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Designed to benefit whom? An evaluation of Irish Early Childhood Education and Care Policy using Policy Design Theory

Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Doctor of Philosophy
February 2012

By

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Abstract

The overarching aim of the research was to evaluate whether the mechanisms used by the state to implement policy were designed to effectively realise national early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy objectives and children’s rights within that context. The theoretical framework selected for the project was policy design theory, a framework that emerged from within the field of implementation study. A focus on the distinct implementation phase within the policy process enabled an evaluation of policy achievements relative to policy intentions articulated in various policy documents.

Five separate policy tool design models were selected and applied to data which was presented through three distinct research elements. First, a macro-level review of non-financial ECEC policy tools was conducted in order to reveal their scale, scope and nature. This provided the contextual background for the second element which involved a more detailed investigation of the financial policy tools selected and designed by the state. This gradually revealed a complex array of competing rationales informing investment decisions in ECEC in Ireland. Finally, new data were generated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to contribute towards a micro-level review in which the social constructions and behavioural assumptions informing ECEC subsidy design in Ireland were explored in more detail.

The key findings revealed that policy tools were designed to realise a limited interpretation of policy goals while increasingly perpetuating inequality and promoting stereotypes, thus creating a more socially unjust society. In particular, a focus on the quality of ECEC services was subordinated to a focus on affordability and access and this was even more pronounced amongst supports for social inclusion targets. Likewise, the provision of services and protection of children was the key focus in relation to realising rights for children with inadequate resources being allocated to addressing the participatory element of children’s rights. An overall lack of coordination and biases in investment decisions realised a split system in ECEC where under-threes were cared for while pre-school children were educated. Less visibly, advocates and stakeholders were being managed through the design of policy tools to minimise dissent and conflict thus reducing opportunities for discourse and exploration of the role and ECEC and children’s rights in Ireland.

This thesis argues that it is necessary to encourage a wider and more transparent debate to explore the rationale and values informing the design of ECEC policy tools. Systemic change is also needed to enable and empower advocacy within the sector and improve overall coordination efforts. Finally, burdens and benefits can be more equitably distributed through the redesign of policy tools to provide universal access and the development of a unitary system in which there is space to recognise children as rights holders and citizens.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of
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others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the
text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research
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Acknowledgements

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<td>CECDE</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Watching the intensive policy developments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ireland over the last decades has provided a valuable insight into the way in which Irish policy makers are interpreting and implementing policy objectives. These implementation decisions have impacted on practice in unexpected ways and it is this sense of influence that has guided the thinking behind the following research study. Implementation is a key moment and yields significant impacts on policy outcomes (Hudson and Lowe 2009) but to date inadequate research into the impact of ECEC policy implementation in Ireland, particularly on the rights of children, has been undertaken. This research aims to address this gap.

This chapter begins by outlining the objectives of the thesis. The advantages of focusing on the implementation phase of the policy process, and policy tool design in particular, are then presented. The chapter moves on to explain how the research questions are addressed. A brief description of the ‘implementation gap’ between Ireland’s policy rhetoric and expectations is outlined before the researcher’s personal motivations and background are explained. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented followed by a brief conclusion of the chapter.
1.1 **Objective of the thesis**

The objectives of this thesis were to explain how ECEC policy has been implemented in Ireland over the past two decades by identifying the mechanisms through which policy goals were realised, these mechanisms are referred to as *policy tools*; to evaluate whether the policy tools selected were designed to realise national ECEC policy objectives and children’s rights within this context; and to identify alternatives that could more effectively realise policy goals to benefit the targets of policy, which in this instance are children, their parents, practitioners and advocates for a more socially just implementation model.

The study was broad in focus and a range of *policy tool design* models were applied to provide structure and guidance in the production of findings and recommendations. Policy design theory, which was the primary theoretical framework used, focused on evaluating policy achievements relative to policy intentions during the distinct implementation phase within the policy process. The application of a variety of models facilitated a review of how policy was translated into action and impacted upon policy targets.

1.2 **A focus on the implementation phase of the policy process**

Various stages in the policy process have been identified. Generally, they can be identified as including some level of sequential attention to agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Hill and Hupe 2009). During the implementation phase policy intentions are transformed into action. A scholastic focus on implementing policy emerged in part due to disappointments in policy achievements
subsequent to implementation relative to public policy intentions outlined earlier in the policy process (ibid 2003).

Within the field of implementation studies, a specific focus emerged on the range of devices or mechanisms referred to as *policy tools* (Linder and Peters 1989) used to translate policy into practice. It was argued that these policy tools warranted close investigation as they were not just technical instruments that determined how equitably benefits and burdens were distributed in society. They were also sociopolitical constructs as they were socially experienced so consequently contributed towards the development of norms in society (Salamon 2002). As Schneider and Ingram pointed out ‘[p]olicy designs signal whether politics is a game of self-interest or a process of deliberation through which broader, collective interests are served’ (1997, p.101).

Policy design theory emerged from the *policy sciences of democracy* (Deleon 1997) which promoted the principles of social justice and sought to facilitate participative democracy. These were also key principles incorporated within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and advanced by children’s rights advocates (Alderson 2008). As such, it served as an appropriate conceptual framework for the evaluation of ECEC policy design in Ireland in order to determine who it was designed to benefit.

Policy design theory evaluates by looking at issues relating to the institutions involved and political power at play but also extends to consider the impact of social constructions of target populations and knowledge (Schneider and Ingram 1997). As all elements can be influenced and changed, this multi-dimensional analysis offers the
opportunity to affect deep and meaningful change as all dimensions, the visible and not so visible, are reviewed simultaneously.

1.3 **Addressing the research questions**

Two questions emerged that the research addressed. The first was evaluative in its focus as it sought to identify and review a range of impacts of policy implementation decisions.

*What impact does policy tool design have on realising national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children in Ireland?*

This is a broad question but the research was structured to address it through the identification of a set of seven indicators which were tracked throughout the research. The indicators emerged from the literature on ECEC development and children’s rights and were selected because of the frequency with which they were referred to and their representative nature. They were the three *P’s* of children’s rights, *protection, provision of services*, and *participatory rights* (Alderson 2004) as well as the three elements of the *childcare trilemma* which were *access, affordability* and *quality*, along with *coordination* as it had been identified as a key area by the OECD (2001, 2006). These seven indicators of policy goals were tracked to determine whether they were effectively realised as intended.

Through the application of five distinct policy tool design models, three research elements emerged. First, through a review of existing documentation a macro-level review of non-financial ECEC policy tools was conducted in order to reveal their scale,
scope and nature. Second, a more detailed investigation of the financial policy tools was undertaken that gradually revealed a rationale for investment in ECEC in Ireland that the state was most comfortable with. Finally, new data were generated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to assist in the presentation of an *illustrative example* in which the behavioural assumption and social constructions informing ECEC subsidy design in Ireland were evaluated in more detail revealing the norms and values being supported by the state.

Following on from this, the second research question was a strategic question (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) as it aimed to identify new alternatives to effectively realise policy goals.

> What actions can be taken to increase the effectiveness of ECEC policy design decisions in Ireland to realise national ECEC policy goals that recognises the rights of children?

This was addressed through the presentation of a broad set of recommendations that range from macro-level to micro-level in focus.

### 1.4 The national ECEC implementation gap

In Ireland the process of policy development has been influenced by a social partnership approach\(^1\) that gave rise to a number of participatory mechanisms including extensive consultation with a wide set of stakeholders during the production of key policy

\[^1\] The Irish model of social partnership extends beyond the traditional tripartite grouping of the state, employers and trade unions to include farming, community and voluntary and environmental representatives.
documents. Through this process the state’s commitments to equality and rights were captured and expressed within national plans for economic and social development such as *Towards 2016, Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015* (Government of Ireland 2006d) and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016* (ibid 2007a). These documents also included commitments to the provision of affordable, accessible quality childcare to facilitate parental employment and as an intervention mechanism to tackle social exclusion (OCED 2004). The human capital arguments that highlighted the benefits of early intervention were informed by research that demonstrated the significant return on investment when children with disadvantaged backgrounds or special needs had access to quality ECEC experiences. However, other key policy initiatives indicated a wider understanding of how ECEC was understood.

The ratification of the UNCRC and the production of *National Childcare Strategy Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare* (Government of Ireland 1999), *Ready to Learn White Paper on Early Childhood* (Department of Education and Science 1999), and *The National Children's Strategy Our Children - Their Lives* (Government of Ireland 2000a) led to additional expectations within the ECEC sector that child-care would be constructed as being the holistic *care* and *education* of children in which children were recognised as rights holders. The establishment of the *Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education* (CECDE) in 2002, the publication of *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education 2006) and the extensive consultations on the development of a National Curriculum Framework
taking place at the time of beginning this research in 2007 were further evidence of the advancement of these commitments.

Despite these highly profiled developments, UNICEF reported that Ireland had only met one of ten minimum standards for ECEC, placing it last in a league table of 25 OECD countries (2008). High levels of relative poverty and inequality continued to exist in Ireland, despite the wealth created during the now famous Celtic Tiger years (Kirby 2010), while childcare places increased but little progress was made in addressing affordability or quality (Hayes and Bradley 2007; Hayes 2008a).

In Ireland, the selection and design of ECEC policy tools appeared to involve unilateral decision making by a limited number of key civil servants in the Office of the Minister for Children (OMCYA)\(^2\), the Department of Finance and politicians (OMCYA 2011a), or ‘policy insiders’ (Maloney, Jordan et al. 1994). This was exemplified by a series of surprise announcements for those working in the sector, such as the introduction of an early childhood cash benefit for parents in 2006, its withdrawal and replacement with a free pre-school year for children in 2009 (OMCYA 2011a), or the sudden closure of the CECDE in 2008 (St. Patrick’s College 2008).

There was a general sense of dissatisfaction with how policy was being implemented as policy objectives were not being adequately addressed. Fine-Davis (2007) outlined how some progress had been made in increasing the supply of childcare and modest attempts had been made to make it somewhat more affordable but overall a more comprehensive approach was required to address affordability and quality and access. She identified

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\(^2\) The Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) was established in 2005. Youth Affairs joined the department in 2007 and it then became known as the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). In March 2011 it was to change to the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).
Ireland as being a state in which parents were forced to assume primary responsibility for sourcing and financing childcare as the ‘Government clearly does not want to be saddled with actually providing childcare and seeing to it that it is of high quality, safe and providing an appropriate educational programme for preschool age children’ (pp.21-22 – emphasis in the original). Similarly, Kilkelly (2007) stressed that the design of funding programmes did ‘not represent a coherent policy response towards early childhood education and care, which is driven by the child’s rights to development, care, education, health and wellbeing and play’ (pp.91). So overall, the sense within the sector was that efforts to realise policy commitments were falling short of expectations.

1.5 Personal motivation

The interest in exploring this gap between rhetoric and reality emerged over time as a result of the researcher’s own experiences within the sector. While working as a Social Economy and Enterprise Advisor within an Area Based Partnership regeneration organisation in Tallaght in the late 1990s, the researcher provided technical assistance to community groups applying for the first dedicated funding for childcare in the state under a pilot Equal Opportunities in Childcare Programme (EOCP). This pilot phase was characterised by extensive learning by all stakeholders in the sector. The focus within the programme was on increasing access, affordability and quality of ECEC

There were huge challenges facing inexperienced voluntary boards of management in taking on responsibility for the construction of large purpose built facilities, recruitment of staff, planning for a complex funding mix, while also addressing the issues of quality of practice and curricular philosophy. Simultaneously, voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) such as the Irish Preschool Playgroup Association (IPPA) were
trying to gain an understanding of the business model so that they could advise individual groups on how to respect best practice and meet the needs of children and their families. During this phase the challenge for the VCOs was to try to keep other stakeholders – who were responsible for developing and managing the roll-out of this emerging policy at the national, regional and local level – focused on the needs and rights of the child. This was necessary as a majority of people involved in the developments, including the researcher, had no experience or exposure to ECEC and were there to address the practical issues involved in funding and opening of services. These were the formative years for the sector and it was marked by extensive networking and sharing of information with government and state agency staff as well as each other as the various stakeholders tried to understand the perspective of the other. As there were only twenty five pilot initiatives in the state, the stakeholder group was small and most people were known to each other.

Following a move to the Dublin City Development Board\(^3\) (DCDB) in 2000, the researcher became involved in the establishment of the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) and continued to be involved as advisor before becoming a Board member up to and during the course of the research. The City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were a key structure established under the newly mainstreamed EOCP (2000-2006). In line with Ireland’s social partnership model, the Boards of Management consisted of stakeholders representing various government departments, state agencies, employers, unions, VCOs, ECEC service providers and parents.

\(^3\)The City and County Development Boards were established in each of the 33 local authorities in order to bring about an integrated approach to the delivery of both State and local development services at local level. Each was required to develop a strategy that would act as a template guiding all public services and local development activities locally; in effect bringing more coherence to the planning and delivery of services at local level.
Once again, the researcher observed extensive learning and cooperation amongst the VCOs and community service providers but representatives of state agencies and government departments, many of whom had hitherto little if any involvement with ECEC developments, often distanced themselves. Furthermore, at a practical level, the parent and private service provider representatives were difficult to recruit or involve at a Board level, hence limiting the voices of those most familiar with requirements of an early childhood education and care sector.

As funding programmes became more structured and mainstreamed, the CCCs increased their involvement in administering funding programmes. Under the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) (2006-2010), the frustrations expressed by those working on the ground shifted from a concern that aspirations captured in policy documents were not being realised, to a distraction with the extensive rules, regulations and administrative complexities affecting almost all VCOs and service providers due to the design of funding programmes. Once again, practical distractions reduced the focus within the NCIP on the child.

A concern about the lack of focus on the child was compounded by a realisation that a focus on increasing the number of childcare places under the various funding schemes was overshadowing quality issues. This was of particular concern as sectorally there was an increased involvement with and exposure to international research that was highlighting the potential negative impacts, particularly on vulnerable children, of access to poor quality childcare (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training 2009). There were sectoral voices (Fine-Davis 2007; Fingal County Childcare Committee 2005; Irish Congress of Trade Unions 2002) highlighting an
arguments for no childcare rather than facilitating the provision of poor quality childcare.

Based on these experiences, three distinct impressions were formed over the years that directed the researcher’s decision to focus on the implementation phase of the policy process, and the design of policy tools in particular. The first was the on-going frustrations expressed by service providers and VCOs with the perceived implementation gap between stated policy and outcomes on the ground, each time policy tools were introduced or modified, a surprisingly frequent event over the past twelve years. Despite analysis and extensive discussion at workshops, conferences and seminars, at which policy makers were often present, each new development seemed to generate the same level of discontent. There was little evidence of learning by decision makers despite expectations that there should be due to the extensive consultations and emulation of the social partnership model in all new structures created.

The second was the gradual realisation, through interactions with key civil servants that, despite declarations within key policy documents, their priorities were not the same as those practitioners and VCOs in the sector who were advocating for the implementation of the stated policy principles. However, as key decision makers the civil servants’ agenda, which prioritised increasing the supply of childcare places and the creation of administrative systems through which they could channel funding and manage sectoral stakeholders, appeared to be prioritised in the design of ECEC policy tools.

Lastly was a belief that without an increased awareness of the need for real commitment to participative methods of policy design, the gap and frustrations would continue and
children, their families and society in general would be denied the opportunity to benefit from the development of a vibrant and change inducing ECEC infrastructure.

However, without credible research and a critical interrogation of the policy process, it would be difficult to affect change as the sector was research poor and often relied on anecdotal evidence and individual negotiations to try to progress change. There was a need to capture the story and identify the powers at play. This knowledge could empower advocates while offering the potential to enhance the policy process through the provision of a robust evidence base.

The research was timely as ECEC policy had only become a political priority in Ireland in recent years so the opportunity to influence change was strong as new policy is less sticky and easier to influence than embedded policies. The literature also revealed there had been a shift in how children were being viewed in the Western world. A view of children as being competent agents and citizens had emerged and the influence of this new thinking was evident in documents such as the *National Children’s Strategy* (2000). In the forward to the document, the Minister of State with responsibility for Children states that “All of us who work with children now realise that children’s views should be heard, their contribution to society valued and their role as citizens recognised”. Likewise within *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2006), the welcome leaflet recognised early childhood as “a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right” as the “child is an active agent in his/her own development through interactions with the world”. Simultaneously UNICEF (2008) were highlighting the increasing number of children accessing ECEC services everywhere, including Ireland, in response to the demand for women to enter the workforce.
1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains ten chapters. Chapters two, three and four are literature reviews in which the five models applied to the data and seven indicators are presented. This is followed by an outline of the context for ECEC developments in Ireland in Chapter five. Chapter six outlines the methodology used for the research before the research findings are presented and discussed in chapters seven, eight and nine. Finally chapter ten outlines the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter two contains a review of implementation and policy design theory literature which highlights the rationale for a focus on this element of the policy process. It also presents five models (Hood 1986; Schneider and Ingram 1990; 1993; Howlett 2000; Salamon 2002) that were applied to the data collected to generate the research findings. A broad understanding of effectiveness, the evaluative criteria selected for the research, is presented. It extends the understanding of effectiveness to include the relative impacts on various policy target populations in order to assess how equitably resources are distributed. This required a focus on the less visible norms and values that policy designs endorse.

Chapter three contains a review of the literature on children’s rights in ECEC policy development. It identifies three elements of children’s rights, protection, provision and participation, which were used as indicators in the policy evaluation that was undertaken.

Chapter four takes a closer look at the links between ideologies, such as conservatism, liberalism and social democracy, informing different welfare regimes and the impact
they have on ECEC policy development before presenting the final four evaluative indicators, *access, affordability, quality* and *coordination*.

**Chapter five** explores the context in which policy relating to ECEC and children in Ireland has developed. It looks at Ireland’s classification in relation to policy development from three perspectives: a welfare regimes approach; a statist approach that focuses on the characteristics of the state such as competitive, developmental or patriarchal; and a *New Public Management* (NPM) approach in which the level of adaptation to a more networked method of governance is seen to be an indicator of how policy will develop. The chapter then moves on to consider policies relating to ECEC and children’s rights in Ireland in more detail with close attention being paid to the historical development of the childcare problem and the state’s efforts to address the issue.

The unique approach developed to enable the presentation of the research data is then presented in **chapter six**, the methodology chapter. It highlights the broad and multi-dimensional nature of the research and the models being used leading to the need for a very flexible methodological approach informed by positivist, interpretivist and critical thinking and methods. The macro-level investigation was facilitated through the collection and review of a range of existing documents and web-based data. The inclusion of a micro-level *illustrative* example enriched the study with the generation of additional data. The chapter also identifies an ancillary research question which considers the credibility of research carried out by VCOs advocating against changes to subsidy design of ECEC social inclusion measures in 2008 in order to understand the lack of influence these reports were having.
The three chapters that follow present and discuss the findings from the research. This begins with chapter seven’s macro-level classification of informational, statutory and organisational policy tools (Hood 1986). They were evaluated to reveal progress in developing tangible substantive tools (Howlett 2000) while a range of less visible procedural (ibid) tools worked to manage and control ‘network’ partners.

Chapter eight moves on to evaluate the financial policy tools in the form of funding programmes and taxation instruments, and to identify the specific characteristics, such as levels of direct service delivery, visibility of the budget, reliance on third parties, and levels of uptake (Salamon 2002) that emerged from within this bundle of policy tools.

Chapter nine considers the design of subsidies in more detail enabling an exploration of the values and beliefs that were informing the policy tool design and selection decisions for different policy target populations (Schneider and Ingram 1990; 1993).

In chapter ten, conclusions and recommendations are presented. The conclusions are presented using the four policy tool classifications used in chapters seven and eight, informational tools, statutory tools, financial tools, and organisational tools. The impact on the seven indicators was evaluated under each of the four resource headings to assess their effectiveness.

The recommendations begin by identifying a macro level need to address further a range of conceptual issues in relation to ECEC development in Ireland that have not been teased out to any significant degree. The recommendations move on to focus on the need for structural reform in order to even out the power relations between the state and all other stakeholders. Finally, specific recommendations are made to adjust and
change current policy tool designs to enhance successful developments that have taken place in the state and address weaknesses that are leading to inadequate attention being paid to the seven indicators reviewed.

1.7 Conclusion

This thesis makes a contribution to research in three distinct ways. First, through a review of an extensive array of written materials it provides an overview of the substantial number of policy tools selected to implement Irish ECEC policy and realise children’s rights within this context. Second, it provides an evaluation of these tools through the application of a range of models to existing and newly generated data using evaluative criteria that extend beyond a limited definition of effectiveness to include a multi-dimensional socio-political review. This provides the rationale for the final element. It identifies a range of possible actions to affect change in the current ECEC policy tool designs that can be further explored.

This chapter has outlined the objective of this thesis to provide extensive insight into the technical as well as the socio-political dimensions of ECEC policy in Ireland through the application of policy design theory models. It also identified the rationale for selecting policy design theory as an analytical framework. It was located in a desire to evaluate the influence of social justice and rights incorporated in key policy documents on ECEC developments. The multidimensional nature of the various models within policy design theory facilitates the multi-level inquiry that takes place within this thesis.

The two research questions were then identified in the chapter which focus on evaluating policy tools designs and then making recommendations for change.
Following on from this, a description of the implementation gap between policy intention and actualisation was examined. This combined with the researcher’s experiences within the ECEC sector to provide the rationale for undertaking this research.

Frustrations at the gap between policy statements and policy implementation have been exacerbated by extensive consultation with the expectation that feedback would be considered in policy design. This has combined with a struggle to keep a policy focus on the child when operational issues and lack of information within the sector have reduced capacity to influence or direct implementation decisions. The experiences of the researcher have motivated an interest in advancing this research in order to generate findings that can be used by those in the sector dissatisfied with the current impact of national policy implementation decisions.

Finally, the chapter presented an outline of the chapters in the thesis as they are structured to review the literature, provide a context for ECEC developments in Ireland and explain the methodology, before the findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented.
Chapter Two: Designing Policy for Democracy

2.0 Introduction

This chapter contains a review of implementation and policy design theory literature which highlights the rationale for a focus on the implementation phase of the policy process. It also presents the five policy tool design models that were used to evaluate the data gathered for the project.

The basic premise of design theory is that governments have a range of instruments (or tools) at their disposal that are the mechanisms through which public policy goals are realised (Linder and Peters 1989) or put another way, ‘implementation systems contain a variety of mechanisms and devices to achieve policy goals’ (Blair 2002, p.169). Salamon (2002) describes a policy instrument as a ‘tool of public action’ which ‘is an identifiable method through which collective action is structured to address a public problem’ (p.19). It is the distinct features and attributes of policy tools as well as the mix of tools on which a policy design approach focuses. The design and selection of policy tools is seen to be the determining factor in the success or failure or overall effectiveness of programmes and the realisation of policy goals (ibid).

The chapter begins by outlining the historical development of a focus on policy tool selection and design. The roots were traced back to the 1950s and Lasswell’s desire to see the policy sciences develop to improve the practice of democracy (DeLeon 1997). In the 1970s, from within a context of implementation theory, which evolved at that time to explain what were perceived to be policy failures, there emerged a focus on what
Lindblom referred to as ‘politico-economic mechanisms’ (DeHaven-Smith 1988, p.14) or what became known as policy tools.

The chapter progresses to review the distinct generations of both implementation theory and a policy design approach that emerged since the 1970s and the variety of theories from other fields that were impacted by a policy design approach. Three first generation policy tools models are presented which were used within this research: a basic tool kit of government action developed by Hood (1986); Howlett’s distinction between substantive and procedural tools (2000); and Schneider and Ingram’s categorisation of behavioural assumptions behind policy tools (1990).

The chapter moves on to look at the second generation of policy tool design research distinguishing between macro and micro-level implementation models. The fourth model used was developed by Salamon (2002) who advocated for a systematic evaluative criteria and set of policy tool dimensions which when applied revealed design tendencies that were appropriate for a macro-level inquiry. This is followed by details of the fifth model derived from policy design theory, as advocated predominantly by Schneider and Ingram (1993; 1997; 2005), which was more appropriate for an exploration of the nitty-gritty of specific programmes (O'Toole Jr 2000). Finally, an overview of how policy tool design theory could make a valuable contribution to the Ireland’s social scientific literature as well as enabling a more specific focus on how ECEC policy was being implemented in Ireland and elsewhere is presented.
2.1 A journey towards designing for democracy

Advocates for a policy tool design approach argue that decisions made during the implementation phase have a significant impact on democracy through the effect they have on providing opportunities to participate in decision making which in turn influences our understanding of citizenship (DeLeon 1997; DeLeon and DeLeon 2002; Rathgeb Smith and Ingram 2002). There is a belief amongst some that the pluralist view of democracy in which all citizens are treated equally and have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process is more aspirational than real (Schneider and Ingram 1997). The problem, as described by Dryzek in 1996 is that ‘it offers a true democratic experience to only a few citizens, holds out the promise of democracy to others, and offers only the illusion of democracy to the remainders’ (cited in Schneider and Ingram 1997, p.67). While these comments were written with adults predominantly in mind, the urgency to address these issues increases for children as they are often ignored or invisible as citizens in the policy process. Decisions are made for them by adults, often with little thought as to the impact on their lives (Moss 2008). Policy science, and specifically the policy design theories within it, offers insight in to how a more democratic policy process can be developed to address these and many other shortcomings that will be identified through the course of this thesis.

