ECCE centres (ECD, Accessed at: http://www.ecd.govt.nz/, 1st July, 2004). The support information and advice services previously offered by the ECD are now provided by the Ministry of Education, which aims to help the sector achieve the goals of *Pathways to the Future* (Strategic Plan of ECCE). An evaluation of two ECD Services in 2001 noted that there was some tension between the Ministry of Education and the ECD, and that a common framework of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each was needed (Mitchell and Mara, 2001).

7.5.4 The Quality Journey

Funded by the Ministry of Education, Hendricks and Meade (1999) developed a resource designed to assist ECCE services in New Zealand to develop quality improvement systems and undertake quality reviews. The guide was based on the concepts and ideas from the government's Revised Statement of DOPs, *Quality in Action*, and *Te Whariki* (Hendricks and Meade, 1999). The revised model proposed a process that included preparing for the review, choosing an approach and setting standards, gathering information, analysing and evaluating results, recommending future actions, and acting to affirm, change or abandon aspects to improve outcomes (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). *The Quality Journey* included examples of quality reviews, an extensive case study and a measuring tool that services can use in their reviews. *The Quality Journey* also highlights the conditions necessary to support the operation of the service, i.e. adult communication and collaboration and organisational management (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003).

There has been some criticism of this review process. Mitchell and Cubey (2003) suggest that some of the examples provided in the review are somewhat mechanistic. For example, one quality indicator for educator/child interactions with infants is described as *"Educators respond promptly to infants when they express a need for attention."* The indicator showed the next step to be agreeing on a definition for *"promptly"* and that *"95 percent of infant calls should have a prompt response."* The crucial nature of the adult's response was not discussed in this example.

McLachlan-Smith *et al.* (2001) suggested a number of improvements to *The Quality Journey*, including the inclusion of more case studies and a greater emphasis on goals. They also drew attention to the importance of professional development in putting more emphasis on goals. The participants also said that they would not have used the document fully if they had not been involved in professional development in conjunction with its use.

7.5.5 Quality Funding Policy

Since March 1996, licensed ECCE services receive increased funding (Rate 2: a greater than the basic Ministry of Education funding rate) by meeting the Ministry's quality criteria in terms of standards higher than licence requirements for staff-child ratios or staff qualifications. However, the impact of this funding has been limited as it is insufficient to cover the cost of the increase in staff. Since 2002, the government have also provided equity funding for community-based ECCE services meeting criteria related to low income, isolation and those providing services in a language other than English.

There has also been some discussion around opening up access to Rate 3 funding, based on evaluation of structural and process variables. A discussion paper on this topic stated that the:

> *Cabinet has agreed that indicators of quality be developed with a view to*

> *possibly offering further incentives for increases in quality in the early childhood sector...It is envisaged that indicators would be part of a process of improvement in quality in ECS, involving teachers, parents, and management.* (Meade and Kerslake Hendricks, 1998:2)

Meade and Kerslake Hendricks (1998) suggested that structural variables would be used as entry/application criteria for Rate 3 for all types of Early Childhood Services (ECS) (including Kindergartens); that quality assurance systems based on common quality components would be adopted in ECCE services and that services would be subject to an on site assessment by an external evaluator. This evaluation would check on criterion referenced indicators focused on learning processes and learning and teaching interactions. Meade (1999) noted that if the proposal became:

> *...public policy, differential funding levels will become the norm, with high quality ECS attracting the highest level of government funding, good quality ECS getting a modest level of funding, and good-enough quality ECS getting the base rate.* (Meade, 1999:20)

Meade (1999) notes that the principle behind this proposal received a great deal of support from the ECCE sector.

7.5.6 Code of Ethics for the Sector

Dalli (2003) identifies the code of ethics developed concurrently with the first draft of *Te Whariki* as one way in which the sector sought to promote high quality. This code of ethics was seen as one way *"...for the sector to take the initiative to make a public statement about the sector's commitment to high quality standards."* (Dalli, 2003:9) The code of ethics consists of sixty values that underpin professional practice and was adopted by the largest union for ECCE staff in 1996. Subsequently, others in the sector have also adopted it.

7.5.7 Future Directions- Supporting Quality

Initiated by the New Zealand Educational Institute, the ECCE sector in New Zealand came together in 1996 to develop a statement on the future development of ECCE in New Zealand (Early Childhood Education Project, 2000). This development:

> *...arose out of the frustration of the sector which, by the mid-90s, became convinced that government could not be trusted to move forward the sector's agenda of ensuring quality across the different services.* (Dalli, 2003:10)

Future Directions articulated the sectors' proposals for the development of ECCE and contained recommendations on the structures and funding required to deliver high quality educational services for young children (Early Childhood Education Project, 2000). According to Dalli (2003), these proposals formed the basis for union campaigns in the latter half of the 1990s and formed the basis of Labour's election manifesto for ECCE. Many of the recommendations were also adopted in the ten-year strategic plan for ECCE.

7.5.8 Strategic Plan

According to Meade and Podmore (2002:25), the strategic plan for Early Childhood Education, *Pathways to the Future*, set out four main future directions for the development of the sector. They were:

1. Increasing participation;
2. Engagement and access;
3. Collaborative relationships (to support quality) and;
4. Improved quality and sustainability of services.

The strategic plan acknowledges in order for children to benefit from ECCE, provision must be of high quality. Future progress will be focused on the attainment of the goals set down in *Pathways to the Future* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The plan outlines strategies to improve the quality of ECCE by:

> *...improving the supply of quality teachers, putting in place better ratios and group sizes, improving process quality through legislating Te Whariki, and putting in place ongoing improvement systems and better professional development.* (Early Childhood Education Strategic Working Plan Group, 2001:19).

The strategic plan also suggests raising funding levels to promote high quality ECCE. To ensure that the overall goals of the strategic plan are achieved, two reviews have been established; one examining regulations in ECCE and the other looking at funding of ECCE. Another development emerging from the strategic plan has been the integration of ECD within the Ministry of Education.