This section focuses on three specific developments in the social sciences. This journey begins in the 1950s with the development of the concept of the policy science of democracy. The second development explored is how implementation theory emerged as a key area of interest for policy scholars in the 1970s. The section concludes with a review of the policy tools approach, which began in the 1950s and blossomed in the 1980s following the integration of design and implementation.
2.1.1 Policy science of democracy

Harold D. Lasswell was the originator of what became known as the policy sciences (DeLeon 1997) which evolved to be a multi-disciplinary approach that aimed to provide information to improve the policy making process as well as policy outcomes. The focus was on the problem rather than on a single academic discipline and in 1950, along with Abraham Kaplan, he highlighted the need to generate knowledge that would both improve the practice of democracy but was also ‘pertinent to the integration of values realized by and embodied by interpersonal relations [such as] human dignity and the realization of human capacities’ (cited in DeLeon 1997, p.46). Building upon Dewey’s pragmatic political theory approach, Lasswell focused more deeply on ideologies and ‘how power might be shaped and shared through widespread participation’ (Dryzek and Torgerson 1993, p.130). His desire for democracy, human dignity, the realisation of human capacity and participation were encapsulated in the term the policy sciences of democracy (DeLeon 1995) and within the question that he first posed in 1936 about ‘Who gets what, when and how?’ (Schneider and Ingram 1993, p.334).

The multidisciplinary policy science models differed from traditional policy analysis models developed by economists and political scientists in which the goal was economic efficiency. Lasswell had given rise to a more interpretive style that strives to provide advice on ‘complex, messy policy issues’ (Durning 2005, p.693) and seeks to involve multiple stakeholders to maximise equity, effectiveness and human dignity.

2.1.2 An implementation approach

One of Lasswell’s legacies was his highly influential framework for understanding the policy process, the stages heuristic (Sabatier 2007). Many have built upon the
framework with four stages generally being identified: agenda setting; policy formulation and legitimations; implementation; and evaluation. Since its development, it has been a contested frame as an increased understanding of the complexity of the policy process reveals the significant role of street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) in reshaping policy to realise different outcomes than those intended and a range of unintended consequences that invariably emerge due to the complexity of systems (Hudson and Lowe 2009). Lindblom (1959) is credited with writing the most widely read policy analysis paper that highlights the incrementalist approach through the science of muddling through (ibid). Some go as far as putting forward a garbage can model (Cohen, March et al. 1972) in which it is argued that there are no rational boundaries on the policy process.

However, a scholastic interest in implementation as a distinct phase emerged in the 1970s following Press and Wildavsky’s case study of the difficulties of implementing a federal manpower training programme in Oakland, California (Lester, Bowman et al. 1987; Hill and Hupe 2003; O'Toole 2004). They highlighted the role of politics in the implementation process. They differentiated between electoral or partisan politics and the policy or social politics that emerged as a key factor in explaining the variance between a state’s policy position and the policy outcomes in the Oakland casestudy (Schofield 2001). In 1975 Edwin Hargrove contended that implementation was the missing link (Robichau and Lynn Jr 2009) ‘between the political and economic analysis of policy and the organizational or institutional analysis of public administration’ (Schofield 2001, p.246). While this rational top-down view was to prove useful for developing knowledge about the policy process, many scholars felt that it was far removed from the real world experiences of those involved in policy (Hudson and Lowe
2009). In time, this view was challenged and a number of sectarian disputes would emerge including ‘qualitative and small-\( n \) versus quantitative, large-\( n \) investigations; top-down versus bottom-up frameworks; policy design versus policy-implementation emphasis, and so forth’ (O'Toole Jr 2000, p.264). Before these are reviewed in detail, the history of the emergence of a tools approach is presented as it was the central focus of this study.

2.1.3 A policy tools approach

The focus on policy tools was recognised in the 1950s when Dahl and Lindblom identified a growing number of new policy techniques that offered potential to address problems with increased flexibility by being more innovative and creative (Schneider and Ingram 1997). Their focus was on evaluating the impact these \emph{politico-economic techniques} had on democracy by judging them against criteria that included ‘freedom, rationality (including efficiency), democracy (defined as political equality), and subjective equality’ (ibid, p.70). However, Lowi is credited with being the key influencer in categorising policy instruments and highlighting the political element in the use of policy tools (Howlett 1991). His work in the 1960s and 1970s was to lead the way in theorising about how policy determines politics. Lowi drew attention to the ‘dynamic political consequences’ of different types of policies on levels of participation (Schneider and Ingram 1990, p.511). He identified four distinct types of policies: distributive; redistributive; regulatory; and constituent. These were evaluated against the criterion of coerciveness and level of targeting. As summarised by Charles Anderson in 1971:

\emph{Politics is always a matter of making choices from the possibilities offered by a given historical situation and cultural context. From this vantage point, the}
institutions and procedures of the state to shape the course of economy and society become the equipment provided by a society to its leaders for the solution of public problems. They are the tools of the trade of statecraft. (as cited in Howlett 1991, p.2)

However, it was the 1980s before extensive linkages were made in the integration of design and an implementation approach. Many of the sectarian divides O’Toole identified as characterising the growth in implementation studies continued to frame what was described as a multi-generational development within the field of policy design (Lester, Bowman et al. 1987). Much of the focus on policy tools up to this point had been on broad definitions of policy instruments which included ‘those instruments used to actually deliver goods and services and those directed at affecting policy developments’ (Howlett 2008). It was following Salamon’s suggestion (1981) that implementation literature would benefit by reorienting its focus to ‘test hypotheses about the comparative effectiveness of different tools’ (Schneider and Ingram 1990, p.512), that a new emphasis on the systematic study of policy instruments emerged. Blair (2002) synthesises Salamon’s new approach as follows:

*Rejecting existing policy implementation research paradigms that examined agencies, programs, actors or organizations, Salamon promoted an investigative approach that focused on the specific devices and actions used by government. These government actions, or policy tools, collectively constitute an identifiable set of “methods through which government seeks a policy objective”* (p.29)

While there is general agreement amongst policy design scholars on the nature and importance of policy design, there emerges from within the literature on the development of policy design theory slight variations in emphasis depending in most part on whether researchers are following a systematic, although not necessarily rational, approach to theory generation and testing as opposed to those who focus on the *micro-implementation* level (Matland 1995). In the course of this research, both were
called upon as the former was a better fit for the examination of Ireland’s ECEC policies in chapter seven and eight in which a macro-level investigation was undertaken while a more interpretive approach which focused in on the meanings of policy (Yanow 2000) was utilised in chapter nine’s micro-level review of specific policy tools. The following three chapter sections deal with these areas distinctly, although in reality there is much overlap as many scholars take on the challenge of adopting a systematic approach to classification while also acknowledging and embracing the complexities of the policy making process.

2.2 The development of implementation research

This section expands on the key developments within implementation theory. It begins by outlining a range of contextual issues impacting upon implementation and consequently later policy design theories. This is followed by details about the three generations of implementation research that have been identified by scholars with different methodological approaches and theories about how best to implement policy. The first generation of the 1970s relied predominantly on case-studies to demonstrate the impact of implementation decisions. The second generation sought to identify the optimal implementation decision considering both top-down and then bottom-up methods of policy implementation up to and during the 1990s. Finally, the third generation emerged in the 1990s to adopt a strong scientific approach and multiple methods to investigating what was understood to be a complex problem accepting that no one best implementation strategy exists but individual contexts and contingencies needed to be considered. This is followed by a review of the key challenges that present themselves for this field of research.
While the claim that policy design and implementation theories have progressed through several generations may reflect a normal life cycle within a field of research, in this instance it is also linked in part to the changes that have taken place in how governments govern. The range and complexity of policy tools have developed in response to local, national and global changes. As Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007, p.2) put it ‘[e]ach phase of state development or restructuring has been accompanied by a new wave of innovations relating to these instruments’. Globalisation has changed the context in which governments operate and the range of problems and potential solutions available to it (Kirby and Murphy 2011) with national governments finding it increasingly difficult to insulate their economies and societies from global pressures (Peters and Pierre 1998). In the case of Ireland for instance, membership of the EU has had a significant effect on Irish policy development. New tools such as benchmarking, mainstreaming and open method co-ordination are being increasingly utilised to lead national governments to meet EU requirements (Bruno, Jacquot et al. 2006), which also impacts on ECEC as it increases in profile on the political agenda. Nationally, states have seen the emergence of new social risks as a consequence of changes in work and family formation patterns that need to be addressed (Hantrais 2004; Anxo, Flood et al. 2007; Van Dongen 2009) with a range of solutions being presented by both state and the private sector in the form of childcare provision, training, insurance against illness or periods of unemployment, and so forth.

Hill and Hupe (2009) outline how a paradigmatic shift occurred in academic research in response to changes in practice in public administration. The policy-implementation paradigm emerged as a general disappointment with how the Western welfare states,
which operated through a centralised interventionist governance model, were able to address a range of problems such as poverty. Through a review of the policy process, the primary focus was on highlighting the discrepancy between intentions of policy and achievements. In the 1980s attention turned to the nature of governance and the manner in which problems of the state were handled. The role of the state was perceived to have changed to encompass an increased emphasis on managerialism within a New Public Management paradigm.

Salamon (2002) presented a range of features under what he termed a New Governance paradigm that reflected a move towards what has been described as a western neo-liberal approach or New Public Management (Hood 1991). There was a shift away from a hierarchical style of government as increasingly more networks, agencies and actors became involved in the policy process. Partnership approaches to the economic and social policy development were to become a norm for many states not just within the EU but throughout the OECD region, Ireland being no exception (Roche 2009). There was also an increased emphasis on competition as ‘a means to increase public service efficiency and sensitivity to its clients-or-customers’ (Peters and Pierre 1998, p.229). While traditionally debates would have focused on public versus private provision of goods and services, increasingly public and private operated within the same domains interchangeably. There was also a decrease in the level of regulatory tools being used as claims were made that natural market forces could provide the potential solution to the development of a healthy economy and consequently a prosperous society (Eliadis, Hills et al. 2005).

The style of government was seen to have shifted away from a command and control model to one in which negotiation and persuasion were more productive for reaching
agreement as many of the policy tools now relied less on coercion, or explicit
government regulation, and more on voluntarism, or self-regulation (Boyle 1999;
Salamon 2002). This in turn led to the need for less managerial skills and more
enabling skills within the public administration (Salamon 2002). It has also led to the
need for new instruments of control and accountability as the functions of the state
become more dispersed (Peters and Pierre 1998). A key phrase used to sum up the new
approach to governance is that government needed to focus more on steering rather than
rowing (Peters and Pierre 1998; Salamon 2002). The overall shift described has been
contested at various levels, which are explored in greater detail in chapter four and five
of this thesis, but some level of agreement exists that a western neo-liberal approach has
gained increased prominence and emerges as a key focus of the literature reviewed.

Another key change has been in the unit of analysis chosen by policy analysts shifting
from agency, to programme and now on to the policy instrument (Salamon 2002;
Landry and Varone 2005). Salamon (2002) outlines a journey that begins with a focus
on the public agency by students of public administration in the US as they sought to
address shortcomings associated with government bureaucracy through the
development of a ‘democratic public agency’. However, in the 1970s the
implementation school was to pay more attention to the specific programmes
themselves, seeking increased clarification about objectives and overall management.
The benefit of this shift was that it enabled the ‘policy analyst to transcend the
distinction between politics and administration’ (Schofield 2001, p.245). The new
governance approach as described by Salamon (2002) pays particular attention to the
post-enactment process as it focuses on the ‘the distinctive tools or technologies that
programs embody’ (p.11). He explains that there are a limited number of basic tools that

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are used across all fields but, more importantly, these tools determine the actors that will be involved in the implementation and their role in the process. He highlights why this is important:

Since these different actors have their own perspectives, ethos, standard operating procedures, skills, and incentives, by determining the actors the choice of tool importantly influences the outcome of the process. Thus, this focus builds on the insight of the implementation studies that the division between policy and administration assumed in the classical theory does not seem to work in practice, and that the process of program design does not end with legislative enactment but rather continues into the implementation phase as well. (ibid, pp.10-11)

He draws attention to the technical but also the cultural and political nature of policy tool design which have given rise to the plethora of concepts and theories that come to bear on the policy design decisions including new institutionalism (March and Olsen 1984), contingency theory (Alexander 1985), rational choice theory (Peltzman 1976), public choice theory (Farber and Frickey 1991), democratic theory (Chambers 2003), and games theory (Harsanyi and Selten 1988), to name but a few, which will reveal themselves through the course of this chapter.

2.2.2 Three generations of policy implementation research

‘Structuring implementation research and bringing some closure to the topic is ...important for policy designers. ... while it is proper to remind policy designers to consider all relevant factors, a much greater service is rendered if policy designers are given an adequate description of the implementation process that directs them to the variables of greatest importance and to the factors on which to focus their scarce resources should their search process be limited, as they inevitably are.’ Matland (1995, p.154)
Peter and Linda DeLeon (2002) clearly identify three specific generations of research within the field of implementation from a US perspective presented in Table 2-1 above. The first is identified as the era of *case studies* led by Press and Wildavsky’s work, with each study generating a set of prescribed lessons but the key criticism has been that they generated little in the way of generic theory. Scholars at the time described the implementation process, assuming policy formation and implementation were linear processes, paying particular attention to policy outputs. They were seen to be pessimistic as they emphasised absolute success (which was rarely accomplished) or failure (which most studies were categorised as), with success or failure believed to be ‘a function of flawed or imperfect primary legislation or a failure of bureaucratic compliance’ (Schofield 2001, p.249). However, the accomplishments of this generation of researchers included directing attention to outcomes and the causal relationship between these outcomes (DeLeon and DeLeon 2002).

This was followed by a phase marked by a rigorous and empirical approach driven by what has become known as a *top-down* perspective (Lester, Bowman et al. 1987). This was a view that accepted a *command and control* style of implementation in which policy makers within the system decided how best to implement policy in order to realise policy objectives. At the same time, key scholars such as Lipsky (1980; 2010) were advocating a *bottom-up* approach in which greater success was envisaged when those affected by the policy decision were involved in the implementation (as well as agenda setting) as there was likely to be a closer match between expectations and outcomes, a view grounded in democratic theory. While strong arguments were made for the benefits of this more *participatory* approach to the policy process, the problems identified were the length of the process, cost, and that at certain times, it was not the
appropriate approach, particularly in areas such as national security (DeLeon and DeLeon 2002). However, Sabatier (2007) who was key in the development of the top-down approach moved on to work on integrating both approaches to allow for policy learning while O’Toole (2000) downplayed the importance of the differences, seeing it as different ways of looking at the same phenomenon. There were those such as Saetren and Berman who concluded that different perspectives were appropriate at different times (cited in Matland 1995).

Matland (1995) provides a most comprehensive synthesis of implementation literature up to the mid-1990s. He developed a much cited matrix presented in Figure 2.1 below that considered the style of policy implementation most frequently utilised when taking into consideration the levels of conflict between various actors about policy goals and/or the means to realise these goals on one axis and the level of ambiguity about goals and desired outcomes on the other (Schofield 2001; Blair 2002; DeLeon and DeLeon 2002; Mischen and Sinclair 2009).

Figure 2-1 Ambiguity-Conflict Matrix: Policy Implementation Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
<td>Administrative Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Smallpox eradication</td>
<td>Political Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>Example: Busing children to mixed race schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Experimental Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Headstart</td>
<td>Symbolic Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coalition Strength</strong></td>
<td>Example: Community action agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matland (1995) identifies four distinct conditions and outlines the recommended implementation style to best address the ambiguity conflict dilemma. The most straightforward implementation style is *administrative implementation* as there is general agreement about the policy goals and means to realise these goals.

*Political implementation* is marked by low ambiguity about the policy goal but conflict about how to realise the goal. Matland suggests a top-down orientation, in which implementation outcomes are decided by power. The evident danger in this quadrant is that coercion or systematically distorted communication (Habermas 2006) is used by the dominant group. DeLeon and DeLeon (2002) argue for a more democratic model to avoid the abuse of power.

When using *experimental implementation* there is less certainty about goals but agreement that something should be done. Environmental issues are presented as an example of this. Contextual conditions dominate the process so on-going updating and alterations are needed. The actors involved will determine the outcomes so Matland recommends a bottom-up approach in which discourse will be used to address diversity.

Finally, where there are high levels of ambiguity and conflict about goals and means, successful resolution of the policy problem seems less likely. Matland refers to a *symbolic implementation* in which efforts are made to be seen to try to solve the problem but outcomes are not deemed to be successful. The DeLeons (2002) argue that there is widespread evidence of these *casualties* in the area of social and environmental policy in the US, ‘for example the entire War on Poverty, Model Cities, or Superfund-sponsored clean-ups’ (p.486). They argue that where high levels of disagreement are present a *democratic* approach in which the participation of a range of impacted
stakeholders in the policy process would be the ‘means of linking organizational action to public preferences’ (ibid, p.487). Schneider and Ingram (1990) more specifically recommend overcoming this impasse through implementation at lower levels with significant discretion enabling support to build around an agreed approach.

The third generation moves on but once again two distinct developments emerged. The first adopts a scientific approach advocated primarily by Goggin et al. (1990) that seeks to explain ‘why behaviour varies across time, across policies, and across units of government and by predicting the type of implementation behaviour that is likely to occur in the future’ (cited in DeLeon and DeLeon 2002, p.471). It does this by ‘using multiple locations and observations, more than one case study and pays greater attention to research methodology involving more longitudinal studies than the first- and second-generation models’ (Schofield 2001, p.250). Drawing from other theoretical approaches, such as formal games theory, applied mathematics are used to analyse a variety of social situations (O'Toole 2004).

The second approach was developed by key policy design scholars such as Ingram (1990) and Matland (1995) who were proposing contingency theories as a method of tackling the complexities of the process. They concluded that ‘there is no single best implementation strategy, that the appropriate strategy is very much contextual in terms of what are the contingencies surrounding the policy issues and how they can best be addressed in terms of implementation’ (DeLeon and DeLeon 2002, p.471).
2.2.3 The challenges for policy implementation

It becomes clear that the second and third generations highlight the emergence of divergent views. While both systematic in their approach, Matland (1995) identifies the top-downers as relying more on a rational model that assumes no conflict in goal setting and has a narrow focus in terms of goal outcomes. There is an underlying belief in the rational actor and there is no consideration of the normative implications of policy (DeLeon 1995). Linder and Peters (1987, p.116) describe the top-down school as being ‘more positivistic and American’, while Schofield (2001, p.250) describes the advances made by Goggin et al. as ‘very North American based, and designed around the legislative and organization bodies of state, federal and local implementation processors’.

The major criticism of this approach is that it gives the appearance of being scientific and providing right answers through the use of research tools such as mathematical and statistical analysis creating the ‘effects of truth’ (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, p.3), resulting in conclusions that policies have failed or fallen short of expectations. This ‘notion of dashed expectations suggests either that there has been a failure of control, or that there have been interventions in the policy process that are seen as illegitimate’ (Hill and Hupe 2003, p.486). The belief is that somebody has strayed from the path within the system and relinquished some level of control or there has been interference or reinterpretation of policy goals at lower levels. These are perceived to be failures rather than a legitimate part of the policy process which is a contention of the bottom-up perspective (Lipsky 2010).

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Another pitfall identified by Hill and Hupe (2003, p.486), two European scholars, was a belief that ‘the relationship between layers is a simple and uniform phenomenon that can be expected to have similar characteristics in dissimilar situations’. However, the complexity of administrative contexts needs to be considered and acknowledged when synthesizing results but the fear is that without a systematic approach that data will be too complex to manage.

This contrasts with the bottom-uppers who acknowledge conflict and ambiguity and look at the broad impact of policy implementation (Matland 1995). They embrace the Lasswellian concept of involving citizens in the policy process, a development which has been assisted by the increase in networks and an increasingly active community and voluntary (non-profit) sector (DeLeon 1995). Linder and Peters (1987, p.116) identify this approach as being ‘more phenomenological and European’ using research tools that facilitate a more descriptive capturing and interpretation of information. A view of democracy based on citizen participation is more in line with the bottom-up approach in which scholars like Habermas (DeHaven-Smith 1988) argue that a top-down approach leads to a deliberate distortion of communications through the use of authority and power. They advocate for and seek a more consensual basis of governance (DeLeon and DeLeon 2002).

However, researchers from within this school have often assumed a normatively attractive version of the policy process in which policy determines action and ‘[g]oal setting is immediately, distinctly, and straightforwardly followed by goal realization’ (Hill and Hupe 2003, pp.482-483). While a usual image of public policy implementation, the pitfall for providing an analysis or explanation of implementation and its results is that ‘it keeps researchers from an open, perhaps more sociological
observation of the actions of implementers’ (ibid, p.483). As Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) point out, a sociological perspective is most useful in shedding light on the relationship between the governing and the governed, a key concern of those adopting a micro-implementation approach such as Schneider and Ingram (2005), and Soss (Soss and Canon 1995; 1999; Soss, Schram et al. 2001; Soss and Keiser 2006).

One of the key challenges for implementation theory overall is distilling a comprehensive set of theories, as it has been argued that it is reaching theoretical dead ends as no theoretical consensus has emerged, although a mass of potential explanatory variables have been presented (O’Toole 2004). The literature does not appear to be presenting any new paradigms but synthesizing existing ones (Schofield 2001). In a more positive light, O’Toole (2000, p.283) argues that ‘the most interesting relevant work is taking place on the edges of the specialty or in related research fields’ such as institutional analysis, the study of governance, as well as networks and network management. Overall, however, O’Toole (2004) suggests that practitioners can benefit from selecting from the bazaar of theories using a contingency approach or ‘strategy of comparative advantage’ (p.326) with a view to employing them in a ‘heuristic rather than a rigorously predictive fashion’ (p.320).

2.3 Policy tools of implementation: the first generation

While scholars have identified three specific generations of implementation theory, the literature focussing on the tools of implementation identifies two distinct generations of scholarly work. As outlined in Table 2-1 below, the first focuses on classifying policy tools while the second generation forged closer linkages with implementation theory as it expanded to consider the value of potential mixes or configurations of policy tools.
and the impact on target populations of policy design decisions. Table 2.1 also identifies the models selected from within each generation for use in the research.

Table 2.1 Summary of Implementation and Policy Design Generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation Implementation Theory</th>
<th>Second Generation Implementation Theory</th>
<th>Third Generation Implementation Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1970s onwards) Case-Studies to demonstrate implementation failure</td>
<td>(1980s onwards) Multiple implementation styles and strategies identified based on top-down and bottom-up approaches</td>
<td>(1990s onwards) Scientific approach taken using multiple sites, multiple methodologies considering context with no single best implementation strategy recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation Policy Design Theory</th>
<th>Second Generation Policy Design Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1950s &amp; 1970s onwards) Identification and classification of distinct policy tools.</td>
<td>(Late 1990s onwards) Identify optimality and coherence within a mix of policy tools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selected Models**

- Basic Tool Kit of Government Actions (Hood 1986)
- A Resource-Based Taxonomy of Substantive and Procedural Policy Instruments (Howlett 2000)
- Classification of tools based on Behavioural Assumptions Informing Policy Tool Design (Schneider and Ingram 1990)

- Policy Tool Dimensions (Salamon 2002)
- Social Construction of Policy Target Populations (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 2005)

Within the first generation literature, the theoretical divides, boundaries and influences evident in implementation theory carry through. Eliadis, Hill and Howlett (2005) outline a history in which economists and political scientists in North America analysed the merits and characteristics of individual *substantive* instruments – ‘that is, those
instruments that seek to effect changes in how governments address public issues or deliver services, including classic command-and-control regulation, public enterprises, and subsidies, to name a few’ (pp.4-5). Scholars developed typologies that focused on technical effectiveness, efficiencies and cost-benefit. The first significant classification of policy means was carried out by Kirschen in 1964 which focused in on tools available for economic policy (Linder and Peters 1989).

In Canada, in response to the trend towards deregulation, the Economic Council of Canada in the mid-1970s commissioned a report *The Choice of Governing Instruments*, which was influential in developing the scholastic efforts in the field which have been described as ‘some of the most substantial research on the tools of government intervention’ (Landry and Varone 2005, p.107). The OECD were advocating for alternatives to regulation as it claimed positive effects such as ‘a reduction in regulatory and resource burdens on government, increased likelihood of compliance if industry has participated in developing the standards, and improved flexibility in coping with technological, cultural, and behavioural changes among regulated entities. The OECD further notes that these aspects may be especially useful in dealing with issues that have international/extraterritorial dimensions, in which case diversity among the regulated entities is greater’ (Eliadis, Hills et al. 2005, p.12).

There was a shift to comparative studies of instrument selection and the development of theories of instrument choice as an increasing awareness emerged that technical efficiency was not driving choice but rather it was based on ‘politically rational instrument choice’ (ibid). Building upon public choice theory they advanced the notion that the self-interest of actors involved in the choice influenced the decision so that
political rationality was the primary (although not necessarily the only) driver (Hill 2005).

There was increased focus on horizontal–partnership-type tools and a decreased emphasis on the legalistic vertical tools. In the search for alternatives to regulation, the inventory of tools expanded to include *procedural* tools, which were designed to affect the policy process, as well as the traditional *substantive* tools that affected the production and distribution of goods and services in society (Howlett 2000). The 1980s saw the identification of a number of these non-expenditure, procedural instruments emerging to ‘steer social actors towards … preferred policy options’ (ibid 2008, p.412). These instruments have been used increasingly and have become an essential feature of the new governance model. They were ‘intended to manage state-societal interactions in order to assure general support for government aims and initiatives’ (ibid).

This expanded role for government was captured in many typologies including a widely cited and influential political model developed by Hood in the UK in the 1980s (Howlett 2005). Within the *basic tool kit* of government action, he identifies four resources that governments have at their disposal: informational; coercive; financial; and organisational, that can be used to either monitor or alter the behaviour of policy targets (Howlett and Ramesh 1993). The resources are classified using the acronym NATO as: Nodality, Authority, Treasure, and Organisation (Landry and Varone 2005). ‘This classification scheme implies that government can approach its problems by using the information at its disposal, its legal powers, its money or its formal organizational capacity’ (Linder and Peters 1989, p.40). This model is based on the premise that the State uses tools to *control* and alter the direction of behaviour of social actors (Hood 2006).
Nodality ‘denotes the capacity of government to operate as a central point (not necessarily the central point) in information networks’ (Hood 2006, p.471- original emphasis). Borrowing from Vedung’s analogy of the carrot, the stick and the sermon, Hood likens nodality to the sermon. He describes these as modern forms of intervention, which offer insight into consequences of actions or behaviours that the state seeks to influence. This influence happens through a transfer of knowledge, where reasoned argument and persuasion are used to appeal to a common value (Bemalmans-Videc 1998). Examples of these policy tools include report generation, training, technical support and information provision.

Authority ‘denotes government’s legal power and other sources of legitimacy’ (Hood 2006, p.471). Regulation is the stick used by the state in an authoritative relationship in which the target is obligated to act as the state prescribes. The tools categorised as this resource type have some element of compulsion about them.

Treasure ‘denotes the assets or fungible resources’ (ibid) of the state. These are the economic means or the carrot the state uses to hand out or take away resources (Vedung 1998). In a lot of cases these are the most visible and contested policy tools.

The final category in Hood’s model and the missing element from Vedung’s model is organisation which ‘denotes its capacity for direct action, for instance through armies, police or bureaucracy’ (ibid). Additionally, it incorporates the various structures and networking arrangements that combine to manage and carry out activities for the state.

Building upon this key typology, Howlett expands it to include a further classification of tools as either substantive or procedural (Howlett 2000). These are the first two
models applied to the data in this thesis. In Tables 2.2 and 2.3 below examples of various policy tools are presented using both Hood (1986) and Howlett’s (2005) models.

Table 2.2 A Resource-Based Taxonomy of Substantive Policy Instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alter social actor behaviour</th>
<th>Nodality</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Treasure</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>Bureaucratic administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>User charges</td>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>Public enterprise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Licences</td>
<td>Tax expenditure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Census taking</td>
<td>Polling</td>
<td>Record keeping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Police reporting</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: (Howlett 2005, p.36)*

The nature of the substantive tools detailed in Table 2.2 moves from trying to alter the behaviour of social actors, at the top of the table, towards a monitoring role that is less directive or coercive, reflected in the tools at the bottom of the table.

Generally, the nature and type of substantive tools used by states in the OECD region have changed to reflect the international trend towards regulatory reform (Boyle 2005), a key feature of NPM. Following extensive promotion of regulatory reform by the OECD a key innovation that emerged was the introduction of *smart regulations* which included a shift towards more use of self-regulation; increased consultation, information provision and independent appeals procedures; as well as a goals-based or targeted approach (ibid). Given this, authority tools became less coercive and there was an increase in the number and variety of nodality and organisational resources utilised (Macdonald 2005). The nature of the financial tools (or treasure resources) also changed over time as more innovative methods of funding were needed and more third parties became involved in the implementation process (Salamon 2002).
When focusing on the procedural tools listed in Table 2.3, Howlett wished to determine how much impact the tools were having on facilitating the expansion of the networks that were emerging as the State *hollowed out* (2000). At one end of the spectrum he positioned the tools that promote social networks in the state but the actions of the State become more negative in nature utilising tools presented at the bottom of the table, that restrict social networks.

While Howlett and Ramesh (1993) argue that Hood’s model was developed to deal with the British situation, Schneider and Ingram’s model (1990), addressing *behavioural assumptions underlying policy tools*, is deemed to address the situation in the US. The latter typology is classified as a *continuum* by Landry and Varone (2005). Howlett (2005) uses the term *resource-based* to differentiate the typology from a continuum in which the *degree of difference* is captured (implying that tools are substitutable) rather than a *difference in the nature* of the tool (which would imply they are less substitutable).
Schneider and Ingram (1990, p.510) begin from a contention that ‘policy tools are essentially political phenomena, and that policy participation in the form of compliance, utilization, and other forms of “co-production” is an important form of political behaviour’. Within this value added approach (Mischen and Sinclair 2009), the amount of discretion exercised by implementers varies as the approach seeks an optimal rather than maximal solution to the problem of democratic participation. It begins with the basic assumption that public policy aims to get people to do things they might otherwise not do. Five tool designs are identified based on the underlying motivational strategies: authority; incentive; capacity; symbolic and hortatory; and learning tools.

While the authority tool is directive and tells people how they must behave, the incentive tool offers an incentive to behave as required. Inducements offer positive payoffs and are usually associated with socially acceptable behaviour unlike negative devices such as charges, sanctions or force which tend to be reserved for actions that policy wishes to stigmatise. There is an underlying assumption that individuals will make choices that serve their own best interests and incentives can render irrelevant the influence of cultural values or a reliance on the trial and error methodology of decision heuristics (Schneider and Ingram 1997). However, the additional tool designs involve increased levels of participation and voice and move towards a more equitable distribution of power.

Capacity tools recognise that utility maximisation will not always drive the decision making process (ibid). In situations where behaviours continue because of insufficient information, capacity or resources, additional strategies are called upon to influence decisions. Outreach or mobilisation programmes, information campaigns, training or financial investment may be used to ensure people are properly informed and have the
resources to make decisions that pursue the actions as prescribed or advocated by policy.

**Symbolic and hortatory tools** go further based on an assumption that individuals rely on decision heuristics and hold preferences based on intangible values that are culturally defined and beyond influence by incentives alone. These tools aim to alter perceptions of the policy-preferred actions through the use of images, symbols and labels to persuade target populations that the behaviour is consistent with their beliefs (ibid).

Finally, **learning tools** assume target populations and agencies can assist in developing tools to solve problems that are not fully understood. They provide for wide discretion to experiment with different approaches and based on evaluations and experience select from other tools the most effective option (Schneider and Ingram 1990). This is most appropriate for piloting initiatives and assumes a ‘partnership’ approach to learning. This was the third model selected for use as its application to several different policy tools enabled a comparative review of underlying behavioural assumptions about different policy targets.

### 2.3.1 International perspectives on policy tool choice and design

In 1991 Howlett reviewed the various typologies and categorisation schemes to determine whether distinct ‘national policy styles’ could be identified. He concluded that models developed in the US, UK and Canada were for the most part non-transferable as they were context bound. He describes American analysts as focusing on ‘politico-bureaucratic calculations of electoral and administrative advantage as significant factors determining specific instrument choices’ (ibid, p.11). The UK
scholars, that he labels as having a *tools of government approach*, are depicted as relying more on ‘past precedents and experiences with different instruments’ which ‘leads decision makers to favor certain instrument choices which have proven themselves to be capable of attaining compliance on the part of the targeted group with the least expenditure of governing resources’ (ibid). The Canadian approach, described as a *policy instruments approach*, is similar to the other two states in that instrument choice is determined in large part by political calculations but ‘the use of particular instruments lies not in electoral advantage, or in policy learning and past precedents, but with ideological preferences of state and societal actors’ to use the least coercive instrument available to do the job (ibid).

Overall, the various first generation models presented offer the potential to give a particular insight into how policy tools classifications can reveal patterns of behaviour in selecting and designing policy tools in response to policy problems. For the purposes of this research, three distinct models were utilised to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of the current state of ECEC policy design in Ireland. The first was Hood’s resource-based NATO model (1986) that was developed in the UK, as it was a useful starting point for classifying the basic tools. Howlett’s classification of substantive and procedural tools (2005) reflected the more subtle instruments of influence and control being used and their impact on network development. Finally, Schneider and Ingram’s behavioural assumptions of policy tools (1990) continuum typology, delved more deeply into the behavioural impacts of policy tool design decisions and their impact on democratic participation. In order to provide a more comprehensive review, models from the second generation policy instrument approach were also applied.
2.4 Policy tools of implementation: second generation

Much criticism of the first generation typologies has been expressed. Linder and Peters (1989) charge that the categories within the various typologies are ‘so broad perhaps that there is as much variance within them as between them’ (p.40). While there appears to be some overlap within some of the schemes, Linder and Peters concede ‘they are probably collectively exhaustive if we are willing to stretch their common-sense meanings’ (ibid). As Ringeling (2005, p.192) points out, ‘in practice, instruments can never be found in a pure form. So even if we have knowledge about characteristics of policy instruments, their actual state is influenced by the fact that they always come in a mix’. So success is deemed to emerge from within a constellation of tools.

The second generation scholars moved on to identify optimality and coherence within the mix of substantive and procedural tools that are available to be utilised within governance strategies (Howlett, Kim et al. 2006). Some empirical results are emerging from fields such as health with Sager (2008, p.541) being able to claim that ‘[i]n empirical terms, performance evaluations within and outside public health policy show that broad policy designs, above all, have a high chance of success’.

Ringeling (2005) reviews research done on the implementation of two environmental policies relating to packing and the transport of hazardous waste in six different countries in the European Union. He presents ten key conclusions about instrument choice reflecting many of the conclusions and principles accepted by the second generation scholars:
1. Government tools are as highly disputed as policy aims as they are connected to the varying views held by those involved in the decision making process about the role the state plays in society and the style of governance.

2. Tools should not be viewed from a pragmatic perspective as they are normative in nature. They are both political weapons and marching banners.

3. Countries in Western Europe differ in the way the welfare state is institutionalised with varying degrees of indirect government evident.

4. Different states favour different policy instruments. There are three general classifications: a social-democratic welfare state where direct state provision of services is a preferred option; a (neo)corporatist welfare state where policy is implemented by both public and private organisations. Finally, there are states in which the central position of the state is absent and public and semipublic organisations are active in the public domain and there is a significant reliance on horizontal tools that facilitate consensus building.

5. Similar policy tools can differ in terms of structure, context and effect within the different welfare states. Policy tools are influenced by the way in which a problem is formulated.

6. Instruments need to fit within the political-administrative setting of a particular state. While policies were often harmonised, the instruments selected were less so. Instrument choice was the result of political ideology, of different governance visions, of legal traditions.

7. Instrument choice is not constant with some instruments becoming fashionable and others losing favour. Policy routines influence choice too.
8. The perspectives of policy makers about instruments will result in different design features depending on which question they ask:

- In terms of *effectiveness*, does it work? This is a rational, economist’s perspective.

- In terms of *feasibility*, does it suit? This acknowledges the importance of the context by political scientists and the behaviour of actors in certain networks.

- In terms of *acceptability (or legitimacy)*, is it normatively correct? A question posed by political philosophers.

- In terms of *legality*, is it permitted? A public policy question that increases with importance (as does the normative correctness) as networks develop.

9. Asking all four questions in relation to the design of an instrument can result in higher quality policy making.

10. Asking all four questions leads to a broader perspective on the choice and application of policy instruments. (2005, pp.200-202)

Ringeling highlights the contingent nature of policy tools and the range of influences on the design and selection process. A unique national context, different ideologies, and the contested and political nature of the process, are all reasons to adopt a non-pragmatic view of policy tools and instrument choice in general. However, the four questions presented, that focus on the effectiveness; feasibility; acceptability; and legality of tools, enable a thorough attempt to increase the quality while broadening the perspective on which tools to choose and how to design them.
For the purpose of this research, a distinction was made amongst the various models about whether they have a macro- or micro-implementation level focus. As the area of ECEC in Ireland had not been reviewed before using a policy tool approach, the macro-level inquiry provided an evaluation of the broad brush strokes and patterns of the tools of implementation while a micro-level review revealed the underlying assumptions and construction informing the design.

2.4.1 A macro-implementation approach to policy tool design

There are several first generation models that can be utilised to evaluate policy tool impacts at a macro-level but there is a greater level of acceptance of the complex political nature of policy tool design and choice amongst second generation scholars. In 2002 Lester Salamon edited an influential guide to new governance *The Tools of Government* in which the modes of operation of several policy tools are presented. It has been described as ‘the most exhaustive account to date’ of tools in use (Sandfort, Selden et al. 2008, p.413). He points to the proliferation of *tools of public action* as well as the new partners for public work that have emerged under the model of new governance. While the amount and variety of policy tools appears to have increased over the years they have been traditionally grouped and placed into *basic tool kits* such as Hood’s (1986) which uses the degree of legitimate coercion to classify the tools or Schneider and Ingram’s (1990) model which relies on behavioural characteristics to distinguish the five tool types: authority; incentives; capacity building; symbolic and hortatory; and learning. However, whichever typology used, the overall conclusion is that there are a limited variety of instruments available to realise policy goals, as is demonstrated in Salamon’s compendium (Landry and Varone 2005).
Salamon (2002) outlines four policy tool dimensions that can be evaluated in order to better understand and improve how public problems are addressed. The various policy dimensions allow a review of the political as well as financial implications of decisions. He describes how **directness** measures the *distance* of the state from service delivery. This is the extent to which the entity authorizing, financing, or inaugurating a public activity is involved in carrying it out. **Visibility** measures the extent to which the resources devoted to a tool show up in the normal government budgeting and policy review processes (ibid). The visibility can determine the *vulnerability*, both politically and financially, of a budget in recessionary times. **Coercion** measures the extent to which a tool restricts individual or group behaviour (ibid). Where a state is very *committed* to the goals the tool would be expected to be coercive while a more *voluntary* approach is taken when the goals are more contested. **Automaticity** measures the extent to which a tool utilizes existing administrative structures to produce its effect rather than having to create its own special administrative apparatus (ibid).

Where a state relies on the market to deliver goods and services, the levels of automaticity are high as the market is self-organising and does not require new state structures. However, where the state needs to create new agencies, which can be prevalent particularly when a problem is new, the levels are low. The levels of automaticity are indicative of the level of reliance on *public service networks* (Pollitt 2009) which engage in a process ‘of facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved, or solved easily, by single organization’ (Arranoff cited in Pollitt 2009, p.202).

These dimensions move beyond the obvious characteristics to drill deeper into the issues of power and politics that shroud all policy tools decisions. Over the years
Salamon (1981; 2002) has argued that while technically it may appear that policy tools can be substituted to attain the same public-policy objective, in reality each tool generates its own political economy so from a political point of view cannot be substituted. Landry and Varone (2005, p.112) support this view and contend that ‘[e]mpirical evidence has led a majority of authors to accept the idea of separate political economies for each policy tool’ and that a range of implementation evaluations have been carried out that stress that not all policy tools are as efficient or effective in resolving the same policy problem.

From within a macro-level investigation, three models were selected for this research. Hood and Howlett’s first generation models were used to classify a full range of ECEC policy tools in Ireland as informational, statutory, financial and organisational tools. From there, an assessment of their substantive or procedural nature of each policy tool provided a more insightful review of the ECEC landscape in Ireland. Salamon’s second generation model identifying the key dimensions of policy tools was also applied to a more detailed review of financial policy tools. This model was used to provide insight into how distanced the state wished to remain from the problem, how vulnerable the budgets for each tool was to cuts, levels of commitment to policy goals and levels of reliance on third parties. However a more complete picture was revealed through the inclusion of a micro-level implementation approach to tool design (Sandfort, Selden et al. 2008) as it focuses attention on targets of policy as well as the many influencers and stakeholders.

2.4.2 A micro-implementation approach to policy tool design

ictionary instrument constitutes a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is
addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation.’ (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, p.4)

This section considers the advantages to a micro-level implementation exploration and looks in detail at Schneider and Ingram’s (1997; 2005) second generation model that evaluates the social construction of policy targets. In chapter nine of this research this model is used to build upon Schneider and Ingram’s first generation work on behavioural assumption of policy tools (1990) as it strives to address the question: who is benefiting from policy tool design?

Given the contingent, political and iterative nature of the policy process, making generic recommendations about which tools work best in certain situations is unlikely to guarantee success. When looking at the developments in educational policy implementation research, Honig (2006) stresses the need to extend the macro level research to look at the day-to-day realities to gain detailed information about the conditions under which certain interventions work. Schneider and Sidney (2009, p.105) state that the ‘choice of design elements reflects political and social values, historical precedent, national trends in ideas about “good” policy, as well as a host of “local” knowledge that leads to enormous variability in policy designs across time and space’.

In Schneider and Ingram’s 1997 work Deserving and Entitled, they identify nine fundamental empirical elements that if looked at could provide a comprehensive framework for a multi-level investigation that considers both rational and value-laden components of design. The nine elements are: (1) Problem, definition and goals to be pursued; (2) Benefits and burdens to be distributed; (3) Target populations (the players in the policy arena who receive, or may receive, benefits or burdens); (4) Rules (policy
directives stating who is to do what, when, with what resources, who is eligible, and so on); (5) Tools (incentives or disincentives for agencies and target groups to act in accord with policy directives); (6) Implementation structure (the entire implementation plan, including incentives for agency compliance and resources); (7) Social constructions (the *world making*, the images of reality, the stereotypes people use to make sense of the reality as they see it); (8) Rationales (the explicit or implicit justifications and legitimations for the policy including those used in debates about the policy); and (9) Underlying assumptions (explicit or implicit assumptions about causal logics or about the capacity of people or of organizations) (Schneider and Sidney 2009, pp.104-105).

Most of the nine elements were addressed through the course of the research but two specific models, the *behavioural assumptions* model, which has already been discussed, and the *social construction of target populations*, were singled out for application to the data gathered. The incorporation of a social construction process enables scholars to examine ‘who constructs policy issues, and how they do so, such that policy actors and the public accept particular understandings as “real”, and how constructions of groups, problems and knowledge then manifest themselves and become institutionalized into policy designs, which subsequently reinforce and disseminate these constructions’ (ibid, p.106).

The *social construction of target populations*, who have been identified as those who will receive the benefits or burdens of policy design, in particular are challenged by the work of Schneider, Ingram and their colleagues (1993; 1997; Ingram, Schneider et al. 2007; Schneider and Sidney 2009). They focus on the ‘political economy of policy tools in terms of their impact on designated target groups’ (Landry and Varone 2005, p.112). Policy designs can reinforce or challenge social constructions of target populations.
The design of policy tools can impact upon and shape the experiences of target groups and reinforces messages about how important their problems are to the state and whether participation in the process is likely to be effective (Ingram, Schneider et al. 2007). However, these constructions are contestable and subject to change.

‘Social construction of a target population’ refers to the popular images of a group that is (or could be) eligible for the application of policy (Schneider and Ingram 1993, p.1). A range of values, symbols, images, and beliefs about the characteristics of the group combine to form a construction (ibid). The symbols and messages that emerge are absorbed by citizens and become embedded in public policy. This in turn shapes information, orientations, and participation in the society. Schneider and Ingram (1997) refer to policies based on constructions as the degenerative policy design. The policies are developed within ‘an institutional culture that legitimizes strategic manipulative and deceptive patterns of communication and uses of political power’ (ibid, p.102).

Schneider and Ingram (1997) present a two dimensional framework in which the political power of the target group form one dimension. They consider the extent of the group’s political resources including ‘whether it is large, united, easy to mobilize, wealthy, skilled, well-positioned, focused on issues of concern to it, and accustomed to voting, contacting public officials, and so on’ (ibid, p.101). The second dimension is whether groups are perceived as being more or less deserving of benefits or burdens or as contributing to the general welfare of the state. Based on these two dimensions, they identify four possible constructions: the advantaged who are powerful and positively constructed as deserving; contenders who are powerful but less deserving; dependents who are not powerful but deemed to be deserving; and finally deviants who are neither powerful nor deserving.
The critical notion is that constructions are not fixed and groups can move from one quadrant to the other. This can be seen clearly in the Ireland following the collapse of the property market in the case of bankers and property developers who have seen their power and positive construction shift considerably. This type of shift can result in the different design strategies being developed as the state may continue to provide benefits, as the groups may remain politically powerful in relative terms, but as they are perceived negatively by the electorate, a more opaque design that is less transparent may be used to disguise or downplay benefit distribution (Salamon 2002). Sanctions may be emphasised, even when they are more symbolic than real (Schneider and Ingram 1997).

DiAlto (2005) provides a very interesting insight into the journey of Japanese Americans from problem minority to model minority and the role public policy, media discourse and the courts played in this story. Much work has also been carried out in the US on the plight of the Afro-American, particularly in relation to welfare policy highlighting the damaging effect of stereotyping and the impact design has on discouraging participation amongst undeserving groups whilst the standing of more deserving groups is reinforced as is their belief that they can challenge the way they are treated (BensonSmith 2005; Schram 2005; Soss 2005). Tackling these negative constructions is critical as it is through these often subtle messages that a group’s sense of having any entitlement is generated. As resources are finite, decisions need to be made about how to distribute them. If this is to be equitably done, then there is a need to expose and reveal the underlying assumptions and constructions informing social policy which in the case of this research means looking at how and why resources for children and their families are distributed the way they are.
Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007, p.1) argue that a public policy instrument approach can assist in addressing this problem as it ‘reveals a (fairly explicit) theorization of the relationship between the governing and the governed: every instrument constitutes a condensed form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it; and … instruments at work are not neutral devices: they produce specific effects independently of the objective pursued (aims ascribed to them), which structure public policy according to their own logic’. This facilitates the ‘deconstruction through instruments’ as this ‘approach allows us to address dimensions of public policy that would otherwise not be very visible. Moreover, public policy instruments are not tools with perfect axiological neutrality, equally available: on the contrary, they are bearers of values, fuelled by one interpretation of the social and by precise notions of the mode of regulation envisaged’ (ibid, p.4). The use of constructions leads to a situation where politics and policy focuses on reforming people and their behaviour rather than reforming infrastructure or institutions (Schneider and Ingram 2005). It makes people responsible for their own problems.

This policy tool model can enable an investigation into how different policy targets are treated through a comparison of policy tools designed for advantaged and disadvantaged policy targets. The themes emerging from this socio-political approach to policy analysis are common to those identified by scholars in Ireland. Carney (2009) has used the social construction of target population model in a casestudy on the links between structured dependency of older people in Ireland and their political participation. Her findings ‘support Schneider and Ingram’s contention that a neo-liberal state apparatus that seeks to diminish state-financed welfare can use the social construction of dependent groups to allocate resources in favour of more politically-powerful groups’
(p.244). She goes on to conclude that ‘[i]n the Irish case, policy design for older people is based on minimising costs, so that the burdens of population aging are placed on individual older people not tax payers, a typical response by decision-makers towards dependent groups’ (ibid, p.245). However, the use of the social constructions and behavioural assumption models (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 1997, 2005) or any focus on policy tool design is not widespread. Within this thesis, Schneider and Ingram’s work enabled a comparative review of key financial policy tools designed for social inclusion targets and those designed for more advantaged populations. Inequitable design issues emerged as an area of concern in the sector in Ireland following moves to make changes to ECEC social inclusion policy tools in 2008 (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2008, Dublin Inner City Partnership 2008, Irish Childcare Policy Network 2008, PLANET 2008).