7.5.9 Quality Register

The Quality Register is an accreditation system developed by the New Zealand Childcare Association (New Zealand Childcare Association, 2004), whereby members of the organisation can seek accreditation as Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Centres. Accreditation involves assessment of a range of quality indicators across eight quality standards. These are:

1. Staff-child ratios;
2. Staff practices and qualifications;
3. Group size;
4. Safe and healthy environments;
5. Curriculum,
6. *Ti kanga Maori* (customs and traditions handed down over generations);
7. Family and culture and;
8. Management.

7.5.10 Training

There is consensus in New Zealand that well qualified staff is essential for the provision of a high quality ECCE. The Early Childhood Development Unit (1996) cited staff training as one of eleven quality indicators for ECCE. In 1999, an announcement by the government reaffirmed that the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (1998) and the Education (Home Based Care) Order 1992 required persons responsible and co-ordinators to hold a qualification recognised by the Secretary of Education. An article in the Education Gazette stated that:

> *From 1 January 2002, coordinators and persons responsible will require a diploma or degree in early childhood teaching and two years experience in an early childhood education setting.* (Education Gazette, cited in Podmore et al., 2000:52)

The Secretary for Education currently recognises the Diploma of Teaching (ECE), the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) or the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE) as suitable qualifications for co-ordinators and others in positions of responsibility. This move to ensure all teachers in a position of responsibility have at least a Diploma in Teaching is seen as the first step in laying down a benchmark qualification for all ECCE teachers (Podmore *et al.*, 2000).

7.5.11 Professional Development

There are a number of providers offering professional development programmes in New Zealand. The Ministry of Education provides professional development and support to licensed and chartered services, focused on the effective implementation of *Te Whariki*, the 1998 DOPs, Special Education 2000[17] and *The Quality*

Journey. Three approaches to professional development have been developed by the Ministry of Education:

1. A basket of general learning for licensed and chartered centres;
2. A basket of Maori learning for licensed and chartered Maori immersion centres and;
3. A basket of learning for chartered Pacific Island centres. (Ministry of Education, Accessed at: http://www.ecd.govt.nz/running/profdev/profdev.html, 15th July, 2004).

These professional development programmes are based on a participatory learning model using action research and an action learning process.

McLachlan-Smith *et al*. (2001) evaluated a professional development project designed to help ECCE centres implement *The Quality Journey* and quality self-review. Over the course of a year, four full-day workshops were held which focused on how to design self-review projects on teaching, learning and development, adult communication and collaboration and organisation and management. A particular concern was to ensure that the programme was participatory and involved the development of practical skills. It also went beyond *The Quality Journey* in that it provided participants with methods of collecting views and data. In addition to the workshops, a project support person visited each centre twice during the year, to assist with design or implementation of the review projects. The evaluation found that participants felt better prepared to implement self-review following the professional development programme and felt their knowledge and skills about the specific topics covered were enhanced. Another key finding of the evaluation was that the use of practical tools and opportunity to try these out made a major contribution to participants' views of the success of the programme. Barriers to implementing self-review included inadequate staffing levels, having to bring staff who did not attend the workshop on board, resistance in play centres to self-review from some parents, motivating untrained staff and cultural barriers (McLachlan-Smith *et al*., 2001).

Depree and Hayward (2001) evaluated the implementation of *The Quality Journey* as a resource. This included an in-service course to provide information on the resources and how to implement a quality review, meetings with all participating centres and facilitators in each region and whole team professional development, over fifteen hours per centre. Facilitators supported the process of implementing the cycle of the review process set out in *The Quality Journey* by working alongside centre team members. The final evaluations of *The Quality Journey* resource highlighted positive changes, including awareness of teaching practices, participants being challenged to lift their standards, teams working together and enhanced problem solving. There were some changes to the structures in centres e.g., changing rosters to ensure teachers/educators could be actively involved with the children, introducing rolling morning teas to alleviate queuing, and systems developed to process resources contributed by parents. There were also changes in the interactions with children. For example, staff increased their use of *te reo maori* - the Maori Language. One centre adopted new strategies for guiding children's behaviour as opposed to reacting to inappropriate behaviour.

7.5.12 Research on Quality

Concern about quality in ECCE services in New Zealand has been accompanied by a selection of government funded research designed to form a basis for informed policy making. In 1993-1994, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of

17 Special Education 2000 is a policy initiative, which has a number of separate initiatives and funding pools to provide support to students with special needs.

Education commissioned literature reviews on the topic of quality (Meade and Podmore, 2002) and research on quality of childcare provision for infants and toddlers was also funded by the Ministry of Education (Smith 1996). The New Zealand Council for Educational Research provided a literature review in 2000, which examined aspects of quality in ECCE, with particular reference to staff training.

A best evidence synthesis of the characteristics of professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children's learning in ECCE settings was completed in July 2003, funded by the Ministry of Education. Eight characteristics of quality professional development are derived from evidence of the processes and conditions operating in the programmes under review. Structural conditions supporting quality professional development are also discussed. Recommendations are made for further research and research accessibility (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003).

The Ministry of Education launched the *"Competent Child Study"* in 1992 to track a sample of four year old children longitudinally. This study focused on ten competencies that are linked with successful learning and with successful economic and social participation, including communication, curiosity, perseverance, social skills with peers, social skills with adults, individual responsibility, literacy, mathematics, logical problem solving and motor skills (Wylie, 2001). At age ten, the main findings suggest that ECCE has a lasting effect on children's competency levels and that the quality of teacher support for children's learning and the teachers' interactions with the children are particularly important (Wylie, 2001).

Another research project is looking at parent/*whanau*[18] involvement in ECCE centres (2002-2004). The project aims to deepen understanding of involving parents and family members, both male and female and parents from a variety of different backgrounds in ECCE services. (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003)

An evaluation of equity funding in ECCE (2002-2004) is being carried out collaboratively by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) and *Te Kohanga Reo* National Trust. The evaluation is designed to assess the impact of ECCE equity funding. The evaluation will yield information about how much ECCE services know about equity funding, needs in each funding area, and whether and how equity funding improves quality and participation. The research is intended to inform future policy developments. (New Zealand Council for Educational Research , Accessed at: http://www.nzcer.org.nz/default.php?cPath=76&products_id=88, 15th March 2004).