Outside the application of the specific models identified within this work, there are ample examples of research that identifies treatments of policy target populations in Ireland that are seen to reinforce stereotypes while preserving a status quo that results in an inequitable distribution of resources (Murphy 2006; Millar 2008; O’Connor 2008; Geoghegan and Powell 2009; Harvey 2009). A belief expressed within the literature is that a reduced commitment to welfare within a revised governance structure has resulted from a neo-liberal preoccupation with economic policy development at the expense of equitable social policy development (Ó Riain 2008; Murphy 2010; Dukelow 2011). To date insufficient attention has been given to the exploration of this theme within the area of ECEC developments in Ireland, a gap in the literature this thesis aims to address. Given the need to look beyond the content of policy reports and engage with the dynamics of the policy process (Newman 2002), the policy tools approach offers an
alternative perspective in which the point of focus is on the significant impact the
design and selection decisions made by the state have on outcomes. Consequently, it is
argued that advocacy efforts might effectively yield more positive results for change if
more attention was paid to this point in the implementation process.

### 2.5 The contribution of a policy tool design approach to research

There are distinct areas of academic focus that policy design theory can make a
contribution to. It can add to the body of Irish literature that strives to offer insights into
the development of Ireland as a more just and equitable society for all its citizens,
including children. In the field of ECEC, it can increase the focus on policy both in
Ireland and further afield and offer a new insight into the potential to advocate for
change using policy tools as the unit of analysis.

#### 2.5.1 A contribution to Ireland’s social science approach

This sociopolitical approach to policy analysis and evaluation is evident in research into
public, social and economic policy in Ireland within various fields of study such as
politics, public policy, public administration, industrial relations, sociology, welfare and
political economics. While policy tool design and selection has not been a specific
focus, related fields such as new institutionalism have been embraced. Adshead, Kirby
and Millar’s *Contesting the State* (2008) focuses on the role of the state viewing it both
as a dependent and independent variable. They claim that the ‘state’s ability to foster,
maintain and even reproduce certain patterns of social relationships and politics, in
preference to others, reflects a … distinctive realm in studies of the state that warrants
our attention’ (p.19). As is evident above, a review of policy implementation and policy
tool design and selection incorporates the notion of the state as an institution. An investigation into how the state implements policy can contribute to the body of knowledge on ‘state relations with civil society’ and ‘the role played by the state in facilitating and promoting alternative forms of associational and deliberative democracy’ (ibid, p.21).

Cronin, Kirby and Ging (2010, p.2) point to the need for a more critical analysis of many crisis and contradictions of contemporary Irish society that will reveal their ‘sources in the structures and power hierarchies of that society’. Policy design theory offers the potential to expose design features and assumptions about target groups that act against efforts to transform ‘Ireland into a sustainable, humane and decent society which can offer a fulfilling quality of life, particularly to its most deprived and vulnerable citizens’ (ibid).

The work of O Riain (2000; 2004; 2008) on presenting Ireland as a developmental state has looked at the various policy tools selected and their impact on economic growth but if viewed from the perspective of a policy instruments approach more light could be shed on the ‘glaring social failures’ that characterised the Celtic Tiger years (Kirby 2010, p.5). This work is supported by other statist scholars that consider Ireland as a competition state (Kirby and Murphy 2008); a patriarchal state (O’Connor 2008); a partnership state (O’Donnell 2008); or look at the state’s behavioural patterns when dealing with social and economic change (Adshead 2008b). While there is no extensive use of a policy tools approach, there are ample examples of work by a wide range of scholars that have sought to make visible the diverse ways governments now operate, such as Boyle’s work on regulatory reform in Ireland (Boyle and McNamara 1998; Boyle, O’Riordan et al. 2002; Boyle 1999; 2005); Hardiman and MacCárthaigh’s
(2008) review of Ireland’s adoption of New Public Management techniques advocated by the OECD; or the considerable body of work which focuses on the impact of state actions on the community and voluntary sector (Larragy 2006; Keenan 2008; Harvey 2009; Carney, Dundon et al. 2011);

2.5.2 The use of policy design theory in the area of ECEC

In Ireland, there has been a limited scholarly focus on either children’s rights (Kilkelly 2008) or on policy development in the area of ECEC (Hayes and Bradley 2009). Hayes (1995; 2002; 2010) has made a significant contribution to keeping a focus on policy in the area through publications and a seminar series focusing on how to structure ECEC policy so that it realises rights for children. Kiersey (Kiersey and Hayes 2010) has expanded the focus to undertake a critical discourse analysis of the key policy documents in the area which can provide useful insights into the level of commitment to children’s rights by policy makers.

Some work has been carried out into trying to gain an understanding of how the public service operates in Ireland, with many examples evident in the publications list of the Institute of Public Administration (see for example Murray 1990; Boyle and McNamara 1998; Boyle 2002; Whelan, Arnold et al. 2004; Quinn 2008). However, a review of the workings of the Department of Children and Young Affairs (DCYA)\(^4\), the department with primary responsibility for implementing policy focusing on ECEC and children, would offer most insight into how children’s rights are realised through policy implementation. Some work has commenced in this area with Bradley undertaking an insider-outsider review of how key policy actors, including those within the OMCYA,

\(^4\) The Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established in March 2011 and replaces the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA).
perceive and define the concept of children’s rights (Hayes and Bradley 2009). This offers the chance to gain an understanding of the level of convergence (or not) in relation to how rights are defined and perceived.

The research being presented in this thesis forms part of a wider project and aims to complement the work of Kiersey and Bradley in trying to gain insights into children’s rights in the context of ECEC development in Ireland. This thesis looks beyond the rhetoric to look at the experiences of implementing policies through a social justice lens and from the perspective of policy outsiders.

More generally in the field of ECEC research, extensive policy analysis has taken place but the use of a policy tool or implementation focus has been relatively limited. One exception has been the US scholar Rigby (2007) who has drawn from Salamon’s work to look at how policy characteristics, which in her research were visibility and coercion, modify political influences. One of the reasons she gives for choosing ECEC as a focus for her study is because it is a relatively new policy area and as such is not as driven by path dependency from earlier policy decisions (Pierson 2000). Through the use of hierarchical linear models she was able to empirically support ‘the conventional wisdom that economic conditions constrain the use of more visible tools and political characteristics constrain the use of coercive tools’ (ibid, p.665).

Sandfort, Selden and Sowa (2008) conducted a micro-level implementation review using both qualitative evidence alongside multivariate modelling to understand how various tools affect third-party non-profit ECEC service providers. They describe the advantage of focusing the research on ECEC, is that it held the policy problem of how to provide care and education to children constant. The research sought to address
whether the intensity of government tools influence its management and effectiveness (ibid). Based on their research they propose that: (1) ‘supply-side government tools [resources provided to increase supply rather than react to demand] that provide organizations with a stable revenue base will have a greater impact on an organization’s management capacity and management outcomes’ and (2) ‘Government tools that allow for stability and innovation, such as grants, will increase programmatic capacity’ (ibid, p.430). However, they point out the need for more research on the way in which frontline workers and managers understand and enact specific tools.

In Rigby’s work with Tarrant and Neuman (2007) a more qualitative piece of work was undertaken to illustrate the socio-political effects of five common childcare policy designs: direct government provision of services; grant-in-aid; vouchers; tax expenditure; and government insurance (paid maternity benefits/leave). They were able to demonstrate that policy design decisions do more than determine the distribution of childcare-related resources, they set the norms for key issues such as the level of state involvement in childcare, type of childcare used, quality of childcare, and so on (ibid). They also draw attention to the need to look at how power is conferred through social constructions and institutional structures. While these dynamics are often understood by the various actors involved in the policy process, there is little empirical focus on them. The focus is on instrumental or distributive features obscuring ‘the fact that underlying these policy decisions are ideas, interests, and values that are very much at stake. In this way, policy formation is a process by which values and priorities become codified, institutionalized, and to some degree determined in future social and policy debates’ (ibid, p.106). According to Pierson (2000) once a design has been selected, it can be difficult to alter the course of action. The most politically feasible action (as it
appeals to the most powerful) tends to support the dominant social constructions and institutional structures. This policy *stickiness* increases the urgency for revealing who is benefitting from current ECEC policy tool choice and design as the more embedded social constructions and patterns of policy behaviour, the harder they are to change.

This research contributes to the limited research in the ECEC area, expanding in particular the qualitative research available in the field. Much of the work identified has been at a macro-implementation level with this research adding a new micro-implementation dimension to the research. Given the emphasis on the need for a more democratic, bottom-up approach to policy implementation, there is a significant lack of focus on policy targets and how findings can be presented from their perspective using interpretive participatory methods as highlighted by Yanow (1987; 2003). This research addresses this through its use of research design as well as its focus on behavioural assumptions and social constructions. While much work has taken place on the social constructions of target groups within the welfare systems in the US and from the perspective of target groups based on race or sex, this research is unique in that it focuses specifically on ECEC in Ireland.

**2.5.3 The advancement of the Policy Science of Democracy**

The aim of this research project is to generate knowledge that will contribute towards the improved practice of democracy for children and their families in the area. The democracy referred to respects diversity and does not seek to colonise and impose a predominantly Western Anglo-American conceptualisation of citizenship. Schram (1993) builds upon Lasswell’s policy science of democracy by advancing a vision of democracy that seeks to destabilise rational claims through ‘questioning and
destabilising established discourses’ as ‘what looks like democratic policy formation can mask decidedly undemocratic discursive hegemony’ (Dryzek and Torgerson 1993, p.133). This ‘pluralist politics of identity’ seeks to highlight ‘ineliminable differences’ rather than generate ‘consensus’ (ibid).

This position complements the work of social construction scholars such as Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 1997, 2005), Schram (2005) and Soss (1999, 2005) who inject a question mark into all constructions. However, the research aim is also to contribute towards social reform, as ‘[n]o politics can live by questioning alone, for there is also in politics and policy a ‘responsibility to act’’ (Dryzek and Torgerson 1993, p.135). For this reason, a participatory model of democracy (Fischer 2009) complements the plural, deconstructivist politics of identity. It is also consistent with the communicative rationality proposed by Habermas (DeHaven-Smith 1988) that ‘represents the degree to which this action is free from coercion, strategy, hierarchy, deception, and self-deception’ (Dryzek and Torgerson 1993, p.134). A bottom-up participative democracy, in which those impacted by decisions taken are consulted or involved in the decision making process, is also a cornerstone concept of many of those advocating for a children’s right perspective (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie et al. 2009), so it forms a common platform for the review of ECEC policy tools and children’s rights.

This research project incorporates elements from both definitions of democracy as it does the first and second generations of policy design models as well as the constructivist and positivist inclined systematic models of the second generation. Each offers a perspective that can enrich the other. Questioning combines with a call to action to frame the recommendations for a reconstruction of the policy process that more readily accommodates the rights of children.
2.6 Conclusion

Overall this chapter has provided insight into the origin of a range of models, typologies and frameworks that have emerged over the past four decades focusing on the tools of implementation. The five models selected for use in this research emerged from each of the four classifications identified in the chapter: first generation; second generation; macro-level; and micro-level policy tool design. The findings presented in chapters seven, eight and nine result from the application of the five models to data collected. Hood’s (1986) first generation basic tool-kit of government actions and Howlett’s (2005) substantive/procedural model were utilised in the macro-implementation level investigation along with Salamon’s (2002) policy tool dimensions, a second generation tool. The micro-implementation research drew from Schneider and Ingram’s (1993) first generation behavioural assumption of policy tools as well as their later work on social constructions of target groups (1997, 2005). The models selected attempted to provide a comprehensive, systematic and broad inquiry at both a macro and micro level in which the impact of policy design was broadly evaluated but rather than combining them, each served to provide a different perspective to the topic. In addition, scholars highlighted the need to expand the evaluative criteria to reflect the socio-political nature of policy tools to include not just effectiveness but to also consider how acceptable, feasible or legal the tools were (Ringeling 2005). Legality and feasibility are important issues that were dealt with indirectly throughout the work, but this research benefited from the expansion of an understanding of effectiveness to include an evaluation of the norms and values - relative to the principles of justice, equality and democracy promoted by the state in policy documents- being perpetuated and endorsed through policy design, particularly through the application of Schneider and Ingram’s models, in order to highlight the visible and less visible impacts on society.
This research can make a contribution to several areas of research both in Ireland and in the field of ECEC policy research. A policy tools approach has been underutilised and offers the potential to provide greater insight into how the state relates to different target populations and how and why it favours particular types of policy tools. It provides the opportunity to make visible the underlying values, biases, and discriminatory practices that perpetuate the divides and injustices in Irish society that are often hidden. It can demonstrate how the dominant paradigm is supported by policy tool design and how power and resources are dispersed. Policy tools can be assessed to identify their impact on participation in democratic processes, a key aim of those advocating social inclusion and participation. These revelations can assist in explaining some of the inequalities in society while also providing a new focus for change: the policy tool. In the area of ECEC, the research can go some way towards explaining how children are treated within policy implementation and why this is so. It can draw attention to the positive and negative impacts of choosing certain policy tools for the realisation of ECEC policy goals and children’s rights. The various classifications can also enable future and cross-national comparisons.

The following chapter will review the topic of children’s rights in more detail so that specific dimensions of what was meant by children’s rights during this research are made explicit.
Chapter Three: Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights

‘Interest in ‘Childhood Studies’ is for many born out of frustration with the narrow versions of ‘the child’ offered by traditional academic discourses and methods of inquiry, especially a rejection of the way psychology, sociology and anthropology traditionally partition and objectify ‘the child’ as subject to processes of development, socialization or acculturation.’ (Woodhead 2004, pp.35-36)

3.0 Introduction

During the twentieth century, various individual disciplines, driven by an often incoherent set of research questions, adopted a variety of methods and approaches to studying childhood. In some fields, such as psychology or education, the focus has been on the child or children while disciplines such as sociology or cultural studies address the concept of childhood. Child development theory, which is rooted in traditional psychology and linked with medicine, biology and the natural sciences, has dominated throughout the last century. It has provided a practical and factual approach to understanding children and informing public opinion and policy (Alderson 2004). Up until the 1960s, children were viewed merely as preparing for adulthood which had the effect of deterring research into children as children (Heywood 2001). Increasingly towards the latter end of the twentieth century, as the profile of children began to increase through important events such as the development of the UNCRC, the sense was growing that an understanding of children and childhood based on scientific generalisations was inadequate. Other disciplines, which were less positivist in their approach, offered the opportunity to provide a wider perspective in the study of children (Penn 2005).
Childhood Studies (CS) as a distinct academic field of inquiry has emerged since the mid-1980s to offer a new way of looking at children and childhoods (Kehily 2004). It offers an opportunity to present a more joined up interdisciplinary approach to research and teaching about children within a context of their lived experience. In particular, CS brings a wide range of disciplines together that are aligned to the social rather than natural sciences where the focus is on asking critical questions and examining underlying theories and beliefs that inform policy and practice (Penn 2004). In the past the adoption of an approach that looks beyond practical research to reveal hidden beliefs and how the perpetuation of these beliefs benefit more powerful groups was used by feminists in their fight for equality (Alderson 2004; McLaughlin and Monteith 2006; Wall 2008). A key question driving childhood studies therefore is whether children have been similarly misunderstood.

This chapter serves to outline the broad, socio-cultural view of childhood and children’s rights that was used within this research as a criterion for the measurement of the effectiveness of ECEC policy tool design in Ireland. In this chapter, an understanding of childhood is reviewed using three distinct approaches, historic, sociocultural, and a policy perspective in order to give an overview of the key themes that have emerged from the literature which has been informed by a diverse range of disciplines and world views within CS. The historic approach focuses on the key ideologies informing the construction of children and childhood. The sociocultural approach will look in more detail at the key areas of psychology, sociology and culture and their role in the emergent sociocultural approach to understanding childhood which has close ties to the emerging children’s rights discourse. Most critically for this research project, a cursory review of the policy perspective on childhood demonstrates how the various rationales
for ECEC development are influenced by different notions of children’s role in the family and society in general. What becomes apparent is that a children’s rights perspective is undermined by a strong economic rationale for investment in ECEC. This is a rationale that does not easily accommodate a socio-cultural view of children as competent agents or the realisation of children’s participatory rights in particular.

3.1 Historical Approaches to Childhood

‘[C]hildhood has been historically constructed and needs to be understood in relation to ideas about what children should be and have meant to adults over time, and why such ideas have changed.’ (Kehily 2004, p.27)

The past helps us understand the present. The disciplines of history, anthropology and philosophy dominate a historical approach to understanding how knowledge about childhood was created and how power was used to reinforce dominant constructions of childhood.

There are some difficulties with an exclusive reliance on a historical perspective. It runs risks of a distorted understanding of childhood as it has been argued that history can be captured to justify current or future actions or promote a particular viewpoint (Heywood 2001). Also, as research into childhood has only recently developed in focus, a complex array of artefacts and documents have been used by historians to try and build up a picture of childhood in the past and much of the literature reviewed was written by and is from the perspective of adults. However, it still provides a useful insight into understanding the adult construction of childhood that drives much of the policy and practice decisions of today.
3.1.1 The Child as Devil, Angel or Adult Becoming

Wall (2008) identifies three distinct childist ethics that exist in the Western world. The three perspectives were driven by three key philosophers: Kant who believed children were unruly and needed to be civilised; Rousseau who sought to protect the vulnerability and innocence of children; and Locke who saw children as developing towards full morality and rationality (ibid 2008). Within each of these perspectives however, barriers exist to granting children rights.

(i) The Child as Devil: Top-down Approach

The top-down childist ethic is based on a belief that children’s raw human nature results in them being unruly, cruel and responding to their animal-like instincts unless a higher moral order is imposed on them and they are ‘civilised from above’ (Wall 2008, p.524). Penn (2004) describes how poor children in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in a newly industrialised England, were depicted as out of control, hanging around cities in unruly gangs. Wall (2008) refers to Plato’s description of boys in particular as being the most difficult to tame due to their higher intelligence. Within religion, theologians such as Augustine and Protestant Reformer John Calvin believed that children were born sinners and deference to God’s higher will could save them and assist man in creating a just society (ibid 2008). So children were seen as fellow sinners struggling to become moral beings while simultaneously needing to be humanised and civilised by wiser adults.

The German philosopher Kant focuses on rational autonomy as a means to self-regulating against the inner wants, needs and desires (Wall, 2008). Rights are bestowed to persons with the capacity to regulate as a rationally moral autonomous being in order
to recognise their human dignity. In this scenario, however, children are not fully autonomous and therefore not ready for social rights although they ‘deserve to be treated as *objects* of dignity and respect for having a rational faculty within them’ but not yet capable of being the subject of human rights (Wall, 2008, p.530 – original emphasis).

(ii) *The Child as Angel: Bottom-up*

The bottom-up form of ethics is premised on a belief that children are pure, good and innocent and that as adults we are in danger of succumbing to the evils of tyranny and losing our original goodness (Wall 2008). Rousseau, the French eighteenth century philosopher, holds a more egalitarian view of rights as a means to protect against the tyranny of the will of others and a focus on rights for *all* leads to a path for equal participation (ibid). However, within this model the belief is held that children must be protected from the public and nurtured within the confines of the private sphere of the home, excluding them from social rights.

A civil rights approach offers an alternative approach to granting rights as it builds upon the bottom-up thinking to liberate social groups from oppression, with no focus on individual freedoms or realisation of interests (Wall 2008). However, while children have recently been identified as a marginalised group (Alderson 2004; Nieuwenhuys 2008) their capacity to engage directly in grassroots political action as a means of securing their own rights is limited so they must continue to rely on adults to secure their rights.
(iii) The Child as Adult Becoming: Developmental Approach

The developmental perspective identifies a path towards moral progress. The child is born as a blank canvas, in a pre-rational state participating in life fully, although in a less developed and rational way than adults. Various religious theologians over the centuries embrace the idea of children progressing through phases of development (lifecycle) and sharing a ‘moral continuum with adults’ (Wall 2008, p.527) although children are deemed not to be full citizens as they have not reached adulthood yet.

During the seventeenth century Locke advocated a belief in the natural rights stemming from a duty of individuals to self-preservation of life, liberty and estate. He believed that a child’s education was predominantly responsible for shaping children into the adults they become. Children could be cultivated through a series of developmental phases and eventually be rational enough to become rights holders. Liberties and rights were not handed over to the adult becoming. Until they reached adulthood Locke believed children were the ‘temporary property’ of their parents who were best placed to look out for their well-being (cited in Wall 2008, p.529). Giving children rights too early could result in them harming themselves or others.

The challenge facing the realisation of rights for children based on any of the three historical constructions of children are summed up by Wall when he says:

So long as rights are grounded in free, equal or autonomous individuality, children will be pressed to the outer edges of the social circle. Protections will be granted according to what is convenient for those in power, provisions allotted as reluctant hand-outs, and participation defined by adult capabilities. But if rights are grounded in the responsibility to construct ever more other-inclusive societies, then children should be their most important subjects. (2008, p.541)
Within the field of CS, a sociocultural perspective has sought to challenge many of the historical constructions of children as outlined above and within a postmodern ethic there has emerged a move towards *childism* which offers a more multi-dimensional interpretation of rights (Wall 2008).

### 3.2 Sociocultural Understanding of Childhoods

In this section, there are five key areas explored from the perspective of a sociocultural understanding of childhood: psychology; the sociology of childhood; children and education; the role of the practitioner; and the influence of culture. The evolution of psychology is explored to reveal a move beyond a focus on the individual to embrace two key concepts: *social processes*; and *cultural goals* (Smith 2002; Smith 2007a).

Within the focus on the sociology of childhood, it is revealed that the concepts of child and childhoods are social constructions, that there are *multiple childhoods* and children are agents in their own right. Pufall and Unsworth, (as cited in Smith 2007a, p.153) describe how:

> As social beings, children are inherently agentive, and they voice their views in order to be heard, to persuade, to move others to action. As children act and ask to be heard, they are both building and experiencing their social reality and constructing their identity in the process. ... They are both parts of a mutual and on-going construction.

The key concern emerging from the literature on children and education is that it serves to segregate children and control their learning so that a key objective of many western states, the creation of *flexible* workers of the future, is realised at the expense of childhood. The role of the practitioner is identified as critical to the realisation of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in particular as a *democratic project* (Moss 2007).

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in which pedagogues are called to action to challenge western cultural and structural arrangements that focus on developing future workers rather than citizens. Finally, the role of culture is highlighted as it is increasingly recognised within a sociocultural perspective that expressions of difference as well as commonality in relation to childhood are necessary.

3.2.1 Psychology

Traditional developmental psychology has been used as the foundation discipline in early childhood education (Smith 2007b). It emerged as a science at the end of the nineteenth century and assumes a model of development that ends with a rational, civilised adult (Walkerdine 2004). It believes that through the study of individual behaviours and learning of children, a range of norms can be extrapolated to identify the psychological process of child development. Children were observed in institutional settings (clinics and nurseries) using controlled experiments that enabled the collection of comparable data that served to inform the standards and norms based on averages that children could be evaluated against (Jenks 2004). This concept of *behavioural universalism* has led to a belief that there are distinct stages that all children pass through, regardless of circumstances or location. Piaget in particular focuses on the individual child and how they progress to eventually think logically and become interested in abstract ideas. He has been credited with influencing the development of a pedagogical approach to working with children that is child-focused (Penn, 2005).

There are some criticisms as to how effective a focus on the individual child is in understanding the challenges of modern childhood (Cannella 2002; James and James 2004; Jenks 2004). Recently the field of cross cultural psychology has emerged as it is
recognised that much of the theoretical basis of developmental psychology has emerged to fit a white, western, middle class model of childhood (Jenks 2004; Kehily 2004; Penn 2005). The norms identified through developmental psychology, against which children are evaluated, are deemed to come from too small a sample with research being predominantly Euro American. Increasingly research has demonstrated that many of the ideas held in the West about children do not hold true in different cultures (Burr 2004; Penn 2005; Nieuwenhuys 2008). For example, White (2007) describes the specific situation in Bangladesh where a patriarchal hierarchy structured by age and gender exists in which girls in childhood “are under the authority of their fathers; at marriage under the authority of their husbands; in old age under the authority of their sons” (p.512). She also refers to research in an orphanage that revealed most of the orphans in fact still had mothers living but lacked a male guardian. In contrast Archard (2004) criticises the individualistic attitude towards parenting and family that prevails in many liberal western countries relative to a more expansive view of what constitutes a family or familial community exists in much of the rest of the world. This reliance on the individual will and ability of parents to look after the best interests of the child does not always offer adequate protection to the child.

Heywood (2001, p.9) points out that ‘such extremes serve to remind us that childhood is a social construct, which changes over time and, no less importantly, varies between social and ethnic groups within any society’. Cultural relativism purports that each community and society creates its own behaviours and ways of being that are constantly changing (Penn, 2005).

Key psychologists like the Russian Vygotsky in the 1920s and 1930s began to emphasise the social nature of development and collectivism. Bruner viewed learning
as meaning making from activities and events within a child’s society and, like Vygotsky, highlights the context dependent nature of learning (ibid). Other cultural psychologists such as Bronfenbrenner, Cole, Lave and Rogoff were to expand the theoretical frameworks based on a belief that all learning was social and negotiated with others. However, within the field there is still a strong positivist tradition but it is within the discipline of sociology that the notion of the child as having a pre-determined path that they must follow is challenged and problematised. A distinction is made between the child as a biological being and the child as a construct. The biological immaturity of children ‘is conceived and articulated in particular societies into culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices which combine to define the ‘nature of childhood’” (James and Prout 1997, p.1).