The Ministry of Education is undertaking research that seeks to better understand effective practices in *kohanga* (Maori language immersion centres), play centres and licence-exempt playgroups. Part of this research involves the establishment of six Centres of Innovation (Ministry of Education, Accessed at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=index&indexID=8304&indexparentid=8303, March 15th, 2004). These are selected ECCE services who are to receive additional support to research and develop their innovative work with children. For example, Wilton Play centre is the focus of a Centre of Innovation project (2003 - 2006), using action research methods to investigate parent engagement and sustain a community of learners (Ministry of Education, Accessed at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8464&indexid=8391&indexparentid=8304, 15th March, 2004). The role of documentation in maintaining continuity and quality across play centre sessions and between play centre and home is being investigated.

18 Whànau are members of an extended family and its supporting network who form a context for the care and guidance of a child. The term "whànau" takes in kinship ties through whakapapa (genealogy) and people who come together for the same kaupapa (purpose).

A'oga Fa'asamoa is a Samoan immersion education and care centre, the focus of another Centre of innovation project. *A'oga Fa'asamoa* uses a rich array of approaches to promote Samoan language and culture and the children's cultural identity. It has close links with the school communities on site, especially the bilingual Samoan class in the school for transition of children and to help maintain confident and competent bilingual speakers. The research will look at small groups of children with the same teacher from the point of entry through different groups and spaces in the centre and into school. The effects on children's learning, including learning Samoan language and culture and of joint educator-child transitions will be studied. New Beginnings Preschool is a Centre of Innovation project offering school-hours education and care for infants, toddlers and young children. An art teacher has added an exciting dimension to the curriculum, and the use of the project approach is strengthening family-centre relationships. The visual arts are integrated into the curriculum at New Beginnings Pre-school and more meaningful educational experiences are offered to children and parents via the project approach to learning and teaching (Ministry of Education, Accessed at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8458&indexid=8387&indexparentid=8304, 15th March, 2004)

The action research will focus on the use of the visual arts and the project approach in pedagogical practice and their effects on children's self-esteem, confidence and learning, and on parents' engagement in their children's learning will be assessed.

7.5.13 Early Childhood Discretionary Grants Scheme

The Early Childhood Education Discretionary Grants Scheme is an annual allocation of planning and capital grants made to eligible early childhood education services. There are three separate funding pools; one for general services, one for services targeted at Maori children and one for services that provide educational opportunities for Pacific Island children.

7.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

A new funding system "equity funding" was introduced in New Zealand in March 2002. Under the equity funding scheme, additional funds are made available for community-based ECCE services meeting criteria related to low income, isolation, and/or those services offering programmes based on a language and culture other than English. The objectives of equity funding are to:

1. Reduce educational disparities between different groups in New Zealand communities;
2. Reduce barriers to participation faced by those groups that are under represented in ECCE services and;
3. Support ECCE services to raise their level of educational achievement (Ministry of Education, *Early Childhood Education Equity Funding - Questions and Answers*. Accessed at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=6818&indexid=1038&indexparentid=1095#P23_645, 16th July, 2004)

In 2002, 1,334 services received equity funding; 1,016 services received the funding for low socio-economic and special needs, 460 services received it for isolation, and 647 received it for services in another language and culture other than English, including sign language (Ministry of Education, Accessed at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=6819&indexid=1038&indexparentid=1095, August 10th, 2004).

New Zealand has an inclusive ECCE intervention programme where the majority of children with special needs are catered for in regular ECCE programmes. A small number of children attend specialised early intervention services.

In the 1990s, work was undertaken in New Zealand to develop policy regarding children with disabilities and special needs resulting in the *"Special Education 2000"* policy (Adams and Hanley, 2000). The aims of this policy are to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children with special needs in the ECCE and school sector, to ensure there is a clear consistent and predictable resourcing framework for special education and to provide equitable resourcing for those with similar needs, irrespective of school setting or geographical location.

Funding for Early Intervention Programmes in the ECCE sector for those with disabilities or special needs is provided in two parts. Funding is provided for specialist services such as early intervention teachers, speech and language therapists, psychologists and advisors of the deaf. Direct funding support is allocated separately:

> *This resourcing in early childhood is based on the child's support needs with regard to accessing the Early Childhood Curriculum. The resourcing applies only to educational support needs while other therapy services are funded through health.* (Adams and Hanley, 2000:2)

An Early Intervention Programme is based on the child's Individual Development Plan (IDP). This plan is drawn up following an assessment. According to Adams and Hanley (2000), this process often uses assessment tools such as the Carolina Assessment, Evaluation and Programming Systems and the Hawaii Early Learning Programme. The Early Intervention Programme is family focused and the drawing up of the IDP is based on a partnership between the service providers and the family, and places the child in the wider context of the family and the community.

According to Wylie (1996), the *Special Education 2000* policy expanded the number of students receiving some special needs support to around 5.5 percent of the school population, and has improved opportunities for some with special needs. However Whyle (2000:7) notes that:

> *...the division of the policy into a number of separate funding pools has made it hard to offer students' parents and schools, the seamless, integrated services which work best for students with special needs. Contestability between the fundholders working with students with ongoing high and very high needs has created fragmentation, gaps in accountability, and inequalities of resourcing and opportunity for students with special needs.*

Whyle (2000:7) was also critical of the professional development provided describing it as:

> *...patchy, focusing on the policy itself and the new support service of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, but with little available for specialist teachers and teacher-aides..*

7.7 Implications for Ireland

7.7.1 Co-ordination

In New Zealand, policy making for ECCE has been located in the Ministry of Education. This ensures a co-ordinated policy framework in the ECCE sector. Additionally, Early Childhood Development was integrated into the Ministry of

Education in October 2003. The role of Early Childhood Development was to provide advice, support and information about ECCE and parenting to ECCE providers, parents and the wider community. The Ministry of Education now undertakes this. Additionally childcare and early education is part funded by the government on New Zealand, through the Ministry of Education. As a result policy making, funding and the provision of support, advice and information to both parents and providers is the responsibility of a single government department, thus ensuring the effective co-ordination of ECCE services in New Zealand.

7.7.2 Regulation

The regulations for ECCE in New Zealand and the charter system highlight the level of quality the government is prepared to support. These are designed for the inclusion of both structural and process features of quality in the standards deemed acceptable by the government. The regulations lay down the requirements regarding the structural aspects of quality such as premises, group size and minimum staffing numbers, programmes, curriculum, organisation, and management of ECCE centres. The Charter system allows services to determine process features of quality, based on the values, culture and philosophy of individual services. The Charter system also requires services to take account values that have been defined as universal to all services in New Zealand, such as biculturalism and equity.

7.7.3 Inspection

External evaluation and review is the monitoring mechanism utilised by the government of New Zealand to support and improve quality in ECCE. The two aims of the review process carried out by the ERO are assessment of the service and the provision of assistance. This process includes a self-review by the service and this is a key component which provides the priorities for the review process. Once compliance regarding minimum requirements has been ensured, greater focus is placed on other process variables of quality that are identified in the self-review.

7.7.4 Curriculum

The importance of an ECCE curriculum for supporting quality is recognised in New Zealand. *Te Whariki,* the national ECCE curriculum, is designed to form the basis for programmes in all childcare institutions and is designed to cover all children from birth to school going age. It represents a move away from a developmental framework, it is considered to be a socio-cultural curriculum, based on the values of biculturalism and equity. The curriculum outlines principles, strands and goals which are distinctively appropriate for the ECCE years. There is a range of resources available to ECCE practitioners, which provide support in the implementation of the curriculum.

7.7.5 Supporting Quality

Developments in the ECCE sector in New Zealand have also highlighted the importance of providing adequate support for any initiatives introduced for the purpose of improving the quality in ECCE. For example, in relation to the curriculum *Te Whariki*, the government have funded several professional development programmes. The ERO evaluates ECCE services in relation to the curriculum. During the 1990s, the Ministry of Education funded several research projects that worked on the development of frameworks for the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum. These frameworks represent a narrative rather than a skills based approach to assessment and innovation. An integral part of these research projects was the development of resources for practitioners. This included the development of resources for assessment and evaluation, for professional development programmes and action research tools for practitioners.

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand has provided funding for the development of a review and evaluation guide (*The Quality Journey*) intended to assist ECCE services design quality improvement systems and undertake quality reviews. This review and evaluation guide included examples of quality reviews, extensive case studies and measuring tools that services can use.

The government make judicious use of funding in an attempt to improve quality standards in childcare services in New Zealand. A higher level of funding is provided to services meeting higher than minimum requirements in terms of one of two structural aspects of quality, staff-child ratios and staff qualifications. The government also provides equity funding to services meeting criteria regarding low income, isolation and those providing services in languages other than English.

7.7.6 Voice of the Sector

One feature of the New Zealand ECCE sector is its strong voice and its concern with quality. In the 1990s, the sector, concerned that the government could not be relied on to move its agenda forward, undertook a number of developments independent of the government. This included the formation of a Code of Ethics (a code of 60 values underpinning professional practice) and *Future Directions*, a document laying out the future direction of the ECCE sector with recommendations on the structure and funding required for these developments.

7.7.7 Staffing

There is consensus in New Zealand that well qualified staff are essential for the provision of a high quality service and the first steps have been taken in laying down a benchmark qualification for all those employed in the ECCE sector. In the future, all early childhood teachers, ECCE co-ordinators and persons responsible will be required to hold a diploma or degree in early childhood teaching and two years experience in an early childhood education setting.

7.7.8 Professional Development

Professional development is also recognised as important in the provision of a quality service. There is evidence in New Zealand to suggest that the review and evaluation document *"The Quality Journey"* would not have been fully utilised, were it not for the implementation of professional development programmes in connection with its use. The Ministry of Education provides professional development programmes focused on the effective implementation of *Te Whariki*, the DOP and *The Quality Journey*. Professional development programmes are based on a participatory learning model.

7.7.9 Special Needs and Disadvantage

Additional funding is available for community-based ECCE services, meeting criteria related to low income, isolation, and/or those services offering programmes based on a language and culture other than English. An early intervention plan in drawn up for children with special needs and most children with special needs are integrated into mainstream services.

7.7.10 Future Planning

Pathways to the Future, the strategic plan for ECCE acknowledges the centrality of quality to any future developments of the ECCE sector. This plan proposes a range of strategies to improve the quality of ECCE in New Zealand, including improving the supply of quality teachers, putting in place better group ratios and group sizes, legislating for aspects of process quality by implementing *Te Whariki* and putting in place ongoing improvement programmes and professional development programmes.

7.7.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from New Zealand, a number of features of quality can be identified which are worth considering in the development of a quality framework for Ireland:

- The literature gathered from New Zealand highlights the importance of a co-ordinated and integrated policy framework for ECCE.
- Quality is defined at national level both in terms of structural and process features and in terms of the implementation of a socio-cultural curriculum. Resources developed in conjunction with the curriculum also represent quality in terms of process features. There is a focus on both structural and process features of quality and on the implementation of the curriculum in the monitoring of ECCE services.
- An evaluative approach to monitoring quality which includes the providers is adopted and this approach combines assessment with the provision of assistance and support to providers in raising the quality of the services they offer. Resources have been developed for use by childcare providers for the self-evaluation and monitoring of aspects of their service and such as the implementation of the curriculum.
- Developments that have taken place in the ECCE sector in New Zealand highlight the importance of the provision of adequate supports for any initiatives introduced and designed to improve the quality of care and education provided.
- Developments designed to support quality improvement in New Zealand have been embarked upon in consultation with the sector and a partnership approach to quality improvement is a feature of the ECCE sector.
- Well-qualified staff is identified as essential in the provision of high quality in the sector and a benchmark qualification for those working in the ECCE sector has been laid down. Professional development is also recognised as important and has been provided in relation the new quality supports that have been introduced to the sector.
- Additional funding is available for community-based ECCE services meeting criteria related to low income, isolation, and/or those services offering programmes based on a language and culture other than English
- Children with special needs are integrated into ECCE services.