3.2.2 Sociology of Childhood

‘Social science research on child-rearing was slow to escape the narrow boundaries of psychological behaviourism.’ (Heywood 2001, p.3)

‘We have constructed the field of early childhood education based on the notion of “child” as psychologically and physically distinct from other human beings. This construct has separated us, denying our human connections.’ (Cannella 2002, p.162)

As outlined above, the key concept driving the developmental psychology field is a model of growth towards Piaget’s notion of scientific rationality, grounded in an achievement ethic that transcends cultural values (Jenks 2004). The child progresses through a universal sequence of specific schema based on norms - that have been revealed to be based on western values, ideologies and concepts - (Cannella 2002; Moss 2008) - predicted by developmental psychologists. Within the field of sociology, the emphasis shifts to focus on explaining social reality and how society shapes the
individual. The process of socialisation results in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. This is the key mechanism through which the child is constituted socially, through a series of representations, images, codes and constructs (Jenks 2005).

It was not until the 1980s that social sciences began to adopt a social constructionist perspective to look beyond childhood using theories of socialization or developmental psychology, both of which considered children as a *natural* rather than *social* phenomenon (Jenks 2005). The new perspective was able to show that the construction and nature of childhood has changed over time to reflect the dominant social, economic and political climates of the time (Kehily 2004). Hendrick (1997) demonstrates this in his interpretive survey in which he identifies a range of principle childhood constructions in Britain since the 1800s in order to understand more fully how western interpretations of childhood are so self-confidently dominant. He describes an approximate chronological series of constructions (and reconstructions) that occurred as progressing through ‘Rousseauian Naturalism, Romanticism, Evangelicalism, the shift from wage-earning labour to childhood, the reclamation of the juvenile delinquent, schooling, Child Study, Children of the Nation, psycho-medicine, and Children of the Welfare State’ (1997, pp.35-36). Stainton Rogers *et al* outline how:

> When social constructivists look at childhood, it is to different social realities that they turn. The interest is not just in learning about the constructions of childhood in history or in different cultures – it is also a technique that throws light on why we construct childhood as we do in our time and society. (1991, p.24 in Jenks, 2004)

In the 1990s, Prout and James were instrumental in developing a range of propositions about childhood that characterised the key features of this new paradigm (Heywood 2001; Jenks 2004; Kehily 2004; Penn 2005). Heywood (2001, p.3) describes how these
were further refined with Jenks in 1997 and given ‘the slippery nature of the customer, they wisely presented it as necessarily a matter of interpretation’. Prout and James (1997, p.ix) describe how their work ‘posed a challenge to what we then characterized as the dominant and dominating conceptual pair of socialization and development’. The key features relevant to this research fall into four categories: childhood is to be understood as a social construction; children’s social relations and cultures are worthy of study in their own right; childhood is a variable social analysis to be considered along-side class, gender and ethnicity; and children are active in determining their own lives and the lives of those around them (James and Prout 1997; Jenks 2004).

(i) **Socially Constructed Childhood**

A belief in multiple childhoods and the competency and agency of children are key themes that inform this understanding of childhood (Smith 2002; Smith 2007b). From a social constructivist perspective the forms of childhood are ever changing as children create meaning in their world themselves and through their interactions with adults. Jenks (2004, p.89) outlines the process as follows:

[K]nowledge of the child and its life world depends upon the predispositions of a consciousness constituted in relation to our social, political, historical and moral context. Social constructionists have to suspend assumptions about the existence and causal powers of a social structure that makes things, like childhood, as they are; their purpose is to go back to the phenomenon in consciousness and show how it is built up.

This perspective has served as a counter argument to the concept of a universal childhood in which differences are underplayed. However, if too extreme a view is adopted an understanding of and validity in all local constructions of childhood may result in inaction at an international level as maltreatment of all types (political, social
and economic) can be justified as local or traditional practice or custom (James and Prout 1997).

(ii) **Tribal Child**

The *tribal child* examines the extent to which childhood belongs to children or adults (Mayall 1994). The child’s world is viewed as insulated from the world of adults, although interactions with the adult world mean it is affected by it. The interactionist perspective has facilitated a shift from thinking about childhood as a *natural phenomena* to a *social construct* (Mayall 1994). From the vantage point of outside, children’s agency, competency and uniqueness are recognised by adults. The world of children is understood to be an ‘independent place with its own folklore, rituals, rules and normative constraints’ (Jenks, 2004, p.91). However, as an ethnographic methodology is employed to reveal the inner workings of their world, Jenks (2004) warns of the risk of generating *whimsical tales* or *quaint fables* of the tribes of childhood. He also points to a danger that insight into the tribal world may give opportunity for increased control although the objective is to improve educational practice and interactions with children.

(iii) **Minority Child**

The key feature of the *minority group child* is that children, like women, are identified as a minority group (Oakley 1994). The objective of this stance is to challenge an existing set of power relations in a structurally discriminatory society drawing actively from work in women’s studies and the women’s movement. The *politicization* of childhood within this model treats children as any other minority group. They are in effect indistinguishable from other oppressed adult groups within an unequal society.
(Oakley 1994; Jenks 2005). Within CS, children are viewed as active subjects in the quest for freedom who need to play a part in the development of their own concepts in order to input into the theory on childhood. The children’s rights movement differs from the women’s movement as it is not children themselves that are politically active in trying to secure their own rights. Adults will continue to be key in the movement for rights. Oakley (1994, p.20) stresses the need for adults to act as ‘facilitators or active seekers out of children’s own perspectives and voices’ rather than ‘the protectors of children [or] the representers of their interests’. The concept of generation is key to understanding the status just as gender inequality was the key to understanding the social status of woman in the past (Freeman 2007).

(iv) Social Structural Child

The final model is the social structural child that challenges the idea of children whose target should be to become integrated into society. School, day care and other structures constitute children’s own life arenas, and it is forcefully argued that children’s time and children’s activities are their own, despite efforts by adult society to ‘colonize them for its own purposes and interests’ (Qvortrup, Bardy et al. 1994, p.vi). Children are regarded as a constant in every social system but their manifestations may vary between societies. Qvortrup highlights the benefits of this perspective when explaining that it:

... enables us to characterize not only childhood, but also the society in which this childhood is situated as mutually both independent and indispensable constructions; moreover it allows us to compare childhood thus characterized with other groups from the same country, perhaps most notably other age groups like youth, adulthood and old age, because they in principle are influenced by the same characterizing and formative societal parameters, although in different ways; it also permits us to ask to what extent childhood within a given area has changed historically; ... and finally, it becomes possible ... to compare childhoods internationally and interculturally, because we are
availing ourselves of the same types of parameters – e.g., economic, political, social, environmental parameters. (As cited in Jenks 2005, p.94).

The shared features of childhood are regarded as a structural feature of the life course (James and James 2004). This pragmatic view (Jenks 2004) facilitates an examination of the status and position of children within society relative to other groups along the life course and is not subject to changing discourses and historical contingencies.

3.2.3 Children and Education

The deconstruction of a patriarchal, Euro-American, middle class global childhood within the field of childhood studies is driven by the desire to challenge the status quo, prejudices and stereotypes dominating educational strategies that are resulting in inequities and social injustices experienced by those falling outside the norm (Cannella 2002; Fleer 2003; James and James 2004; Dahlberg and Moss 2005; Moss 2008). This reconceptualist perspective argues for ‘hope and possibility as we move toward a newly evolving, liberating third space, and early childhood dreamscape of social justice and equity’ (Soto, as cited in Swadener and Cannella 2007, p.26).

Increased political attention to early childhood education and care, as a potential solution to a range of social and economic problems (Dahlberg and Moss 2005) has resulted in increased investment in and institutionalisation of children (James and James 2004). The danger this poses for children and society becomes apparent when viewed in a context where ‘[u]niformity and normalisation of thought and practice’ take place within services as children conform to Western norms, that are Anglo-American in origin, based on ‘political liberalism, informed by developmental psychology and
adopting a positivist and empirical-analytical paradigm’ (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, p.vi).

Cannella (2002) describes the key influences in the construction of children as separate from adults, as taking place between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, were the reasoning of the Enlightenment and Christian church’s view that children needed protection and reformation. The school was the significant mechanism for separation from wider societal influences enabling educators to gain significant control over the direction of children’s lives. Further segregation within the school took place in line with a protectionist ethic as younger children were separated from older children that ‘may have seen more of the debased world’ (Cannella 2002, p.30).

A male dominated church developed a system of patriarchal discipline that carved out a role for women as nurturing caregivers (Cannella 2002). Specifically, women as less powerful were relegated to the actual work of care giving while the more powerful in society identified the need for caring about the dependants and then taking care of those needing protection and reformation by assuming responsibility for how care was organised (Porter and McLaughlin 2006). Power relations within this system are further shaped by a discourse of the universal child which ‘generates positions of power for adults … over child and psychologist/expert over child, parent, and teachers’ (Cannella 2002, p.43).

The traditional curriculum which embraces developmental perspectives results in a system where ‘education has been institutionalized as a norming activity that gives power to those who construct the norm’ (Cannella 2002, p.114). A focus on the individual rather than the system also ensures that blame within this system is located in
the individual or teacher while denying historical, political, or social power relationships. A two-tiered system of education has developed where systems are adjusted for those who have difficulty fitting the norm, such as the poor, children of colour, immigrants, and so on, so that they can strive to address their deficiencies, while mainstream curriculum aims to develop the potential of the other children (Cannella 2002), maintaining the social order.

Within this discourse, even the child-centred pedagogy is presented as being based on a notion of self-regulation that is a more covert form of control and more difficult to resist (Cannella 2002; Langford 2010). Each of the five main tenets of child-centeredness have been challenged by Burman (Cannella 2002). Readiness is based on a developmental understanding of the child. The concept of individual choice and self-governance is an illusion as the adults control the choices that surround the children. The needs of children are met by those who identify and interpret these needs, and their interpretation is in turn informed by a universal understanding of what is best for the child. The focus on play as a natural right of childhood is demonstrated to be a ‘Euro-American middle-class construct, an artifact of a particular view of the world’ (ibid 2002, p.125). Finally, imposing the notion of discovery on all children places them in a position where ‘success is dependent on the availability of money and materials’ and ‘colonizes classrooms all over the world to be constructed in ways that are consistent with western middle-class values’ (ibid 2002, p.135).

While an interactive pedagogy has been promoted as a pragmatic solution to the problems associated with both child-centred and teacher-centred pedagogies, Fendler (2001) problematises this approach as also being covert, controlling and driving an agenda of business and politics. The teacher neither leaves the child free to
independently pursue their interests nor lectures the child, instead the teacher ‘teaches by adapting the materials to the children’s momentary interests and imparts information at a place that is set by the children’s questions’ (Fendler 2001, p.132). She describes how this interactive pedagogy combines with a focus on the whole child education - that moves beyond cognition to ‘affect, temperament, self-esteem and love’ (ibid, p.138), within a context of a developmentally appropriate curricula resulting in a system in which the procedure may be flexible but the outcomes are predetermined. The objective is to produce ‘response-ready and response-able’ (ibid, p.137 - emphasis added) subjects that are controlled rather than disciplined through a process of self-regulation. The control society that has emerged is described by Fendler as being characterised by a self monitoring that is continuous, (for example, on-going assessments rather than examinations), with quickly changing, multiple standards that are no longer centralised but can emerge from anywhere, (for example, teachers may be part of a multi-disciplinary team and know what is expected from them from several stakeholders) and finally, a lack of opportunity for completion as learning is seen as an on-going process, for example, life-long-learning. The result is the education of a ‘flexible souls’ as

*flexibility is vaunted as the cutting-edge solution to the challenges of productivity in a fast-moving global economy, and the goals and objectives of education reinscribe the values of flexibility through curricular and pedagogical practice.* (Fendler 2001, p.119)

While Langford puts forward the concept of a democratic pedagogy, Singer identifies the potential problem facing all approaches as all ‘methods can turn into orthodoxy … and can be translated into practice in a mechanical and child-silencing way’ (cited in Langford 2010, p.117). So the role of the practitioner in interpreting any of the approaches is critical to the realisation of children’s voice.
3.2.4 Role of the Practitioner

While the deconstructions reveal how power and control can take new forms (Ruffolo 2009), the role of professionals in reconstructing childhood so that power shifts from those in the control is outlined by many of the authors in the field (Duhn 2010). Professionals in the sector are called upon to engage in activism in order to shift away from a professionalism grounded in best intentions in which they take a neutral, apolitical stance and furthermore are required to respond to a call to action in ways that foster social justice (James and James 2004; Dahlberg and Moss 2005; MacNaughton 2005; Cannella and Bloch 2006). Cannella’s vision for early childhood educators ‘dedicated to escaping the webs of power the discipline has successfully spun’ is where the ‘practitioner watches for middle class mimesis – the establishment of middle class values and ways of seeing as a barometer by which everyone is evaluated’ (Kincheloe 2002, p.viii). Dahlberg and Moss (2005) endorse this view as they advocate changing services from being loci of technical practice to becoming loci of ethical practices and minor politics in which injustices like oppression and structural domination can be challenged. They highlight how:

the dominant early childhood discourse ... offers a regime of truth about early childhood education and care as a technology for ensuring social regulation and economic success, in which the young child is constructed as a redemptive agent who can be programmed to become the future solution to our current problems. (ibid 2005, p.viii)

Moss proposes that ‘institutions for children and young people can be understood, first and foremost, as forums, spaces or sites for political practice, and specifically for democratic political practice’ (2007, p.1). This vision implies a need for crucial educational thinkers drawing from key philosophers such the Brazilian, Friere who is
credited with being the ‘inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy’ (McLaren cited in MacNaughton 2005, p.9). Adshead (2008a, p.15) responds to this by advising that ‘if this ideal is to flourish, it will be in a state that holds a high degree of responsibility (for social policy, social engineering, political education etc), and where there is a well-developed notion of citizenship that typically entails recognised rights and contingent responsibilities’, conditions that are prevalent in the Nordic states rather than other western liberal states (Moss 2006).

Even from a practitioners perspective, sociocultural theory is seen to have successfully achieved a ‘high level textual presence’ in many of the Anglo-American countries such as Australia (Edwards 2007, p.84), New Zealand (May 2007) and in Ireland’s national frameworks for ECEC quality and curriculum (Moloney 2010). However, realising the ideal through the ‘translation of sociocultural theory into practice has been hampered by the historical commitment the field holds to cognitive-developmentalism’ (Edwards 2007, p.84). This combines with what Brennan describes as the ‘current Western cultural and structural arrangements of group public child care [that] impedes the successful implementation of sociocultural-based curricula because of its individualised and separatist nature’ (2007, p.1). Moss (2006) adds to the list of obstacles to converting theory to practice in his description of the situation in England where:

... the early years field has been increasingly colonised by organisations and individuals who have come at it from a labour market and employment perspective and who have readily adopted the childcare discourse. While there may be some recognition of ‘development’ or ‘education’, these are add-ons, to be bolted onto ‘childcare’ through adoption of very focused technologies which will deliver ‘quality’ and ‘outcomes’ … with little awareness of or interest in wider conceptual debates within the field (debates, for example, about the meaning of care and education, and different social constructions and images of the child) (p.79).
Through schooling, Bourdieu points out, the State can maintain its cultural hegemony through the transmission of values and patterns of thought of the ruling and educated classes (cited in James and James 2004). However, Montandon and Osiek (cited in ibid) counter this to some extent by highlighting that no single variable determines how children relate to or experience the educational process, rather it is the interaction of structures of policy, the underlying principles and practices informing the behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and relationships, and the child’s agency during the process of cultural and social reproduction that influence how childhood is understood and experienced.

3.2.5 Global versus Local: The role of culture

While structural controls have a role to play in constructing childhood by attempting to maintain social order, childhood is experienced differently amongst children in ‘different cultural contexts as well as within a single setting’ (James and James 2004, p.7). A key theme within the sociocultural literature is how to address the drive to achieve a more equitable ‘global distribution of opportunity’ (Buhler-Niederberger and van Krieken 2008, p.148) for children while also recognising the diversity of childhood experiences (Moss 2001; Viruru 2001; Burr 2004; Langford 2010). James and James (2004) review of the four models of childhood and address the issue of how to manage the gulf between the commonality and diversity of childhood and that between structure and agency. It is summarised in Figure 3-1 below.
The child as *social actor*, who is an able and active participant in the social world, is acknowledged in the Tribal Child model of childhood, which places an emphasis on diversity, and the Minority Group model which sees children as a group that are separated and distinct from adults and united by factors such as age, lack of rights and citizenship status (ibid). The Social Structural child recognises and accepts that children are common to all social systems while the Socially Constructed model of childhood adopts a radically relativistic stance and looks to see how the child and childhood comes to be constituted and is understood locally believing that there is no one set of *naturalised competencies* that define what is known as the child.

This model sets the stage for James and James’ (2004) theoretical work on the Cultural Politics of Childhood in which they explore how and why change and continuity in childhood (constructions) happen. They describe how children can instigate construction shifts through individual or collective exercise of agency. However, change is influence by ‘the range of institutional mechanism, processes and structures
that constitute the social and through which the collectivity of childhood is made real within social order’ (ibid, p.63).

Woodhead (1996, p.12) contends that the care and education of young children contributes to the shift in constructions in ‘community and economy, ensures continuity of tradition between generations, and makes innovation and transformation possible’. While James and James provide a very useful framework from which the policies of governments and their tools of implementation can be reviewed the practical implications of this model are highlighted by Adshead when she says:

\[\text{Recognising, valuing and promoting development within a post-modern paradigm of care means that childcare must be understood as a continual reflexive practice (MacNaughton 2005), which requires ongoing state support and which takes much more time and training than is the case with modern paradigms of care. (2008a, p.27)}\]

While policy has a key role to play in maintaining social order it also needs to have an element of dynamism in order to respond and react to changes resulting from social interactions and actions of individuals (James and James 2004; Monk 2004; Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2007). It strives to manage the tensions between ‘the collective expression of conformity and commonality on the one hand and the rights and freedoms bestowed by the law on individuals, to explore and express agency, on the other’ through the development of social policy (James and James 2004, p.51). Within a sociocultural perspective it is believed that the actions of children and young people in each generation have a role to play in shaping their childhoods as their actions elicit responses that can result in social policies and associated legislation. However, the danger of overemphasising local diversity and cultural differences is that it ignores the areas of commonality that unite children. Political and policy agendas find it easier to
respond to the notion of child as a shared category, but increasingly there is a need to accept there are some areas of commonality but the dual aspect of difference and diversity need also to be recognised and managed within the policy process.

Overall, shifting from a developmental to a sociocultural understanding of childhood can pose challenges for policy makers. The former fits comfortably within a simple and increasingly prominent emphasis on the education of children to be future workers in order to meet the needs of industry (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). The latter emerges from a perspective influenced less by economic need and more by a commitment to social justice. It contains a more complex and holistic vision of education that nurtures children as citizens (Hayes 2008b) within a future as well as present orientation. It challenges policy makers to expand their understanding of and trust in children and their competencies; recognise and support the key and influential role of pedagogues; and accept difference along-side commonalities within a global and local perspective. The following review of the policy perspective outlines the various advances and challenges to the realisation of this vision of ECEC development.

3.3 Policy perspective

‘The ways we understand children and childhoods shape the institutions as: commodities for working parents, as sites of intervention and social engineering, as means of normalisation, or as forums in civil society (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al, 2007) spaces for encounter, democracy, experimentation and meaningful interaction.’ (Urban 2010, p.2)

‘Educational policies, and the social and power agendas that influence them, are certainly avenues through which these circumstances are either made more oppressive and inequitable or through which increased social justice is facilitated.’ (Cannella and Bloch 2006, p.5)
Within a policy perspective the various historical, psychological, sociological and cultural approaches impact upon the development and interpretation of social and economic policies and how these policies are implemented and operationalised, and this is no less the case in relation to children and their early childhood education and care.

In this final section of the chapter, the literature is reviewed to look at three specific areas. First it is revealed that policy to promote better childhoods is shifting away from a more traditional construction of child concerns that focus on needs to one that addresses the rights of children. Following on from this, the UNCRC, as one of the most important initiatives in the development of a focus on children’s rights, is investigated to reveal: an emphasis on participatory rights; the tensions of managing abstract universalism and cultural relativism; and the extended role of the UNCRC beyond a legal interpretation. Finally, brief reviews of the various strategies that have emerged within the OECD region to develop ECEC services are identified and the influence of the new children’s rights movement is explored.

### 3.3.1 From Children’s Needs to Children’s Rights

Historically ECEC policies and programmes seem to have emerged through similar overarching themes within the OECD region. The move from a nineteenth century model of private charity service provision towards a public responsibility for services evolved after the Second World War (Kamerman 2000). There were variations amongst nations as to how much emphasis was placed on education and socialisation relative to custodial type care for poor or disadvantaged children. From these two themes, there have emerged two major policy dimensions within the OECD region, education (which
includes socialisation and school readiness) for the children aged three to six and care of younger children while mothers work (Kamerman 2000).

Vandenbroeck (2003) describes how the construction of childcare as a service for working mother has emerged and dominated in recent times in part due to globalisation. Governments, who have little control over employment particularly as more public services become privatised, now focus on creating the conditions to attract employers to locate in their territories which include the provision of ECEC services either to increase the supply of female labour or promote academic success thus reinforcing the economic function of childcare provision. He argues that the discourse of psychology has been taken over by a discourse in management terms exemplified by the quality rating scales and other such instruments that benchmark the child against what have been identified as Western, middle class developmental norms. In his review of Belgian infant care, he details how the ethnotheories of parents about what is good for their children have been replaced with the definitions of quality and intelligence that appear scientific in nature. Features of concern for parents such as accessibility or friendships, unless included on the measuring scale, are disregarded. Within this context, Vandenbroeck argues that the ‘managerial discourse … enhanced the responsibility of motherhood, but now focused on her as a client, protected by (and thus dependent on) the quality label and the expert’s opinion’ (Vandenbroeck 2003, p.144). These features typify a neo-liberal or western model which relies on economic rationales to justify investment in ECEC but there is growing recognition that rights should also be considered (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009; Moss and Kamerman 2011).
(i) Needs

Policy and practice are informed by what Stainton Rogers (2004) refers to as discourses of child concern. The needs discourse of child concern has been dominant within the welfare perspective (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie et al. 2009) that emerged after the war. The developmental approach has been interpreted from a policy perspective as the adult becoming resulting in children being perceived as minors that need services provided in order to assist in their development. Children are viewed paternalistically as passive and lacking adult competencies resulting in a system where decisions are made by the adults around them. This combines with the micro level focus on the individual within psychology that has driven an interventionist approach to tackling poverty, ignoring structural, social and economic conditions (or taking them for granted), instead seeking to identify what works to improve individual learning, based in large part on the studies carried out in the US (Penn 2005; Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009).

(ii) Rights

The rights discourse of child concern shifts to embrace a view of children as citizens with their own rights rather than ‘just a bundle of needs that must be met’ (Stainton Rogers 2004, p.134 emphasis added). There are several areas of overlap and commonality between the sociocultural theories of development and children’s rights perspectives (Smith 2002; King 2007). Both focus on the agency of the child and their role in shaping their own lives, recognise multiple childhoods (acknowledging areas of commonality – although sometimes struggling with the conflict between the global and local) while viewing children as subjects not objects of control or concern. Children are, “not merely developing and practicing, they are also accomplishing and
contributing competently” (Alderson 2004, p.133) while being viewed as having mixed abilities rather than meeting a norm. The more competent and autonomous children are perceived to be, the less justified adult paternalism is and the more justified a move towards recognising their rights (King 2007).

A focus on childhood in the here-and-now is also a key idea within the concept of child as citizen (Dahlberg and Moss 2005; Mitchell 2007). An example of how a rights discourse can shift how activities are viewed can be demonstrated in a review of how play for children is perceived. Within many of the textbooks on the importance of play for children, the benefits are highlighted such as helping them develop social skills, fine and gross motor skills, and so on. When we consider leisure for adults, it is accepted that entertainment and leisure are things adults are entitled to and they are just enjoyable, they are not viewed simply in terms of what is good for them (Stainton Rogers 2004). Within a rights and sociocultural perspective the child’s play, like that of the adult, is not simply viewed as meeting a developmental need, which has a future orientation, but it is also valued as it is fun and gives pleasure to children in the here and now.