Chapter 8

Northern Ireland

8.1 Introduction

According to the government's childcare strategy, *Children First*, quality in ECCE in Northern Ireland is currently founded upon *"...registration, inspection, investigation and enforcement under the Children Order"* (Department of Health and Social Services [DHSS] in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and Department of Education Northern Ireland [DENI], 1999:10).

8.2 Context for Quality

8.2.1 Philosophy

ECCE in Northern Ireland is viewed as having an important function in the support of families and children. High quality childcare can provide opportunities for children's development and can support parents in caring for their children. While parents are seen as having the primary responsibility for the care and well-being of their children in Northern Ireland, the State acknowledges the role that ECCE can play in supporting parents in this task. Childcare and early education is also identified as important for the future economic development of Northern Ireland:

> *The Northern Ireland economy will prosper if more skilled and capable people are able to take up jobs because they have access to good quality, affordable and accessible childcare, and if children are well equipped from an early age to make the most of the learning opportunities available.* (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999, Accessed at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications/archived/childrenfirst.asp, 1st July, 2004).

ECCE in Northern Ireland is therefore seen as having three main functions; the promotion of the well-being of children, the provision of equal opportunities to parents and the provision of supports to parents in balancing work and family life.

8.2.2 Policy

Responsibility for ECCE is divided between the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), in line with the division between education and care services in the UK (OECD, 2000b). Responsibility for pre-school education lies with the Department of Education and responsibility for services providing care for children lies with the DHSS. According to *Children First* (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999), it is the long-term goal of the government to integrate the early education and care services.

Five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland are responsible for organising publicly-funded school education within their area. Pre-schools are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate. Under *Children First*, a Childcare Partnership was established in each Health and Social Services Board in Northern Ireland, comprising of Voluntary and Statutory Agencies with responsibility for implementing the government's childcare strategy (Northern Childcare Partnership, 2002). Health and Social Services Trusts inspect services under the administrative auspices of the DHSS.

8.2.3 Funding

The main form of subsidy for childcare costs is demand funding (Candappa *et al.*, 2003). For children aged from three months to three years, provision is largely in the private and voluntary sectors, and parents pay fees. Pre-school education (for children aged from three to four) is currently being expanded and developed in co-operation with the private and voluntary sectors. The pre-school education expansion programme is working towards provision of a full year of pre-school education for every child whose parents want it in the year prior to entry to formal schooling.

8.2.4 Delivery Strategies

Most childcare and early education in Northern Ireland is supplied by private providers. Compulsory primary education starts at the age of four and this is provided by the State.

8.3 Defining Quality

8.3.1 Children Order (1995)

Under the Children Order (Her Majesty's Stationery Office [HMSO], 1995), Health and Social Services Trusts are responsible for the registration and inspection of day care services and childminding. Furthermore, they promote and encourage good practice through the provision of advice and guidance to providers. Any childcare facility or child minder providing care for more than 2 hours in any one day is required to be registered by law. Social Services Early Years Teams assess their suitability in 3 key areas:

- Premises - for health and safety;
- Staff - via police, medical and social services checks to ensure individuals are suitable to care for children;
- Equipment and play environment - to ensure that it is age appropriate safe and stimulating. (Children's Services Northern Ireland, Accessed at: http://www.google.ie/search?q=cache:iyL7DHSVkc8J:www.childrensservicesnorthernireland.com/earlyyears/faq.asp+Social+S

ervices+Early+Years+Teams+assessment+premises+staff&hl=en&start=1, 15th March, 2004.)

The DHSS offers guidance on the suitability of service providers, premises and equipment; adult/child ratios and the physical environment in which care takes place.

8.3.2 Pre-school Education Expansion Programme

This programme provides funding to private and voluntary providers for the provision of free pre-school places to children. The programme is committed to providing quality pre-school education and as such includes regulations and an inspection process. All programmes have to meet minimum quality standards to receive funding:

> *These standards relate to the nature of the pre-school curriculum, the number and duration of sessions, the number of children, the staff/child ratios, the qualifications held by staff, the accommodation and the provision of support from a qualified teacher or early years specialist.* (DENI, 2002:1)

For example, all services participating in the programme are required to secure the services of a qualified teacher or an ECCE specialist, who can in turn support staff in implementing the education provision.

8.3.3 Curriculum

The Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education is a process rather than an outcomes-based curriculum. It recognises that children are entitled to a curriculum which enables them to make appropriate progress, and that desired learning will come from an appropriate curriculum. The curriculum focuses on describing the type of activities to be experienced rather than on outlining the evidence of learning or assessment to be applied.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum sets out the minimum educational entitlement for pupils aged four to sixteen years of age. There is a statutory requirement for the Curriculum to be delivered to all pupils attending grant-aided schools.

The curriculum is defined in terms of four key stages. Key Stage One covers the first four school years (pupils aged four-eight years of age) and includes Religious Education, English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History and Geography (known as the Environment and Society Area of Study), Art and Design, Music and Physical Education (known as the Creative and Expressive Area of Study). In addition, there are educational themes to be woven through the main subjects of the curriculum, including education for mutual understanding, cultural heritage, health education and information technology.

Each subject in the Northern Ireland Curriculum is defined within the Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets. The Programmes of Study set out the opportunities which should be offered to all pupils, subject to their age and ability, in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding at each key stage. Teachers use the programmes of study as a basis for planning schemes of work. Attainment Targets define the expected standards of pupil performance in particular aspects of a subject and provide the basis for making judgements on pupils' attainment at the end of each key stage. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (DHSS and DENI, 1997) are the statutory advisory bodies responsible for the curriculum.

8.4 Measuring Quality

The Education and Training Inspectorate reports on the quality of funded pre-school provision within the statutory, private and voluntary sector. The inspection process

consists of an informal pre-school visit, followed by a formal visit, which results in a published report. Where areas are identified that require improvement, the service is requested to draw up an action plan, detailing the way in which they will work to bring about the necessary improvements. The inspectorate monitors the implementation of these action plans. When shortcomings are found in key areas, a follow up inspection is carried out four to six months after the initial formal inspection.

8.5 Supporting Quality

8.5.1 *Children First*

Children First, the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy recognizes the importance of ECCE in supporting parents and families (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999). *Children First* identifies several problems currently facing the childcare sector in Northern Ireland. Quality is variable in ECCE services, there is no consistent definition of what constitutes quality, which is recognized and applied across all childcare settings. Only half of all childcare workers in Northern Ireland have any relevant qualification. There are differences in regulation between the education and care sectors. The availability of childcare is limited in some areas and is in many cases too expensive for parents to afford. Parents' access to childcare is also hampered by poor information and the quality and accuracy of information on the availability of childcare is insufficient to allow parents make informed decisions about the care of their children.

Children First proposes action in a number of areas. First of all, it proposes action to address the quality of provision, including the establishment of new regional and local co-ordinating structures, better integration of early education and childcare and a commitment to collaborative working between the Education and Training Inspectorate and those responsible for registration and inspection under the Children Order. In addition, it advocates Good Practice Networks to provide models of quality integrated education and childcare, a new training and qualifications framework for childcare workers, more opportunities to train as childcare workers and better support for parents and informal carers.

8.5.2 Sure Start

The Sure Start initiative was established to provide early intervention supports for disadvantaged families in an integrated fashion (Sure Start, Accessed at: http://www.surestart.gov.uk, 1st July, 2004). Sure Start is a government initiative to enhance services for children under four years of age and their families in areas of greatest need, through better access to family support, advice on parenting, health services and early learning. Each Sure Start project is managed by a committee of local partnerships including statutory, voluntary and community groups and includes local parents in decision making. Childcare Partnerships work with potential providers and identify priority areas for Sure Start Projects. Though the design and content of Sure Start programmes varies according to local needs, all programmes are expected to include a number of core services including:

- Outreach and home visiting;
- Support for families and parents;
- Support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children;
- Primary and community health care;
- Support for children and parents with special needs (Accessed at: Sure Start, Accessed at: http://www.surestart.gov.uk, 1st July, 2004).

Each Sure Start Programme also has a set of shared principles and is expected to:

- Co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services;
- Involve parents, grandparents and other carers;
- Avoid stigma by ensuring that all local families are able to use Sure Start;
- Ensure lasting support by linking Sure Start to services for older children;
- Be culturally appropriate and sensitive to particular needs;
- Promote the participation of all local families in the design and working of the programme (Sure Start, Accessed at: http://www.surestart.gov.uk, 1st July, 2004).

8.5.3 Accreditation

One of the ways in which the quality of services provided can be improved is through the use of accreditation schemes (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999:10). There are currently a variety of accreditation schemes available for ECCE providers in Northern Ireland. These include PlayBoard's Quality Assurance Scheme *'Pathways to Excellence'*, the NIPPA (The Early Years Organisation) Quality Assurance Scheme and the High/Scope accreditation scheme. Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) provides quality assurance schemes for childminders. *Children First* states that:

> *The Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years will invite relevant childcare organisations to work together with the group to develop common standards for accreditation in Northern Ireland. (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999:11)*

8.5.4 Building Quality Childcare

The New Opportunities Fund have recently opened a new grant scheme entitled *"Building Quality Childcare."* The scheme is to meet the capital costs of new premises, refurbishment and modernisation of existing services and mobile services. The funding relates predominantly to pre-school provision.

8.5.5 Teacher Training

Initial training of school teachers generally involves a four-year Bachelor of Education degree course, or a bachelor's degree followed by a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Staff in childcare facilities are not required to hold qualifications, though services under the pre-school education expansion programme must have a qualified teacher involved to receive funding from the education authorities.

There is a range of qualifications available for staff in childcare facilities. The following section outlines some of the occupation profiles and qualifications for those working in the ECCE services as highlighted by the Northern Childcare Partnership (2002).

- Nursery Nurses work in a supervisory role in a variety of settings such as nursery schools or classes and private day nurseries. The Northern Childcare Partnership recommends a specific qualification, such as a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3 for those employed as nursery nurses.
- Nursery Assistants tend to work in a junior role in nursery schools or classes and private day nurseries. The Northern Childcare Partnership recommends a specific qualification, such as NVQ at Level 2 or equivalent for those employed as nursery assistants.
- Playgroup leaders work in either community or private pre-school settings providing either full day care or sessional care. Playgroup leaders supervise staff on a day-to-day basis, plan the programme of activities and report to the playgroup committee, chairperson or proprietor (Northern

Childcare Partnership, 2002). The NVQ at Level 3 in Early Years Care and Education or equivalent is seen as the most appropriate qualification for those involved in this kind of work. Playgroup Assistants work under the supervision of the playgroup leader. The NVQ Level 2 in Early Years Care and Education or equivalent Level 2 qualifications are considered the most appropriate for this work.

The Government is developing a national 'climbing frame' of qualifications to help people enter, move and progress in the childcare sector (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999). This framework will map out equivalencies between different forms of training and qualification and will lay out progression routes for those involved in the ECCE sector. *Children First* recommended that:

> *T&EA [Training and Employment Agency] will develop a childcare training strategy for Northern Ireland, in consultation with other relevant Departments and other stakeholders including employers in the sector and the National Training Organisations, and will aim to ensure that the resources available are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.* (DHSS in Association with the Training and Employment Agency and DENI, 1999:13)

8.5.6 Childminders

Considerable emphasis is placed on training for childminders, as a way of enhancing quality (Northern Area Partnership, 2002) and many childminders undertake an introductory course before they begin childminding.

8.5.7 Childcare Partnerships

Under *Children First*, four Childcare Partnerships were established, one for each Health and Social Services Board in Northern Ireland. These Childcare Partnerships are partnerships of Voluntary and Statutory Agencies whose remit is the implementation of the Government's Childcare Strategy, *Children First*. The Partnerships provide a range of services designed to support quality; for example, the Southern Partnership has engaged in activities such as the production of a guide to quality in ECCE services, the identification of training needs and the co-ordination of training provision (Southern Area Childcare Partnership, 2002).

8.5.8 Childminding Networks

A *Children Come First* childminding network is an approved formal group of between twenty and thirty registered childminders recruited, assessed and monitored by a network co-ordinator, who ensures that they maintain the standards of NICMA's Quality Childminding Charter. Settings are monitored on a 12 weekly cycle.