Within a rights context, Moss (2006) describes how in England amongst practitioners and policy makers, a childcare discourse is slowly being replaced by a holistic pedagogical discourse which contain the following features: service provision for all children, regardless of parental employment status; services that complement home experiences and relationships; a workforce ‘viewed as reflective and researching practitioners’ (2006, p.73); and children deemed to be active citizens. He reiterates the need to tackle structural obstacles and specifically identifies a need to shift early years services ‘out of a welfare regime that is inscribed with liberal welfare state values of
targeting, family responsibility and private markets, into an education regime inscribed with very different values’ (Moss 2006, p.79). However, Canella and Bloch (2006) observe that, the welfare state in the US that aimed to protect citizens is being eliminated through the processes of technology, transnational corporate rights and power and free markets and it is this crisis of ‘social and education engineering, control, and profiteering’ (p.6) that is leading them to call for engagement in activism in the manner of the Civil Rights and legal activists of the 1960s.

A rights perspective is driven in part by the recognition that the assumption that all adults will aim to do what is best for or in the best interests of children has been proven to be unfounded (Freeman 2007). In recognition of this, Archard (2004) argues that a presumptive right to rear children should be contingent on parental willingness and ability to ensure the minimally decent upbringing to which children have a right. Given that some adults, including parents, do not always consider the best interests of the child, he argues for a more collective attitude towards child rearing responsibilities than currently exists in many liberal western countries. This model of moderate collectivism, he argues, affords more protection to children while also providing increased opportunities for empowerment, as a more extensive valuation of children would exist in society.

An idealised adult-child relationship in Anglo-American states has led to a reluctance to interfere with family and reinforces parental rights as sacred (Hayes 2002). During the twentieth century professionals have made ‘decisions, policies and actions that have been inappropriate for, if not actively harmful to, children while claiming to be acting to promote their welfare’ (Lansdown cited in Stainton Rogers 2004, p.134).
The important concept of *citizenship*, which appears in literature and policy embracing a rights perspective, can be conceptualised within political theory differently reflecting competing ideologies contained in varying welfare regimes. Millei and Imre (2009) consider whether children are being asked to act as:

> liberal citizens with minimal participation limited to voting on some key issues, social democratic citizens participating in the governing of the institutions in which they spend their days, socialist citizens striving for collective emancipation from capitalism, communitarians working on duties and obligations to and or someone or thing termed as a community in which they dwell. (2009, p.287)

While the concept can be influenced by liberal, social democratic, socialist or communitarian theories which can be thought of as types of Kantian common world views of morality and reason, the reality is often that the administrative and legal frameworks that legitimise rights and duties are confined in the most part to national boundaries (Millei and Imre 2009). In fact, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie argue that citizenship is actualised more locally as children ‘achieve citizenship through their various relationships and actions, a citizenship that can assume different shapes’ (Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2007, p.439). However, it is within the parent-child relationship that debate flourishes in relation to whose rights take priority, a tension often fuelled and highlighted in the media (Stainton Rogers 2004).

**(iii) Children, parents and rights**

This was illustrated in Ireland when *Irish Times* journalist, John Waters, criticised the consultation carried out by the Ombudsman for Children with school children throughout Ireland in November 2007.
Underneath the guff about "family", the real purpose of the Big Ballot is to marshal the moral power of childhood in undermining the bond between families and children, as currently protected by the Constitution of Ireland, and to assert an alternative focus for children and their needs - in the bosom of the State. To this end, the Big Ballot was a PR exercise, aimed primarily at our children, insinuating that there is reason for them to see present arrangements as denying them "a voice". Have no fear, says Logan, soon you, the children of Ireland, will be rescued from the suffocating embrace of those who have falsely claimed to care for you until now. (Waters 2007)

The use of ‘media power’ (Habermas 2006, p.418) in order to influence public opinions is a critical tool in a potential battle of rights. Much of the debate about children’s rights in Ireland is as a result of a focus solely on the legal ramifications of constitutional change or legal arguments (Hayes and Bradley 2009). A rights discourse embedded in a concept of autonomy and a contractual exchange between persons with entitlements and duties is the primary cause of the antagonistic relations between those lobbying for rights of children and parents (Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2007).

Many cautions are expressed about the attention to rights. Ignatieff (2000) points out that, ‘rights can command universal assent only as a decidedly “thin” theory of what is right’ (p.322), as it tries to be all things to all people. He cautions that the authority whose power is directly challenged will be reluctant to concede the legitimacy of rights. There is also the danger that rights can be interpreted as and converted into another technical practice, becoming itself imperialist in form (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). A limiting legal focus that has emerged has in part been due to the development of the internationally negotiated Convention on Children’s Rights in 1989 that needs to be interpreted within each nation state’s legal framework.
3.3.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Much of the impetus for the rights discourse that currently exists began with the adoption of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie et al. 2009). The UNCRC has been ratified by 191 of the world’s 193 States. The rights contained are commonly classified under three categories: provision rights; protection rights; and participations rights (Alderson 2004). Lansdown summarises key features of these rights as follows:

The provision Articles recognize the social rights of children to minimum standards of health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure.

The protection Articles identify the rights of children to be safe from discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict.

The participation Articles are to do with civil and political rights. They acknowledge the rights of children to a name and identify, to be consulted and to be taken account of, to physical integrity, to access to information, to freedom of speech and opinion, and to challenge decisions made on their behalf. (Cited in Mitchell 2007, pp.32-33).

Alanen (2010) conducted a review of all sixteen years of articles published in the influential Childhood journal which focuses on the sociology of childhood and she identified an increasing focus on rights within the literature over time. Most texts shared an approach that assumed children’s rights were those enshrined in the Convention and as such the UNCRC provided a framework around which much of the research located itself. This demonstrates the importance of the UNCRC in influencing the research agenda and as a site of focus for both the children’s rights movement and those advancing the field of sociology of childhood. The rights movement is supported
by the sociology of childhood, which is described as being the *socioscientific* wing of the *political-juridical* children’s rights movement (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie et al. 2009).

Reynaert et al (2009) conducted a review of scholarly work on children’s rights appearing in key journals since 1989 and they identified three main themes. The first is autonomy and participation rights as the norm in children’s rights practice and policy. Second, as described above, is the tension between parental and children’s rights when the focus shifts from protection to participation and types of provision. Finally is the evolution of a global children’s rights industry which has emerged as a result of the extensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms. The various topics are distilled in the following three sections as participation rights; abstract universalism vs. cultural relativism; and beyond a legal interpretation of the UNCRC.

(i) **Participation Rights**

The point of most resistance in realising rights for children is in the area of the right to participation (Freeman 2007; Powell and Smith 2009) which is based on the acceptance of a concept of children’s agency as outlined in the sociology of childhood. Despite evidence that even very young children and babies have the capacity to be involved in decision making (Alderson 2004), within the various welfare models, it is the participation rights that are the most often disregarded or violated (Smith 2002). This is demonstrated in research carried out by Habashi et al (2010) in which content analysis was carried out on constitutional documents of 179 nation states recognised by the UN Development Programme in the Human Development Index (HDI). The findings outlined in table 3.1 below indicate that children were portrayed as needing protection
and provision of services in 58% of the 179 countries on average but there was a
dramatic reduction down to 14% in any portrayal of the child as participants in decision
making.

Table 3.1: Constitutional review to determine level of endorsement of Children’s Rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of countries that endorsed PROVISION in the constitution and amendments by level of HDI</th>
<th>Level 1 HDI</th>
<th>Level 2 HDI</th>
<th>Level 3 HDI</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57 of 75</td>
<td>44 of 78</td>
<td>18 of 26</td>
<td>119 of 179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of countries that endorsed PROVISION and PROTECTION in the constitution and amendments by level of HDI</th>
<th>Level 1 HDI</th>
<th>Level 2 HDI</th>
<th>Level 3 HDI</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision and Protection</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49 of 75</td>
<td>41 of 78</td>
<td>14 of 26</td>
<td>104 of 179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of countries that endorsed PARTICIPATION in the constitution and amendments by level of HDI</th>
<th>Level 1 HDI</th>
<th>Level 2 HDI</th>
<th>Level 3 HDI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12 of 75</td>
<td>10 of 78</td>
<td>3 of 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(ii) Abstract Universalism versus Cultural Relativism

White (2007) summarises the character of the Convention as being:

modernist and universalist, setting standards which states everywhere should seek to observe. The child is accorded rights, because rights are the currency through which the UN system recognizes the claims of individuals or population groups. At the same time, it is careful to leave some space for different cultural perspectives in child-rearing, mindful of the sensitivities of representing a community of nations”. (p.508)

Ambiguity is revealed as abstract universalism incriminates cultures that are perceived to abuse children or violate their rights, while cultural relativism argues that all cultures are equal and need to be observed through a neutral eye rather than measured against a

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3 The three HDI levels (high = 1; medium = 2; low = 3) consist of nations that share characteristics regarding degree of human development measured by the indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and living standards. The intent of each nation state is to attain level 1.
Eurocentric bias (Nieuwenhuys 2008). The task of implementing children’s rights implies action and intervention to make the world a better place for children but it is argued that abstract universalism ‘actually reduces children to mere victims in need of expert scrutiny and guidance’ (ibid, p.7). Once again, as with those arguing in favour of the sociology of childhood, it is suggested that widening the focus beyond legal codes towards an ethics of children’s rights that views children as subjects, capable of adaption, transformation and discarding, diverts away from areas of contention between the local and global (Burr 2004).

Within research an increased emphasis on exploring children’s experience of their lives has emerged (Nieuwenhuys 2008). Stainton Rogers (2004) contends that a focus on quality of life ensures the welfare of children is evaluated not on needs or rights but on children’s experience of life which considers their overall happiness and satisfaction with life. This method of evaluation assumes agency of children inviting their opinions, while promoting the concept of resilience as evidenced in reports such as the UNICEF Report Card 7 (2007) which incorporates data on the subjective well-being of young people through capturing information from them on how they feel about school, family and their overall life satisfaction.

(iii) Beyond Legal Interpretation

Limiting the interpretation of the UNCRC to a narrow positivist legal exercise limits the use of the convention (Nieuwenhuys 2008). Reynaert et al (2009) argue that the process of negotiation to form consensus thinking emerges within a positivist framework as the rights discourse becomes more technical in its nature and there is little attention paid to the context in which rights are or are not being realised. In overseeing the
implementation of the UNCRC there has emerged systems of monitoring, standard setting and reporting on progress that by its nature generates a global children’s rights industry (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie et al. 2009). Academics have engaged in extensive searches for methods to measure and compare children’s rights cross nationally, including Gran’s Children’s Rights Index (2010), Carvalho’s Rights Measurement Matrix (2008) and the UNICEF benchmarks for ECEC services in rich countries developed in light of the UNCRC (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009), while each Nation’s legal obligation to submit periodic reports has itself generated its own local national activity. Ombudsman offices have been established in many nations. Materials on rights for children amass while various NGOs emerge to campaign for rights for children as well as becoming involved in the monitoring of UNCRC implementation.

However, Smith (2007b) argues that the UNCRC is most effective in the application of moral pressures and a support for child advocates seeking better ECEC policies. To date, the UNCRC’s impact has been limited and progress has been slow (Carvalho 2008; Krappmann 2009). Many States have chosen to weaken their legal commitments under the UNCRC through reservations to provisions and in Canada, for example, a series of soft rights have been established that have not been transformed into hard rights (Tang 2003). Children are frequently treated as recipients of welfare rather than independent rights holders (Carvalho 2008). Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) argue that a social-political interpretation is a more effective perspective from which to investigate how rights of children can be realised rather than what rights children have or do not have. Rights function as a starting point for dialogue in which the rights of children are placed in a wider social context and creating space for meaning-making
amongst children, parents, providers and the State. For example, rather than viewing pedagogues as policy administrators this model builds upon empirical findings showing that ‘pedagogical action helps to shape policy and that pedagogues are social policy makers – for instance, in the way they interpret law in their daily practice’ (Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2007, p.440). A social-political interpretation, which informs the theory on social construction of target populations, in this instance, does not aim to solve the ambiguities of the relations between the State, parents and children but it acknowledges it. The UNCRC acts as a lever for facilitating debate that includes a focus on context and diversity within an on-going cycle of policy formation.

However, the practical outcomes prompted by the UNCRC can not be underestimated. In Ireland, despite its weak legal standing, it is recognised that the processes of monitoring and evaluation have prompted significant change at a structural and policy level. Following the publication of the UNCRC concluding observations on Ireland in 1998 a range of national coordinating structures and strategies were developed along with the appointment of an Ombudsman for Children. The vocabulary of children’s rights spread to influence various national strategies in relation to family, employment, education and social inclusion. However, the concluding observations for Ireland in 2006 indicated that Ireland was making inroads in terms of structures and policy but, in line with international experience, highlighted the slow progress being made in affecting deeper and more meaningful change at a normative and cultural level. There was little indication that children in Ireland were being recognized and treated as citizens in their own right. While the outcomes may be disappointing, the UNCRC operates as an effective mechanism for contining to draw focus to the issue of children and their rights.
3.3.3 Looking Forward – A Sociology of Children’s Rights

Alanen points out that children’s rights ‘is not just a political and legal construct … with social and societal consequences for children and childhood which sociologists may then explore’ (2010, p.7), it is a human right and as such childhood researchers find themselves benefiting from a newly emerging sociology of human rights. She feels that the first phase of childhood sociology is coming to an end and it will emerge into a sociology of children’s rights in which there will be an increased analysis of children’s rights that will explore and question ‘the theoretical presuppositions and practical conditions of children’s rights, or the social significance for children and their relationships of a right-bearing status’ (2010, p.7).

3.3.4 Strategies for ECEC Development

‘While ECEC has become a policy priority in order to address a range of economic and social problems, increased provision is resulting in the ‘institutionalisation of childhood’. ’ (Dahlberg and Moss 2005)

‘European governments have not only been in the forefront of developing preschool education from the 19th Century onwards, but they have also put into place family and childcare policies to help couples have children and assist parents to combine work and family responsibilities.’ (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009, p.18)

The OECD’s two influential reviews of ECEC, Start Strong (2001) and Start Strong II (2006), acknowledge that from within the diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, a variety of policy approaches are pursued. They highlight the complexity of policy making in the field as it ‘is also linked with issues of women’s employment and equality of opportunity; child development and child poverty issues; labour market supply; health, social welfare and later education’ (OECD 2006, p.13).
This view is supported by the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training (NESSE) who point out that arguments in favour of extension and development of ECEC services are ‘sometimes contradictory and overlapping, and tend to draw on different research traditions and use different kind of data’ (2009, p.56).

NESSE (2009), when investigating the various rationales for investing in ECEC services across Europe, refer to the extensive research carried out by Leseman and New and Cochran that supports their finding that there is a strong agreement in the child development literature that early years are an important time of learning and young children’s early learning experiences have a critical impact on their future learning. While there is some difference of opinion within the neuro-scientific field about how much it can support this argument, there is the broad acceptance of the belief that early education is good investment (ibid, p.32).

NESSE point out that human capital theory is seen to be the driving force behind many of the rationales for ECEC provision. These rationales include: investment in early education to mitigate the expenses of remedial action in the future; enhancing the dispositions for learning; getting children ready to be flexible life-long learners as well as enhancing their ability to compete in the new knowledge economy; freeing mothers up to participate in the workforce; assisting in tackling child poverty through enhancing their educational performance; and, ECEC services are seen to assist in tackling low birth rates which is viewed as a societal problem (2009).

In terms of educational services, the emphasis on the generation of human capital amongst the very young has emerged as a key driver in state decisions to invest in childcare services (Jensen 2009), a development that poses a challenge to the
advancement of a rights-based rationale as it does not embrace a socio-cultural perspective. The desire to develop the necessary skills and knowledge needed to participate in the workforce has resulted in what Bennett (2005) terms the readiness-for-school-curriculum where the focus is on the achievement of cognitive goals for future worker citizens. Heckman (Carneiro and Heckman 2003) is the key human capital theorist who argues that investment in young children provides a higher return on investment than in later stages of education (Doyle, Harmon et al. 2009). There is criticism of an over-reliance on three key American studies, Perry High Scope, the Abecedarian and the Chicago Child-Parent Centres which provide evidence that drives the cost-benefit rationale (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009) resulting in a distribution of resources via a series of policy tools that actually reinforce and support inequalities within many western society (Moss 2001).

However, the NESSE report notes that a children’s rights and child well-being arguments are ‘leading to a major re-conceptualisation of ECEC services’ and a challenge to ‘current futuristic economics’ (2009, p.47). The key developments outlined are: the focus on the child in the present; the child as citizen with rights; the competent child; the various attributes of childhood; and the diversity of childhoods. In particular, there is a focus on the ‘participatory processes at various levels, with children, with parents, with staff and with the wider community’ while the peer relationships of children are viewed as critical to the learning and emotional support of children (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009, p.47). However, the major challenge that lies ahead in a state like Ireland is how to advance a rights argument in the face of rationalistic human capital arguments that justifies investment in ECEC based on a return on investment formula.
A key concern amongst advocates and scholars advancing a rights based approach is that amongst english-speaking states services are being provided increasingly by for-profit organisations in direct response to a demand for services rather than as a result of the state trying to stimulate the supply of services (ibid). While it has been argued by economists such as Becker that this is a cost-effective strategy (cited in NESSE 2009) it has also been shown to have negative impacts for policy targets (OECD 2006). For-profit services tend to be lower quality than either non-profit or state provided services (NESSE 2009). Targeting of resources at disadvantaged populations rather than universal provision is a common technique used to overcome this problem but targeting has been associated with stigmatisation and social segregation that can carry through to primary school. Research in the UK was able to demonstrate increased social stratification and reduced quality as a result of a switch to demand-led funding strategies and a reliance on market forces for provision (ibid). Despite stringent inspection and evaluation procedures designed to ensure quality service provision, a review of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections over a three year period showed “only two thirds of those inspected were good quality, falling to about half in deprived areas” (ibid, p.30). This is of particular concern for the most vulnerable children as unless ECEC is of high quality it can “do more harm than good” during children’s most important and formative years (ibid, p.28).

Alternatively it has been argued that universal provision is more effective in identifying and reaching a wider population of children in need of support (Hayes 2008). Research increasingly reported that high-quality early childhood care and education could benefit all children with a higher impact on more disadvantaged children (OECD 2006). The OECD also point out that ECEC alone could not realise social equity or “personal
success” (p.256). It must form part of a holistic approach to the provision of a range of services for children. Within this context, children’s right to service provision is evidently as important as the participative rights focused on extensively within the children’s rights literature.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the range of disciplines contributing to the study of children and childhood over the decades and centuries. The disciplines founded within a positivist tradition have strongly influenced how we think about children. We are capable of embracing a variety of concepts at one time. It is not unusual to see a practitioner sway between feeling or describing children as needing some structure (in order to combat their animalistic tendencies), being a sponge that absorbs knowledge (in the manner expected of the developing child) while simultaneously being held in a protective environment to shelter them from the exposures of the adult world. However, the beliefs we as individuals hold about children have far reaching consequences when we look at how we treat children within our wider society.

The study of the sociology of childhood, driven by a concern with social justice and equity for children (and adults), challenges our interpretations and deconstructs our current understanding of children and childhood to ask, who do these constructions benefit? (Cannella 2002; MacNaughton 2005). The new paradigm of childhood studies embraces a view of children that recognises ‘multiple childhoods, children’s agency and competency, and the primacy of children’s lived experience’ (Smith 2007b:1). The Children’s Rights movement, which has blossomed since the adoption of the UNCRC in 1989, has focused on realising protection, provision and participatory rights for
children. However, scholars within Childhood Studies demonstrate how the traditional ideological interpretations of children can still yield an unhealthy influence on how rights are realised and can lead to the further marginalisation of children if there is too much focus on individualism and universal behaviourism and the process of *educationalisation*.

One of the key challenges facing the advancement of childhood studies within the political arena is that it accommodates a considerable degree of complexity and diversity and embraces otherness (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). This contrasts with the dominant positivist discourse of rationality and technical practice (education) which offers clear cut prescriptive solutions for narrowly defined problems. It is only through critical reflection that the issue of *control* by a dominant western, neo-liberal agenda that strives to meet the needs of industry becomes apparent. Without creating space for alternative discourses, which in turn opens up the possibility of alternative choices, the discrimination against children remains unchallenged and policies are framed around a discourse that facilitates a maldistribution of resources (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

Hultqvist and Dahlberg (2001) share a conviction that the twenty first century sees the dawn of a new way of theorising and reasoning about children and childhood. What is evident is that there is a body of research building up within the area of Childhood Studies that advocates a rethinking of pedagogical practice and policy development and implementation in the name of social justice and child-ism. Specifically, ECEC services offer the distinct opportunity to act as *loci of ethical and democratic practice* (Dahlberg and Moss 2005) in which the focus is on engaging with children as *citizens*. This involves understanding the child as having infinite capabilities while challenging and reconstructing dominant discourses that perpetuate inequalities (ibid).
The concept of *children’s rights* needs to be qualified to add value to the socio-cultural understanding of children’s potential and role within society. It is acknowledged that rights are frequently understood as ‘codes of conduct rooted in liberal individualism’ (ibid, p.31) that can perpetuate rather than challenge traditional views of children and family. Within this context rights are cautiously considered by many deconstructivist scholars as a *means* rather than an *end* it itself (ibid). However, the rights approach is not without merit. A key benefit is that it increases visibility, legitimacy, and contestability while empowering and to some degree protecting the oppressed. Given this, rights were used as a key indicator within this thesis as they were the *means* used to draw attention to the *child* within the debate on ECEC.

The key challenge identified within a European policy context is to shift thinking beyond the limited focus on *childcare* which addresses employment and gender equality issues to adopt an inclusive concept of services available to all children with a wider focus incorporating education, family support, social inclusion and democratic practice (Children in Europe 2008). ECEC is not seen as a substitute for home or as an ‘enclosure for applying technologies to children to achieve predetermined outcomes’ (Moss 2006, p.73) but instead offers children qualitatively different experiences and relationships. It provides the space for children to *be* and *develop*, through pedagogical practices that focus on learning, caring and raising children as a single integrated activity.

While tracking the impact of the various articles of the UNCRC might appear to have been an obvious starting point for evaluating the impact of rights on ECEC development, a focus on individual rights was deemed to be too narrow, technical and positivist a focus for the research. For that reason, a focus on the three categories of
rights: protection; provision; and participation (Alderson 2004) were selected as they provide a broader understanding of rights that more easily accommodates a socio-cultural perspective of children and a socio-political review of policy tool development in Ireland.

In order to understand the challenges and opportunities facing efforts to advance a vision of ECEC development as empowering and respectful of children, their families, society and consequently the economy, the context in which ECEC policy is developed needs to be explored in more detail. The following chapter considers the ideologies and structural changes driving the various rationales for investment in ECEC amongst welfare states in the OECD region. It reveals how levels of commitment to rights, views about children and families, and consequently the role ECEC plays in economic and social development determine how ECEC policy is shaped and implemented. It highlights how increasingly in a globalised world social and cultural issues that are often complex in nature are subordinated to economic rationales.
Chapter Four: Welfare regimes and the impact on ECEC development

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore in more detail the general trends that have been identified amongst states as to how they manage welfare developments as the impacts from these decisions are felt in all policy areas, including ECEC. Generic clusters have been identified as welfare regimes (Esping Andersen 1990). They tend to follow similar patterns of policy development reflecting ideologies that place different levels of emphasis on key issues such as the role of the market in addressing policy problems and the level of state involvement in the lives of people. They also influence the social constructions and norms that emerge within society. This in turn informs decisions about which policy tools most effectively address policy problems as constructed by policy makers.

The chapter has four distinct sections. The first reviews one of the most influential models looking at the welfare state, Esping Anderson’s (1990) three welfare regimes: conservative; liberal; and social democratic, as these provide a useful reference for tracking and classifying state behaviour. The second section presents a review of ECEC policy within various welfare regimes. In particular, it considers how best to realise the goals of developing accessible, affordable, quality ECEC with integrated coordinating structures, key indicators of quality ECEC (OECD 2006).
The third section follows with a review of the literature looking at changes taking place to welfare regimes. Changes in family formation and how people work are creating a new set of social risks. These include less opportunity for children to be cared for exclusively within the home as women increasingly participate in the workforce.

The fourth section reviews a range of futures models that focus on how public policies should be shaped into the future to achieve a work-life balance that facilitates new work and family demands. Within these models, a focus on ECEC is emerging that considers the need for significant investment in quality ECEC to supplement familial care and education that could accommodate a view of children as citizens.

Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining how access, affordability, quality and integrated coordinating structures will be the criteria used in this research to evaluate ECEC policy tools in Ireland.