8.5.9 Innovative Projects

There are some projects which seek to develop the quality of services provided on an ongoing basis in Northern Ireland. A number of ECCE providers are participating in the EEL approach to quality assessment and improvement. NIPPA has implemented a pilot project on the Reggio Emilia Approach, which has involved 20 Early Years groups, working on establishing this innovative approach to ECCE in their facilities.

8.6 Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs

NICMA have a dedicated Childminding Network for families of children who may have a disability or special need. This

network can provide specially trained childminders who can be matched to a child's very specific needs.

Children with special educational needs are educated within mainstream schools wherever possible. If a child needs more help than can reasonably be provided by the resources normally available to the school, the local authority must issue a statement of special educational needs, detailing the needs and the necessary extra provision. In 2000-2001, around three per cent of all pupils had a statement of special educational needs and around one per cent of all pupils were educated in special schools.

In 2000-2001, the Northern Area Childcare Partnership ran a grant scheme to support the inclusion of children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities in different types of childcare provision (Northern Area Partnership, 2002).

8.7 Implications for Ireland

8.7.1 Co-ordination

Responsibility for ECCE is divided between two government departments in line with the division in Northern Ireland between care and education services.

8.7.2 Regulation

In Northern Ireland legislation sets down minimum standards regarding structural aspects of quality such as premises, staff and equipment.

8.7.3 Curriculum

The value of a curriculum in supporting quality in ECCE is recognised in Northern Ireland. The Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education is a process based curriculum. It focuses on describing the type of activities to be experienced by pre-school children. The Northern Ireland Curriculum sets out the minimum educational entitlement for pupils aged four to sixteen years of age.

8.7.4 Inspection

The Education and Training Inspectorate reports on the quality of funded pre-school provision within the statutory, private and voluntary sector. The inspection process consists of an informal pre-school visit, followed by a formal visit, which results in a published report

8.7.5 Supporting Quality

Childcare Partnerships were established, one for each Health and Social Services Board in Northern Ireland. Partnerships have a focus on supporting and improving quality. Activities undertaken by the partnerships include the production of a guide to quality in ECCE services, the identification of training needs and the co-ordination of training provision.

8.7.6 Special Needs and Disadvantage

Children with special educational needs are educated within mainstream schools wherever possible. If a child needs more help than can reasonably be provided by the resources normally available to the school, the local authority must issue a statement of special educational needs, detailing the needs and the necessary extra provision. The Sure Start initiative was established to provide early intervention supports for disadvantaged families in an integrated fashion.

8.7.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, on the strength of the evidence collected from Northern Ireland, a number of features of quality can be

identified which are worth considering in the development of a quality framework for Ireland:

- While there is currently a division between education and care in Northern Ireland, it is an aim of government policy that co-ordination at all levels between services providing care and education be improved.
- Curriculum guidelines are used in Northern Ireland as a mechanism determining quality in pre-schools and there is a curriculum in place for all school children.
- There are several accreditation schemes offered by voluntary childcare organisations in Northern Ireland.
- Childcare Partnerships have been established to support and improve quality at local level, these Partnerships will focus on issues such as the provision of information and training.
- The principle of inclusion in mainstream education for children with special needs is adopted in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 9

Overview and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises some of the key issues that emerged from the profiling of countries in the last chapter. It is evident that there is much difference in the way in which quality is defined, measured and supported amongst the countries included in the review. These differences included differences in welfare regimes, understandings of children, qualifications and working conditions of the workforce, amount of public investment, whether regulations are imposed nationally, locally or by the State or regional government and the range of measures adopted to support quality improvements. Despite this, there were also many similarities between countries. Measures such as a curriculum framework were adopted by some countries for all ECCE provision, by others for pre-school provision and in other countries by the sector itself in an attempt to improve the standard of care offered. The information gathered provides a range of possibilities for the future development of quality in Ireland.

9.2 Context

One key issue to emerge was the importance of a co-ordinated and integrated policy framework for ECCE. In some countries this has been achieved by locating responsibility for all ECCE services with a single government department, in some instances, ECCE has been integrated into the education system. For example, a unified system of care and education is an important feature of ECCE in Sweden, where there is a single framework for a child's educational experience at pre-primary, first and second level education.

Other countries have attempted to establish structures to ensure improved co-ordination between government departments regarding developments in ECCE.

9.3 Defining Quality

Quality is defined in a variety of different ways by different countries. Some countries focus on structural features of quality, such as premises, staff-child ratios and group size (Germany). Countries such as Norway, Sweden and New Zealand have moved to include process features in their definition of quality. In these countries the curriculum plays a key role in expanding the definition of quality to include process features. The adoption of a broad curriculum framework is a key tool utilised in defining quality in ECCE in these countries. The educational levels, training requirements and working conditions of staff in both of the Nordic countries is high and both countries have well developed systems of in-service training for centre based services. A benchmark qualification for those working in the ECCE has been laid down in New Zealand. A highly qualified staff is viewed as essential for the development of quality in these countries. Parents' involvement is also defined as an important aspect of quality in some countries, with countries such as Norway and Portugal legislating for the involvement of parents in early education services.

9.4 Measuring Quality

Countries that focus on structural aspects of quality use inspection as the main mechanism in the monitoring of quality. Countries with more developed ECCE systems moved from a model of inspection based on assessment to one based on a partnership approach with providers, where their role was to provide support and assistance to providers in improving quality. One notable trend was a growth in the use of evaluations, both in terms of evaluations forming the basis for government monitoring of ECCE services and in terms of the inclusion of processes of self-review on the part of the provider as part of the inspection process. The provision of support and assistance to providers in implementing features such a curriculum framework and the adoption of an evaluative approach to measuring quality allows for a broader definition of quality, which is inclusive of process quality indicators and for the continuous improvement in the quality of provision offered by the provider. When measuring quality in a more evaluative way, the development and provision of high quality resources for use by childcare providers is important.

9.5 Supporting Quality

There were many measures introduced in an attempt to support and improve the quality of ECCE services in the countries included in this review. It should be noted that the countries with the widest range of mechanisms introduced by the government to support and improve quality were the English speaking countries; countries where childcare provision is primarily reliant on the private market. Measures introduced to support and improve quality in these countries included accreditation schemes and the provision of resources such as *The Quality Journey* in New Zealand. The Nordic countries did not adopt many measures for supporting quality. This reflected the broad definition of quality in these countries and the comparatively high quality of care and education generally provided.

When examining the ways in which quality was supported in the countries included in the review, approaches included the use of networks to support ECCE practitioners,

the use of pedagogical documentation, the provision of training and professional development opportunities, an innovative Kindergarten building programme, the introduction of a curriculum and the provision of resources to adequately support measures to improve the quality of care and education offered. Research projects, focused on the issue of high quality in ECCE have commenced in some countries, while the Nordic countries collect and collate statistics annually on a range of structural indicators of quality.

9.6 Implications for Ireland

One important question in light of this review is the implications for quality in the Irish context. Ireland most broadly fits into the Anglo-Saxon/liberal welfare regime in terms of Esping-Andersen's Typology of Welfare States (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, to look at potential directions of quality in Ireland solely in relation to those countries with liberal welfare regimes negates the valuable contribution of this review. Policies, practices and research in other countries concerning quality can provide alternative ways of thinking and acting and innovative solutions to the quest for quality in ECCE in Ireland. From the review, synergy themes needing attention in the development of a National Framework for Quality (NFQ) in Ireland emerged, and some of the main implications that will need consideration are outlined below.

9.6.1 Co-ordinated Policy Framework

It is clear that a coherent co-ordinated policy framework is essential for the promotion of quality ECCE. While in some countries this has been achieved through the location of responsibility for policy in ECCE in one government department (the Nordic Countries, New Zealand), other countries have sought to establish structures which promote a coherent policy framework (Portugal).

9.6.2 Broad Definition of Quality

This review has highlighted the myriad definitions of quality that potentially co-exist at any one point in time and amongst different groups of people, both between and within countries. A flexible definition of quality is needed and any mechanisms designed to support quality improvement in Ireland will need the ability to incorporate different perspectives on quality. Quality will need to be defined in a way that is sufficiently broad to allow for diversity and the adoption of a variety of different approaches. This definition of quality should include process as well as structural aspects.

9.6.3 A Support System which is Advisory and Empowering

It is also clear from the review that the ECCE sector in Ireland will require a support system which is advisory and empowering, which does more than simply inspect. Some countries have adopted an evaluative approach to assessment, this allows for the measurement of concrete structural aspects of quality which are clearly defined and process aspects of quality which are determined in partnership with the service provider. An evaluative approach to measuring quality also allows for the continuous improvement of the service and provides support to providers on this journey.

9.6.4 Engagement of all Stakeholders

It is important that all stakeholders be engaged in any undertaking relating to quality. Much can be accomplished via networks of providers. In Sweden, organised networks of ECCE educators or centres are viewed as a quality system as they promote the exchange of ideas and

facilitate ongoing professional development amongst ECCE professionals. Research journals regarding ECCE have been established in Norway, Sweden and Portugal. In New Zealand, the sector came together in 1996 to develop a statement on the future development of ECCE and what was needed to ensure quality.

9.6.5 Parental Involvement

The importance of parents as key stakeholders has also been recognised and some countries have legislated for the involvement of parents in childcare facilities. Parental involvement is an important aspect of quality and any developments undertaken in Ireland should be based on a partnership approach with parents.

9.6.6 Adequate Support

It is vital that initiatives seeking to impact on the quality of care and education are adequately supported. For example, the introduction of a curriculum needs a variety of supports if it is to be successful. One can point to New Zealand in this regard, and highlight the wide consultation with the sector that was an integral part of the construction of the curriculum, to the professional development programmes offered regarding the new curriculum, to several research projects that worked to developing frameworks for evaluation and assessment based on the curriculum and to plans to improve process quality through legislating the curriculum. One can also look at Germany where one of the requirements of the two projects focused on developing quality indicators and practical assessment procedures for evaluating the pedagogical work with children aged birth to six is the production of accessible, flexible and relatively low cost printed material available to ECCE institutions for self-evaluation and internal quality development procedures.

9.6.7 Training

International research highlights the importance of training in the provision of services and suggests that there is a general trend towards longer and higher-level basic training for ECCE workers. Both Sweden and New Zealand have all settled on a three-year degree as the main or benchmark training for workers across the ECCE age range. This qualification must be held by all coordinators and persons responsible in New Zealand, while in Norway the styrere and *pedagogiske ledere* must be educated pre-school teachers. Portugal has also sought to set standards with the requirement that staff in pre-school institutions hold a pre-school degree. The importance of ongoing professional development has also been acknowledged in several countries. Any approach to improving the quality of childcare and early education in Ireland will need to take the issue of training into account.

9.6.8 Special Needs

In most countries, an integrative approach is adopted for children with special needs with a range of supports such as decreased group sizes and specialised teachers provided. Inclusion within mainstream early education can be beneficial for children with special needs. It is important that the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream ECCE is adequately supported.

9.7 Conclusion

It is perhaps worth noting in conclusion that a broad range of quality measures, which have the support of parents, practitioners, children, policy makers and society in general represent the best opportunity for quality childcare in Ireland. It is suggested that quality of provision will not be ensured and standards will not be

raised with a focus on one or more aspects of quality, but that a wide framework of initiatives must be adopted in the search for quality in ECCE in Ireland. The following interaction sheds much light on the process we are about to undertake in Ireland and the necessity of remaining cognisant of the complexity of quality in the Irish context.

Marco Polo describes a bridge.

> *"But which is the stone that sustains the bridge?"* asks Kubla Khan
> *"The bridge is not sustained by this stone or that stone"* Marco answers
> *"but by the line of the arch that they create."*
> Kubla Khan is silent, reflecting. Then he says *"So why are you telling me about the stones? It is the arch that interests me."*
> Polo answers back to him *"There is no arch without stones."* (Calvino, cited in OECD 1998b:13).

We might similarly conclude that there is no single answer to the issue of quality in Ireland, but a series of *"stones"* that if used correctly can raise the quality of ECCE.

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