4.1 Welfare regime approaches to work and family

Labour and family issues are inextricably linked within the welfare regimes captured most famously within Esping Andersen’s The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism (1990). The model has not always held up to intense scrutiny that has been applied to it. It has been shown that different areas of welfare provision exhibit different cross national variations (Gornick, Meyers et al. 1997; Kasza 2002; Bambra 2005); a feminist critique has argued that the classifications do not adequately address gender issues (O’Connor 1993; Orloff 1993; Lewis 1997; Lewis 2002); and regimes have been expanded to distinguish policy developments associated with Southern Europe and the
Central and Eastern Europe states (Trifiletti 1999; Hantrais 2004). However, the three basic social stratifications provide a useful starting point for this review.

The three groupings are identified based on ‘social provisions that “de-commodify” citizens by providing alternatives to market income when labor market connections are weak or non-existent, e.g., during sickness, unemployment or retirement’ (Meyers and Gornick 2003, p.382). The extent to which citizens need to rely on a public-private mix varies between the conservative, liberal and social democratic regimes.

The conservative welfare regime is described as designing social policy to preserve ‘traditional status differences in society’ (Scruggs and Allan 2006a, p.3). Historically social expenditure budgets within these welfare regimes were significant and aimed to reinforce traditional roles regarding social structure and familialism. The state had a strong central role and adopted an old-style corporatist economic order while facilitating a significant role for religion in society. The guiding principle of subsidiary stressed the primacy of the family and the wider community for providing support and care (Meyers and Gornick 2003). The state’s role was to get involved only when families, neighbourhoods, churches or community groups could not effectively address a given problem (Vischer 2001).

Promoters of a liberal regime argue that economic welfare needs to be freed from the restraints of the social institutions of the church and state so individuals can realise their potential through a free market. Within this grouping there are varying degrees of liberalism. The neo-liberal approach that has originated from the Chicago School, goes further than the German post-War liberalism that would have seen government supporting the economy through political regulation but also becoming involved in
social intervention in areas of housing, health, unemployment, and so on, when the market was unable to respond to demands (Lemke 2001). Lemke’s assessment of Foucault’s lectures on the genealogy of the modern state, conclude that the primary role of the state in the US neo-liberal model is to ‘universalise competition’ (p.197). He outlines the key differences between the US and European models:

[T]he key element in the Chicago School’s approach is their consistent expansion of the economic form to apply to social sphere, thus eliding any difference between the economy and the social. ... Whereas the Ordo-liberal in West Germany pursued the idea of governing society in the name of the economy, the US neo-liberals attempt to re-define the social sphere as a form of the economic domain. (Cited in Lemke 2001, p.197)

Rather than the state managing individual’s social risks (or periods when labour market connections are weak or non-existent), private remedies are favoured through interaction with the market minimising the state’s social expenditure and involvement in private or family issues, thus justifying and limiting governmental action. Within a conservative context, historically church, non-profit organisations or charities may have stepped in to assist citizens and families when they were disconnected from the labour market but the liberal approach would favour the use of the market to solve problems. In areas of market failure, typically where prospective consumers of services cannot afford to purchase services, where the demand for critical services exist demand will remain unfulfilled as private enterprise will not engage in commercial activity as there is no profit available to motivate a market response to the local problem. In these circumstances, the state may target groups or areas but the level of direct intervention can vary substantially depending on the degree of commitment to the more extreme US model of liberalism.
Finally, the *social democratic* regime has evolved based on a desire to achieve social solidarity through a *universalist* approach to social spending. *Social citizenship* is a key concept promoted and used to justify extensive social expenditure that aims to eradicate social and economic barriers between classes. *Social rights* to state support are granted by virtue of citizenship (Esping-Andersen 2006b). The strong focus on home and society and the accomplishment of equality through non-market mechanisms within this regime contrasts with the ‘conservative welfare regimes … that sought to preserve social differentials [and] the liberal regimes that sought to subordinate traditional social structures to the imperatives of the market’ (Scruggs and Allan 2006a, p.5). There is an explicit goal to use welfare policy to minimise market-generated income inequalities and a particular emphasis on assisting families in order to promote labour market equality between men and women.

The categorisations contained in the *three worlds* are based in large part on a static view built in part upon the *male breadwinner model* in which men are seen to be the key earner in the family with women’s role being that of carer of the family and management of the home (Scruggs and Allan 2006a). Dean (2001) looks at the expected reaction of each of the regimes to pressures to increase female labour force participation. He focuses on the three elements of what he describes as the family policy trilemma: the interaction and interdependence between family policy; labour policy; and social spending. Within this model he expects that social democratic regimes would maximise labour force participation and family life through investment in social spending on childcare provision and benefits for working parents; the conservative-corporatists states prioritise traditional family life and through moderate social spending measures to bolster family wages and sustain self-supporting traditional families which
in turn restricts female participation in the labour force; the liberal regime typically maximises labour force participation while keeping social spending at a minimum instead promoting market led economic growth despite the stress that this places on women and low-income families (ibid).

4.2 Welfare regimes and ECEC

These welfare regime classifications provide a useful framework to try to understand and classify patterns of behaviour amongst the various states in relation to policy around work, family and ultimately, from the perspective of this research, children. However, there has been some criticism that groupings under the popularised welfare regime model shift when policies that assist families with caregiving are taken into account as they do not correlate exactly to the patterns that emerged when alternative criteria are used (Gornick, Meyers et al. 1997; Kilkey and Bradshaw 1999).

Meyers and Gornick (2003) investigated the level of public and private provision of ECEC services amongst fourteen states drawn from the three different welfare regimes. They concluded that amongst most of the social democratic states extensive public provision is prevalent which is consistent with their goals to reduce inequality and promote full employment among men and women. The liberal states engage in state provision primarily to increase the human capital of disadvantaged children or to facilitate the participation of disadvantaged parents in the work force. The impact on availability and affordability is mixed as supply reacts in direct correlation to demand for services and what parents can afford. This also results in mixed quality while perpetuating income and gender inequality. The variance however amongst the conservative states was marked with two distinct groups emerging. Overall, the
principle of subsidiarity is seen to be the influencing factor for very limited provision of services to under-threes. However, there are a range of unique localised pressures that see some states shift towards increases in socialised care, such as ‘concerns with preserving national culture in France, an emphasis on early learning and language acquisition in multi-lingual Luxembourg, and a strong focus on the value of group and cooperative learning for children in Italy’ (Meyers and Gornick 2003, p.406).

Two organisational models of childcare have been identified across Europe. In the Nordic states (excluding Denmark), Latvia and Slovenia a unitary model is identified where there is a single system to support all pre-school children who attend the same setting and where “staff responsible for children’s education have, generally, the same qualifications and salary scale regardless of the age of the children they look after” (European Commission 2009, p.13). In contrast other European states favour a system where services are structured according to age, giving rise to a split system. Access to subsidised services for the 0-3 year olds is frequently granted based on the parental employment status where an understanding of childcare is limited to minding or caring for children to facilitate parental employment. This is a targeted approach which contrasts with the Nordic universalist approach. For the 3-6 year olds ECEC shifts from being considered childcare and takes on the role of being the first step on the educational ladder. Educational requirements for staff are higher and all European countries finance, in full or part, services for children 3 years and older. There are several states in which both models co-exist: Denmark; Greece; Cyprus; Spain and Lithuania. However, the OECD (2001; 2006) have concluded that a universal approach to the provision of quality ECEC services benefits all children and avoids the labelling,
stigmatisation, ghettoisation and exclusions that often emerge when targeting disadvantaged groups (Schneider and Ingram 1993; Carney 2009).

One of the key resources in the review of ECEC development and investment were the two OECD reports, Starting Strong (2001) and Starting Strong II (2006). These cross national comparisons were critical works comparing key features of ECEC development within twenty states in the OECD region. They also included national notes as it recognised ‘not only that there are different understandings or social constructions of childhood and different images of the child, but that these are productive of policy, provision and practice’ (Moss 2001, p.3) in each national context.

They identified numerous rationales for the attention to ECEC including a strengthening of the foundations of life-long learning, ensuring access of women to the labour market, early development and the importance of early learning and, when effective fiscal, social and employment measures were in place for communities and parents, ‘early childhood programming would help provide a fair start in life for all children, and contribute to educational equity and social integration’ (Bennett 2007, p.1). Within the social and economic framework it used to categorise ECEC amongst countries, it managed to classify key features from within a sociocultural perspective that encompassed the agency of the child, the key role of well trained professional pedagogues and the holistic understanding of a range of policies relating to child well being.
4.2.1 The childcare trilemma – access, affordability and quality

The conclusions of both OECD reviews were ‘strongly influenced by a governance and children’s rights perspective’ (Bennett 2007, p.28). ECEC services were identified as being instruments of social equity and cohesion in which governments could ensure social values such rights, democracy and equality of access were incorporated into the ECEC systems. The OECD (2006) provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for ECEC policy development, the key features of which are:

- A systemic and integrated approach to ECEC policy.
- A strong and equal partnership with the educational system.
- A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support.
- Substantial public investment in services and infrastructure.
- A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurances.
- Appropriate training and working conditions for ECEC staff.
- Systematic attention to data collection and monitoring.
- A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

(OECD 2006, pp.13-15)

These recommendations focus on the structures and systems best suited to coordinating the development of affordable, accessible, quality services for children. The review highlighted how differences in ECEC policy development between states had different impacts on both access and affordability. They advocated for appropriate and universal access available to all children whose parents wish them to participate. While some private expenditure on ECEC is evident in most states, the argument is made for increasing investment so that public expenditure will reduce the requirement for personal financing of access, especially for those that cannot afford access to quality
services, as ultimately only *quality* services stand to benefit children. Quality is described as encompassing a pedagogical approach based on a sociocultural understanding of childhood so therefore requires appropriately trained and qualified staff, which in turn impacts upon access and affordability.

Differing emphasis are demonstrated amongst different regimes in key areas such as a definition of quality. NESSE (2009) conclude that Anglo-American literature, which favours a targeted approach, stresses the importance of training, staff-child ratios and good pedagogical programmes while in countries influenced by the children’s rights debate, adopting a universalist model, these quality criteria are insufficient. The latter grouping believe that evaluation is a ‘complex interactive process’ (ibid, p.29) leading to a preference for a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance (Bennett 2003). NESSE (2009) describe how a policy approach that is supported by a rights rationale is broad in focus as it aims to tackle the reduction of child poverty, health and welfare supports simultaneously and in an integrated manner. Provision is also defined from the children’s perspective. This supports the overall findings of the NESSE research review which concludes that there is agreement that *quality* ECEC services can enhance the subsequent school performance of children, but will not on their own ‘redress the effects of child poverty and disadvantage’ (ibid, p.3).

Provision of quality ECEC services is by its nature expensive as it is labour intensive and it is recommended that staff be adequately trained to a professional standard to ensure positive outcomes and experiences for children, thus driving up wage costs. The level of subsidy and support the state invests in ECEC determines how many and who gains access to services. Within the grouping of states that favour a targeted approach they hail from both the corporate conservative and the neo-liberal welfare regimes. The
latter may use an economic rationale for investment through targeting, using evidence from high profile researchers such as Heckman (2007), and his theory on investment in human capital as a point of reference. The former may be influenced by their traditional principle of subsidiarity to avoid direct involvement in family life. While the targeted approach favoured across many of the European states for younger children is more cost effective for the state than the unitary or universal model evidence suggests that this approach perpetuates inequalities (Bown, Sumsion et al. 2009).

Research emerging from the UK and the US has shown that disadvantaged or at-risk children that could benefit most from quality ECEC services (Campbell, Ramey et al. 2008) are less likely to access these services (Magnuson and Waldfogel 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva et al. 2007). When they do attend, there is evidence that the quality of services available to disadvantaged children tended to be ‘didactic and basic skills oriented with a negative social-emotional climate’ where staff did not have high educational standards (European Commission 2009, p.37). The services also tended to be marked by frequent transitions and disruptions in relationships with other children and caregivers rendering ‘the developmental and learning processes less effective, and may be a cause of behavioural maladjustment and low achievement in primary school’ (ibid, p.37). In contrast, in services that had staff that were more highly educated and better paid, with lower staff-to-child ratios and overall higher classroom quality they were accessed by those that could afford the services while being inaccessible to low income groups (Phillips, Mekos et al. 2000). This socially selective use reinforces the divides that exist between the advantaged and disadvantaged in society.

Difficulties with targeting are not restricted to those at risk. The support of a split system in which significant investment by the state in early education only begins when
children are aged 3 or 4 has led to inadequate attention to issues such as access, regulation, funding, workforce development and has led to problems with transition between systems and inequality for the under 3s (Kaga, Bennett et al. 2010). Many states have recognised this problem and made efforts to address this issue through integration of ECEC with education. However, Kaga et al caution that change is successful where the rationale has been strong and principled rather than a pragmatic decision.

Within the three distinct welfare regimes, the liberal, conservative and social democratic there are a range of commonalities within each in terms of their policy approaches. The OECD findings stress that ‘the view that early childhood education and care should be seen as a public good is growing, and has received a strong impetus from the research of education economist’ (2006, p.12). While this may be true, the marketisation of ECEC services has also been promoted within the OECD region (OECD 2002; OECD 2003) and it has had a significant influence on how services are delivered and how the balance of investment is shared between parents, employers and the State. In general terms within the Liberal economies, State intervention is kept to a minimum (Larner 2000) and a market approach to service provision, which is embedded in the consumerist approach, is favoured to direct provision of services by the State (Hayes and Bradley 2007). A distinct drawback to this approach is that business has a primary objective of profit maximisation. Of course it will address the needs of parents (rather than children) but a review of scholastic work by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in New Zealand (Carroll-Lind and Angus 2011) highlights the deficiency in this model.

*Parental choice of childcare does not inevitably lead to high quality education and care, as defined by the research literature and the early childhood*
professionals in this inquiry. This is because many parents are not fully aware of the learning and developmental needs of their infants and of the importance of responsive relationships as a crucial aspect of quality. (2011, p.xviii)

For this reason, there is a need for intervention to ensure the best interests of the child are addressed. Norway and Sweden have been able to accommodate private providers within a social democratic public service model through adequate regulation, contracts and funding, which goes some way towards addressing the issue. However, the Liberal economies favour less intervention in the business model with the result that quality, access and affordability are uneven (OECD 2006) as they respond only to demand for services by those that can afford it. In order to address the unevenness of supply when relying on a market approach and there is a need to intervene in the business model to ensure children’s interests are adequately represented by those with a full understanding of how ECEC can benefit children. A strong partnership approach between Government, service providers and community is advocated in New Zealand to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive coverage of quality services, as defined by research and best practice, for all communities, not just those that can afford them (May and Mitchell 2009).

As ECEC is a relatively new policy problem for many states, adjustments and changes to policy and the tools of implementation are frequent. To assist in trying to predict and influence the direction changes could and should take, a review of a range of futures models is undertaken after the pressures for change to the welfare state are reviewed.
4.3 The changing welfare state

The welfare state regimes have been critiqued from the left as providing inadequate protection for the most vulnerable and bowing to the pressures of the economy while the right contend that they can create dependency and poverty while stifling personal responsibility (Pierson and Castles 2006). They have also come under fire from feminist authors as perpetuating and reinforcing gendered structures and outcomes (Lewis 1997; 2002; Borchorst and Siim 2008). Despite this, there appears to be a degree of consensus that the welfare state contains the potential to be a vehicle for ‘forging a new and stable reconciliation between seemingly competing claims of economic efficiency and social justice’ (Pierson and Castles 2006, p.6).

4.3.1 The threat to the welfare state

An international political economy perspective puts forward the idea that globalisation, and in particular the mobilisation of capital, has put pressure on the welfare state as capital seeks out regimes that are least encumbered by expensive welfare traditions, high tax rates and rigid labour market relations (Hay 2006). The argument is that business will seek to avoid the costs of ‘social provision, better wages and conditions and environmental safeguards’ as they lead to high production costs so will seek out alternative locations (Castles 2006, p.226). However, there are several limiting factors that prevent the welfare state, being cast ‘on the bonfire of regulatory controls and labour-market rigidities’ (Hay 2006, p.210). Castles (2006) conducted a review of social expenditure levels within the OECD region and established that overall a predicted race to the bottom had not taken place as expenditure levels had remained stable. He noted, however, that in small exposed economies such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland, reductions and cutbacks had taken place fuelling the argument amongst many
Irish scholars that globalisation has been a significant contributory factor to growing inequalities within Irish society during the boom years (Kirby 2006; Murphy 2009; Cronin, Kirby et al. 2010; Kirby and Murphy 2011).

Pierson (2006) in his new politics approach contends that globalisation is not the sole driver of change to the welfare state. He finds that government budgetary pressures are the key causal factor for the changes currently taking place. Post industrial changes, in particular the growth of the services sector, changing family forms, increasing share of women in the public sector labour force, a greying population and maturing governmental welfare commitments combine to put pressure on government budgets (Korpi 2006). Pierson (2006) outlines how these stresses combine to make public expenditure a difficult project for modern governments to manage because:

... they are expected to tackle a wide range of problems from deindustrialization to population ageing and to provide a whole range of new services from drug rehabilitation to services enabling women to combine labour force participation and maternity. Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why commentators interpret what is happening in terms of increased pressure on the welfare state or even a crisis. If governments feel that there are economic and/or political constraints on higher taxing and spending, and if, at the same time, there is an increased demand for welfare services, one of two things must happen: either other expenditure must be cut or existing standards of provision must decline. (2006, pp.237-238)

In defence of the Welfare State, Hay (2006) argues that the welfare state can in fact be a ‘competitive necessity’ (p.218) where it intervene to assist the development of industry through a focus on enhancing the skills and functions of business rather than deregulation of the labour market. This combines with the impediments to moving capital quickly to ensure that there is a future for the welfare state although the context, in terms of budgetary pressure resulting from changes in family and work
configurations as well as the pressures of globalisation, faced most significantly by small open economies like Ireland, has changed considerably since the initial establishment and expansion of the welfare state.

4.3.2 Lifecycle of the welfare state

There is sense that the current welfare state regimes are entering a phase of *retrenchment* (Korpi 2006; Palier 2006). This is based on a functionalist model in which the welfare state is identified as going through a period of *emergence* from the late 19th century until the 1970s, *crisis or limits* in the 1980s and finally *retrenchment* since the 1980s (Palier 2006). This is a similar trajectory to that identified by Van Dongen (2009) in his review of societal development over the centuries. He identifies three distinct phases of development of society that have emerged since the 1750s illustrated in figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4-1 Models of Society**

![Figure 4-1 Models of Society](source: Van Dongen's Models of Society (2009, p.2))

Within this framework he outlines how generally the 19th century was shaped by a liberal free-market system that adopted a laissez-faire economic approach that saw high
labour market participation rates for adult men and women as well as children. The 20th century saw moves towards a *socially adjusted free market system* in which traditional welfare state emerged that aimed to create a more equal society and to protect individuals across the life cycle. This was to be achieved through the regulation of the labour markets and introduced social protection for children and women but particularly married mothers. It was during this phase that the distinct roles for men as breadwinner and women as housewife became a norm and labour force participation rates for women and children declined (Van Dongen 2009). The decline of the traditional welfare state has been in progress for decades now and a new model is emerging.

The *power-resources approach*, which ‘views welfare states to a significant extent as outcomes of distributive conflicts involving class-related interests groups and political parties, conflicts where relative power of actors is significant’ (Korpi 2006, p.247), is used effectively to explain the establishment of the 20th century welfare state. However, there is contention about the relative significance of this approach in the face of post industrial changes. From within the *new politics* perspective Pierson (2006) argues that class related politics and the trade unions play a lesser role in retrenchment of the welfare state. They have been replaced to some degree by new groups emerging from within the new *networked* government model and structures such as social partnerships which deal with wider issues than just employment.

### 4.3.3 Ideological recalibrations

‘... it appears that the welfare state, while being contested both from the right and the left, will not be easily replaced by a conservative or progressive alternative ... ’ (Offe 1982, p.12)
Handler (2004) describes how in Western Europe active labour market policies or a workfare approach have attached a conditional element to benefits within the changing welfare state. No longer are social benefits a right attached by virtue of having the status of citizen. Obligations to participate in the workforce attach to rights as ‘[s]ocial citizenship thus changes from status to contract’ (ibid, p.2). The workfare regime has emerged from a new political synthesis or ideological recalibration that has become evident in the past two decades. A third way rhetoric is informing debates about the future of the welfare state and democratic politics in the US and the UK (White 2004). The ideology, Giddens (1994) argues, is not between left and right but beyond it and is driven by a belief that there are new ways of achieving traditional social democratic goals. Bonoli (2006) points out that virtually all European Union member countries are moving toward a new social policy orientation under the label ‘third way’. A motto of no rights without responsibilities has driven change within the third-way politics (Lister 2006). This is exemplified in the 1990s by the introduction of active labour market policies as well as measures to reconcile family and work life.

While some new policies have been introduced reform has not necessarily been radical or transformative (Pierson 2006). In Palier’s (2006) review of change where he looks beyond levels of expenditure he discovers that change has been handled differently within the various welfare regimes. Generally, the liberal states tend to utilise commodification to advance change while the Nordic states favour cutbacks and the continental states, who find reform most difficult, rely more on recalibration of existing measures. Surender and Lewis (2004, p.7) conclude that:

It is undoubtedly the case that the broad internal and external pressures for reform currently being experienced by all advanced welfare economies have
helped to push current patterns of welfare arrangements in a similar direction. However, an analysis of the political context surrounding the trajectory of social policy reform in the US and UK suggest that electoral and political considerations rather than ideological factors explain why the promotion of Third Way reform assumed an evangelical tone in these countries but not in others.

Regardless of the label being placed on the shift taking place, the dilemma faced by politicians is captured by Pierson (2006) as he argues that change, and in particular any move toward retrenchment, is moderated by the political cost of trying to take back or reduce benefits to target groups. Simply put, when benefits increase governments are credited for this but when they are reduced they are blamed. As people will punish politicians electorally, they can face a ‘clash between their policy preferences and their electoral ambitions’ (ibid, p.349).

4.3.4 A new context for families and workers

There is overall agreement that the current breadwinner model of society, in which men go out to work and women take care of the home and children, is shifting to accommodate more frequent and rapid economic and societal changes resulting in a more complex set of variables that need to be managed by individuals, society and the State (Lewis 2001; Supiot and Meadows 2001; Gornick and Meyers 2004). The old pattern of training, employment and then retirement is being replaced with a demand for more flexible forms of employment as continuous up-skilling is needed to keep up with technological advancements (Van der Meer and Leijnse 2004).

Several trends are emerging that change how people organise their lives such as the trend towards upgrading jobs and skills and knowledge intensification leading to a demand for life-long learning. This is coupled with a decreased reliance on the logic of
Industrialism as economic activity is increasingly centred on servicing (Esping-Andersen 2009). The service economy is dualistic in nature as it combines knowledge intensive professional and technical jobs with low-end, labour intensive, low value added jobs (ibid). The lower end jobs tend to be occupied in large part by women and young people. These are high risk categories as these jobs serve a function as entry-level positions but when trapped in these jobs in the long-term, a working poor emerges. This is compounded in neo-liberal states where servicing needs, such as childcare, are externalised but vulnerable families cannot afford to pay for quality care thus forcing people out of the job market or forcing them to juggle and/or invest in informal or low cost childcare options.

Changes in family formation patterns also increase the social risks faced by women and children (Hantrais 2004). The increased number of single parent families, divorce, delaying having children and many more aspects of new family form have an impact on an individual’s capacity to participate in the workforce and the type and level of services needed. Across Europe however there is a drive to ensure welfare policy accommodates the changes in family formation, gender roles and the quest of people to strike a balance between work and family life (Lewis 2002). The OECD has placed a significant focus on the rights and responsibilities accruing to people beyond their employment activities as highlighted by the OECD’s Employment Outlook in 2004 which urges governments to combine work strategies with a range of social objectives including work-life balance (Wilthagen and van-Velzen 2004).

Economic security has been identified as the key precondition for embarking on family life (Anxo 2002). Supplementary family policy impacts on how families manage work and family demands but:
Whether mothers enter paid work and remain in employment would seem to depend less of the availability of public care provision than on access to suitable jobs and flexible working arrangements. The amount and quality of public care facilities and other forms of support for children and older people are cited as factors influencing the strategies adopted by couples for combining paid work and family life, rather than decision about whether or not to work. (Hantrais 2004, p.191)

Kamerman and Moss (2011, p.263) support this belief as they refer to the work of Neyer which demonstrates through a comparison between Sweden and Finland that ‘labour market developments and women’s opportunities for employment may be more important determinants of fertility than specific family-policy regulations’. However, in order to overcome the inadequate attention given to the importance and impact of ECEC on children, families and the wider society, the debate around childcare needs to move beyond an economic focus.

4.4 The future welfare state

A range of futures models have emerged that look at recalibrating the labour market so that it becomes more responsive to the needs of the labour force and the new pressures people find themselves under while simultaneously investing in the creation of human capital to meet the needs of the market. Two key models emerging from continental Europe, flexicurity and transnational labour market (TLM), highlight a need to increase the flexibility of labour markets and work organisations while simultaneously seeking to enhance security for those with a weak relationship with labour markets (Van Dongen 2009).

The visions outlined in these models have been drawn from what have become known as the Supiot Report (2001) developed by the European Commission in which it is
recognised that the distribution of risk has been a long-standing feature of employment relationships but there is a need to spread the risks associated with the new ways of working and living which requires an expansion of focus beyond employment.

Increasingly the division between the work and private lives blurs as issues such as training, working from home and parental leave arrangements are dealt with within employment contracts. People can find themselves moving between self-employment, employment within the private or public sector, being shareholders as well as employees, training or working at home with children or parents.

In order to address the complexities of the numerous transitions TLM advocates and contributors to the Supiot report put forward the idea of the development of new social rights which ‘cover subjects unfamiliar to industrial wage-earners: rights to training, to appropriate working hours, to a family life and to occupational redeployment or retraining’ (Schmid 2006, p.27). Supiot (2001) advocates for the development of special drawing rights that offer ‘everyone the option of temporarily withdrawing from market and employment constraints in order to exercise a freedom, while at the same time being able to rely on collective funding’ (p.19). In line with strategies adopted by many advocates of children’s rights, a focus on rights as a method of managing new ways of living and working into the future is a key feature of these futures models, although as Handler (2004) has pointed out, the rights described within these models are conditional rather than being granted based on citizenship. As personal choice is seen to drive decisions that impact upon workforce participation, such as having a family or further training or studying, the focus of welfare and labour policy shifts to individual rather than collective action (Hantrais 2004).
4.4.1 Managing new social risks

The need to manage the risks associated with juggling multiple activities over the life course is a key driver of these labour focused future models. Some of these life-course risks were traditionally managed within and by the family but gradually welfare states have taken over responsibility for some risks experienced by children and older citizens, the two ‘passive’ tail ends of the life course (2002). Bonoli (2006) notes however that an extensive range of new risks are concentrated on families with children and working women. This focus on social risk management within these future models moves beyond coping with risk to re-emphasise risk prevention and risk mitigation (Schmid 2006).

* A risk becomes “social” if it is considered not only as a matter of the individual but as a matter of some collectivity, especially the family, the enterprise or the state. Thus, by definition, risks are socially constructed since it depends on social norms and other historical contingencies whether a risk is considered a matter of some collectivity or the individual. (Schmid and Schomann 2004, p.2)

Bonoli (2006) identifies the source of the new social risks as being related to new forms of work and the number of women entering the workforce. The relationship between the state, employees, employers and families is constantly changing which impacts upon the norms and expectations in relation to who takes responsibility for the ‘risks’ that emerge over the life course. The argument within these models for state involvement in managing the ‘parenting’ life event is that the well-being of families and its various members is of significance to society in general. Schmidt and Schomann (2004) argue that ‘[s]ome consequences of individual choices are so crucial and the ensuing vulnerability so overwhelming, that … the [r]isk management or the compensation of damage… is taken over by the society’ (p.18). Most countries within the OECD accept
responsibility for children once they reach school age but pressure mounts to extend this to younger children. UNICEF advises that the ‘revolution in how the majority of young children are being brought up’ (2008, p.31) across the industrialised world needs to be planned and monitored in order to protect children as poor quality ECEC can be harmful.

4.4.2 A focus on women

Much attention is given to the gender impacts of these new risks within the various models. Van der Meer and Leijnse (2004) point out that the ‘feminisation’ of employment has increased the ‘the significance of work in the lives of both men and women … while the concept itself has become less clearly defined and less consistent’ (p.7). Applebaum (2002) outlines how the increase in paid employment for mothers, in particular, has:

challenged older views about the distribution of responsibility for paid work and unpaid care activities among family members and between families and other institutions ... New models of work and care are emerging in every developed country. These models reflect the differences in these countries in the extent of social dialogue, legal mechanisms for social protection and gender equality, public responsibility for the early childhood education of young children, and employment policies at the company level. (2002, pp.93-94)

There is also a significant focus within the various future models about the impact on women of managing various activities, such as work, training and caring with a lot of emphasis being placed on trying to design systems into the future to ensure equality of opportunity for all family members but in particular women. However, there appears to be an assumption within much of the literature that is driven by a labour market focus (Supiot and Meadows 2001; Van der Meer and Leijnse 2004; Schmid 2006; Van
Dongen 2009) that what is best for women and what they would prefer is equal access to employment opportunities. The dilemma that emerges is whether future models should promote gender equality that focuses on seeking harmony between work and family or full ‘gender neutrality in the allocation of opportunities, life chances, and welfare outcomes’ (Esping-Andersen 2002, p.110).

From a feminist political science perspective, the focus shifts beyond rational economics and moral arguments made under the TLM and flexicurity models for changes to how work and family are managed. Research from the US has sought to develop a normative model in which the behaviour of both men and women is altered. Gornick and Meyers (2003; 2004) mapped a neo-liberal journey through a range of changes during the period 1950 to 2000 when the traditional breadwinner model was in decline and a new balance began with a dual earner/female part-time carer model.

From here substitute care was identified as a key element as more women participated in the workforce with two distinct models emerging, the dual earner/state carer model and the dual earner/market carer model, depending on the type of welfare regime and the corresponding level of state service provision available. Ultimately a future dual earner/dual carer model is proposed which advocates for the extensive support of the state in care provision.

The overall aim of the model, which is similar to Fraser’s universal caregiver model, is described by Borchorst and Siim (2008, p.211) as:

... removing gendered segregation by making women’s life patterns the norm for both women and men. It is based upon the principles of shared parental role-playing with respect to care and breadwinning. Fraser claims that this model has the potential to foster gender equality in the post-industrialist phase of
capitalism, where women are being integrated into breadwinning, and the collapse in male wages diminishes the viability of the male breadwinner norm.

4.5 Child-focused models

However, futures models have been advanced that focus specifically on the need to invest in quality services for children in the future. Esping Andersen’s (2006a) Social Investment State model emphasises investing in the workers of the future and advocates for the provision of services for children in order to facilitate a workfare system in which poverty can be alleviated through maximising opportunities to participate in the workforce. Van Dongen’s (2009) emphasis within his Combination Model is on the benefits to the state of sharing the education and care of children with parents at a very young age in order to ensure equality of tasks and responsibility between men and women in all aspects of labour, be it within or outside the work environment. While both models use strong economic rationales for investing in services for children rather than a rights approach, they embrace some very important principles that could pave the way for a greater focus on quality services and participatory rights for children.

4.5.1 Social investment state

In line with new third-way thinking, Esping Andersen (2006a) uses a strong economic rationale to justify substantial social investment in children as ‘the urgency of reform is so much greater because it is today’s children who will be tomorrow’s productive base – or, in the case of failure to reform, tomorrow’s expensive social problems’ (p.435). He argues strongly in favour of a future social investment welfare state where social policy is redefined to nurture strong viable families and protect those most at risk. He advocates for a fundamental shift in the type of tools used to address the new social
risks; rather than income maintenance, *service provision* should be the key focus of social investment. For example, he argues that servicing working mothers is a more effective method of addressing the risks associated with family or labour market instability than provision of benefit payments. Social rights within this model need to be reconstituted to form ‘a basic set of *life chance guarantees*’ (p.436 original emphasis) such as maximising the productive resources and life chances of citizens. In line with this and in order to optimise the long-term chances of children, ECEC needs to be of a high quality and it is unimportant if the externalization of family care is provided via the market or public agencies ‘as long as standards and affordability are guaranteed’ (p.450).

So the first principle of what he describes as a win-win strategy is that social investment is prioritised over passive maintenance and a feature of this is that the highest priority be given to investment in children as future worker citizens – meaning the cost of children is socialized rather than remaining the sole responsibility of the family. Within the ECEC investment, prioritising quality childcare for the weakest families is justified. However, there are several potential weaknesses with this model.

Lister (2006) cautions against this *child-centred social investment strategy* in which the child as *worker* of the future is prioritised over the child as *democratic citizen* both in the future but also in the here-and-now. Valerie Polakow (cited in Lister 2006) cautions that if children are seen to ‘matter instrumentally, not existentially’ (p.462) expenditure will only be justifiable where there is a verifiable pay-off. She also cautions against a managerial tendency to reduce education to a ‘utilitarian achievement-oriented measurement culture of tests and exams, with little attention being paid to the actual educational experience’ (ibid, p.463). An example of one issue inadvertently obscuring
another was in Canada, when child poverty dominated policy making discourse on poverty, women’s issues were displaced from the policy agenda (Stasiulis 2002).

While the social investment state does advocate investment in optimising the chances for women to participate in the workforce, the structural issues in relation to who sets the agenda for both children and women has not been addressed adequately. There is also an assumption that the rational arguments made for long-term policy investment will be adopted by politicians as they make economic sense. There is evidence that politically the rewards for a focus on children are not high as was demonstrated in the UK when ‘the pledge to end child poverty [had] not generated the expected political returns’ (Lister 2006, p.461). So there remain practical impediments to the acceptance of some rational arguments for investing in children.

4.5.2 A combination model

Van Dongen (2009) is critical of the limited definition of labour contained in the TLM and flexicurity model as being occupational or professional labour which is paid and does not take into account the family labour that is carried out in order to maintain society. He moves beyond a liberal egalitarian stance refuting the public-private divide by dealing with gender-related issues of injustice within the private care domain (Lynch 2010).

He goes on to identify clearly the role ECEC can play in realising the goals of equality contained in his combination model. An equal division of labour in both family and professional activities is sought in which individuals and families have sufficient freedom to decide on the balance appropriate to them. The model is framed within a
clearly articulated and prescriptive concept of democracy (which he defines as the expression of the basic need for social justice) in which a balance is sought between the basic values of freedom, equality, solidarity and efficiency. These values he sees as critical as he points to Eastern Europe where an equal division of labour has been undermined by insufficient freedom for personal choice and initiative and with an inefficient allocation of the means of production. The result for women in these countries is that seeking a balance is more frequently driven by self preservation rather than self-interest (Hantrais 2004). Like Gornick and Meyers, a key concern of Van Dongen when looking at other OECD countries is that:

For decades, the professional human capital of women has been systematically weakened and neglected in business life, both in quantity and quality. At the same time, most men changed their basic attitude towards the division of labour, largely neglecting their engagement for family work, with a loss of family-oriented personal and social competences. (2009, p.162)

However, he feels this is more of a problem in the continental context rather than in the English speaking countries of US, Canada, the UK (and Ireland). His analysis of participation rates leads him to conclude that the more liberal market systems and market policies can push most women into the labour market. In contrast in the continental European countries the division of household labour is more equal probably due to ‘the lack of leave facilities with sufficient financial compensation, offering fewer opportunities for women to invest in their family life’ (ibid, p.165). However, research supported by the United Nations gives details of findings that shows that men in the US are only taking on slightly more care work now than twenty years ago, while in the UK and Northern Ireland men are reported to spend only ninety minutes a day on childcare in 1999, although this is up from forty four minutes in 1987 (Baker and Pawlak 2011).
The increased employment of women may act as a *push* towards greater paternal involvement in the home, but the United Nations (2011) argue that there are a series of benefits to shaping public policy’s gentle *pull* to increase male involvement in the family as there is “burgeoning research documenting men’s contribution to gender equality, the importance of their engagement for work-family balance, and the numerous positive paternal contributions to children’s development” (ibid, p.2). So the questions public policy is expected to address are who *pays* for ECEC and who *cares* for the children.

**4.5.3 ECEC – a shared responsibility**

It is within the context of facilitating a fair division of labour between men and women while combining professional and family labour tasks over the life-course that ECEC is positioned as a key activity that needs to be shared with and between parents. Van Dongen argues that within a democratic society there is a need for a new pedagogical view of the position and education of children. The traditional breadwinner model embraced a pedagogical belief that attachment with mothers was critical so young children were believed to benefit from an exclusive education within the family, provided predominantly by the mother. The pedagogical view informing the combination model is that ‘all boys and girls can enjoy ‘shared or combined’ high-quality education from birth, both within and outside the family’ (ibid, p.184). He acknowledges that the child’s family plays a full role as the home base is the focal point of the child’s life but ‘external daytime education/ care is also a full part of the broad development of all children from birth, not as a replacement for education within the family, but as a full complement and enrichment of it’ (ibid).
This is a perspective that can align itself to much of the current sociology of childhood arguments that highlight the potential benefits for children, their families, society and the economy of participation within quality ECEC opportunities (Moss 2004). ECEC fulfils a critical role in the realisation of a ‘democratic project’ as advocated by key researchers in the field (Hultqvist 2001; Dahlberg and Moss 2005). ECEC is framed within a notion of shared education in which families and society assume responsibility for the education and care of young children and moves away from seeing ECEC services ‘as a last resort or necessary evil’ for working parents but rather as ‘an integral part of a good childhood’ (Kamerman and Moss 2011, p.266).

The focus on shared care builds upon the notion of equality as focusing on the conditions of their lives rather than opportunities (Lynch 2010). As Lynch argues, equality of condition is ‘not about trying to make inequalities fairer, or giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal’, rather it is about giving everyone an ‘equal prospects for a good life’ (ibid, p.4). Van Dongen positions ECEC as having a wider function and playing a crucial part in realising this goal.

4.5.4 Pedagogical age

Within the combination model the average number of days spent by children per week in ECEC services would increase from two days, which he identifies as the current average in most European countries, to three days, which is less than the four day average that primary school children spend in education/care (Van Dongen 2009). In order for this to happen, increased scrutiny needs to take place in relation to what Van Dongen terms the critical pedagogical age which he defines as the age after which:
... external education/care is seen as a necessary and valuable complement to education/care at home, stressing the importance for the development of children and giving entitlement to all children/parents to use the provision. Before this age, this entitlement is not available, since external education/care is largely seen as a necessary replacement for education/care at home, mostly because of the labour market participation of mothers. This replacement daycare is less oriented to the personal development of children. (ibid, p.222)

Once children reach the critical pedagogical age in a state, services tend to be provided with little if any cost to the parents mostly under the umbrella of the education system or social welfare.

The critical pedagogical age differs between states. In the Nordic states it is accepted that children are partially educated outside the home at approximately a year old. Based on Van Dongen’s review of figures up to 2004, the age raises to two or three in Belgium, France, Spain and Italy and four years in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Greece, Ireland, the UK, Canada and the US and five years in Germany and Austria. While recent developments in the UK and Ireland have resulted in provision being extended to three year olds, under the combination model this is still considered inadequate. The critical failure within the current systems found in the southern European states, the continental states and the English speaking Anglo-American states is that the notion of childcare is restricted and limited to an understanding of it as a substitute for care in the home and not as a complement to education/care in the home.

The principle role of ECEC in this scenario is to facilitate labour market participation of women when the demand exists. However, the OECD (2006) identifies the active engagement of parents, families and communities in the shared education and care of young children as a key indicator of quality ECEC. Increased involvement and communication between parents and staff enhances the ‘continuity of children’s experience across environments’ (ibid, p.17).
While the Nordic countries recognise the value of ECEC as a complement to home-based education and care, Van Dongen is critical of the pedagogical view that children should be almost exclusively cared for within the family until the age of one. He feels that absence from the workforce for such a substantial period has led to a situation where activity rates for men and women are largely equal but a significant gap between the number of hours worked by men and women exists. In Sweden, for example, women tend to work full-time prior to the birth of the first child in order to maximise the earnings on which their parental leave payment will be calculated (Anxo 2002). They then avail of generous and flexible parental leave arrangements of 480 days where payments are included in pension calculations. Women return to their previous job on a long part-time basis and gradually increase their working time as children get older in order to maximise pension benefits. This pattern is facilitated by a high reliance on flexible, family friendly employment options provided through employment in the public sector (Anxo 2002; Hantrais 2004). This has led to what Esping-Andersen describes as “virtual female employment ghettos” in the Nordic states (2002, p.112). Van Dongen argues that until the Nordic states change the view that children under one should be cared for in the home, they will never reach the ideal contained in his combination model in which activities and hours of professional and family work are equally balanced.

While this model would seem to clearly value the contribution women make to the labour market and places particular emphasis on the management of risks specific to women as they are more vulnerable due to the work patterns that have evolved for them during the male breadwinner phase of societal development, he seems to start from an assumption that what is best for women and society in general is full gender neutrality.
rather than considering whether this meets the needs or desires of parents or their children.

In addition, a key criticism of this model is that it continues to rely on an economic rationale for investment in services. Within this context, he loses the child and what might be best for the child by prioritising work over care by mothers in the very early years, although his model would result in father’s spending more time with children. The model facilitates the gradual integration of quality ECEC with the care and education within the family but a financial penalty is imposed on those failing to select some significant level of work outside the home in the early years, meaning those who can afford have freedom to decide on their desired balance. However, the model offers the opportunity of shifting norms so that men are expected to be more involved in family labour and women more involved with professional labour which could reconstruct how the different types of labour are valued within society.

4.6 Conclusion

There is evidence that distinct welfare regimes exist, namely liberal, conservative and social democratic, and some level of correlation exists between the behaviour of these states in relation to social policy in general and ECEC policy (Dean 2001; Meyers and Gornick 2003). As expected, social democratic states invest more substantially in ECEC services within a unitary system in which all children, regardless of age, have access to quality services with qualified professional staff. The liberal states construct ECEC as a consumable commodity supplemented with limited targeted state provision or investment to facilitate disadvantaged parents to participate in the workforce or to increase the human capital of disadvantaged children. Within the conservative states a
split-system provides state supported pre-school services for children aged three and over but a mixed picture emerges for the under threes. While the principle of subsidiarity justifies the non-involvement of the state in family affairs, there are several exceptions when it comes to state supported ECEC provision and the rationales for states becoming involved in investing in young children are varied and localised, such as acquisition of languages or preservation of national culture.

The OECD’s Start Strong (2001) and Start Strong II (2006) review of ECEC developments amongst twenty different states recommends that the three elements of the childcare trilemma (Fiene 1997), access, affordability and quality, be managed through appropriate investment and the establishment of integrated structures and systems that embrace participative practices. These elements can combine to produce a system that incorporates a socio-cultural view of children and childhood as well as realising all elements of children’s rights. For this reason, access, affordability, quality and coordination were selected as key criteria within this research against which ECEC policy tool design in Ireland was evaluated.

Continued changes to ECEC policy development and policy tool design are expected within all welfare regimes. There is evidence that the traditional male breadwinner model in which men earn and women care has changed to a form of dual-earner model, in which some level of external education and care is needed for young children (Meyers and Gornick 2003). In response, welfare states are being reconfigured as a third way approach increases in influence throughout the western world in all welfare regimes (Bonoli and Powell 2004). This approach shifts the focus of rights from citizenship to labour force participation but in order to maximise participation, ECEC provision is required.
As female workforce participation rates increase, the debate about levels of responsibility the state should assume for investment in ECEC is considered within several futures models. Overall, there is a level of agreement that state’s need to assume some responsibility for young children (or share the risk) if women’s participation in the economy is to be supported (Schmid and Schomann 2004, Schmid 2006). Esping-Andersen (2006a) makes an important point in his social investment state that the provision of ECEC services rather than cash payments or benefits to parents is the best way forward to support parents but he also highlights the need for services to be quality if they are to benefit the child in order to be a successful future worker. While this challenge to provide services will impact upon liberal and conservative states alike, this model, as with other rational economically driven arguments, provides an inadequate focus on the child. However, Van Dongen’s (2009) combination model offers the potential to shift the rationale for an investment in ECEC as it becomes more valued in society overall.

He advocates for a gender balance in how all labour, which incorporates both professional and family labour, is distributed. He highlights the need for quality ECEC which parents have confidence in so that a critical pedagogical age, which is the age at which it is normatively acceptable or expected that children can be cared for and educated outside the family home, is lowered in all states. This would facilitate a shift in how all labour was constructed with more male participation in family labour and more female participation in professional labour, which in turn could cause a shift how valued the labour dedicated to caring for young children was perceived in society. The emergence of this model demonstrates some shift towards a deeper understanding of the role of care and ECEC in society.
To recap to this point, chapter two of this thesis outlined how policy design scholars believe the individual designs and collective mix of policy tools are a determining factor in the overall levels of success of policy implementation so that it most effectively addresses the needs of policy targets. Emanating from Lasswell’s *policy science of democracy* success and effectiveness focus on how equitably resources are distributed within society and how inclusive the resultant society is.

While chapter two was concerned with ‘who gets what, when and how’, chapter three moved on to consider *who benefits* from the various constructions of childhood that exist and how these constructions influence how rights are defined and ECEC services developed. There is increased understanding of children as agentive citizens with rights to protection, provision of services and most importantly, participation in decisions affecting them. As such, ECEC pedagogues strive to address unequal power relations and develop sites of democratic political practice. However, competing with this is a prominent and influential view emanating from a neo-liberal discourse that children are redemptive agents (Moss 2005) who can be moulded by ECEC experiences to be the future solution to current economic problems.

Finally, this chapter has reviewed the international context in which developments in ECEC have taken place as well as considering various future models in order to identify arguments being used to inform future ECEC investment decisions. There is an emphasis on increased involvement of the state in shared education and care for young children in the future but the emancipating potential of ECEC services are constrained by the limits of rationalistic arguments that serve to preserve the status quo, thus perpetuating rather than challenging inequalities evident throughout western society, but some shifts in understanding are becoming evident.
Chapter Five: Ireland’s Policy Landscape

5.0 Introduction

Path dependency theory (Pierson 2000) suggests that past actions inform the future trajectory of policy decisions. For that reason, it was important to review where Ireland was positioned in relation to regimes and ideologies as they in turn influence policy. A key concern has been expressed amongst scholars reviewing developments in Ireland (McKeen 2009; Schäfer 2009; Lynch 2010) that it has been shifting towards a form of neo-liberalism in which ‘[p]ublic goods, related to social justice and redistribution, are increasingly privatised, while their distribution becomes more consumer driven and less based on rights derived from citizenship’ (Murphy 2006, p.2). This would have considerable implications for the future development of ECEC in Ireland.

A review of where Ireland is positioned relative to other states offers the chance to compare and generalise about the rationale for decision making as well as predict possible future actions. In this review of policy and institutional arrangements the research expands to look beyond the processual to also consider the political (Moss and Kamerman 2011) in recognition of the distinct political economy that this policy area generates.

The chapter begins by positioning Ireland relative to other regimes. This section considers the role of Ireland’s Social Partnership model in defining Ireland’s nuanced version of neo-liberalism. A statist classification is then presented which more specifically points out the traits of the Irish state that influence its behaviour in relation to the development of social and economic policy. This is followed by a review of
Ireland’s adaptation to New Public Management (Hood 1991) as it gives a deeper insight into the workings of the public sector, the development of agencies and networks, and the state’s attitude to regulation, all of which impact on policy tool design decisions. The section concludes with a review of the state’s efforts to more proactively address the negative social fall-out resulting from the ‘uncontested acceptance of economic globalisation, and for tailoring policy choice to the opportunities and constraints it is considered to pose in order to achieve economic prosperity’ (Dukelow 2011, p.6).

The second section of the chapter focuses on the emergence of the childcare problem in Ireland and the historical and policy context from which it emerged. It considers the various policy areas it impacts upon and the strong economic arguments used to advocate for ECEC development within policy documents. It then considers the policy focus that has emerged on children and the challenges of realising children’s rights and developing quality ECEC services. It moves on to consider the ethics of care and the overall lack of value placed on caring activities which serves politically to diminish the importance of quality ECEC experiences for children and the importance of caring work for society as a whole. The section then considers Ireland’s gender gap and the impact of ideological, geographical and historical influences on Ireland’s positioning relative to other states. Finally, ECEC in Ireland is reviewed to reveal a conflict between a commitment to gender equality in policy documents and the state’s less vocalised continued commitment to a traditional model of the family as contained in the Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hEireann 1937).
5.1 Welfare regime classification

Ireland is frequently categorised as a neo-liberal state (Hantrais 2004; Scruggs and Allan 2006b) however, upon closer examination it is seen to adopt many of the characteristics of the more corporatist, and to a lesser extent social democratic regimes with a highly profiled model of social partnership (Larragy 2006; Rush 2006; Regan 2010). The positioning of Ireland is influenced by ideology, history, culture and proximity to other states, in particular the EU.

5.1.1 Social partnership

Within a strong neo-liberal context employees are not perceived to be a company’s dependents being paid for their labour. They are constructed as ‘autonomous entrepreneurs with full responsibility for their own investment decisions and endeavouring to produce surplus value; they are entrepreneurs of themselves’ (Lemke 2001, p.199). As such, employers favour negotiation with employees using a human resource or unilateral model of industrial relations (Roche 2005) that enables employers to negotiate individually with employees, avoiding trade unions and collective bargaining situations which restrict their flexibility. This is quite significant given the increased remit of negotiations into the family or personal space of citizens in the form of leave arrangements and/or work-life balance policies, for example.

However, the linkage between labour market reform and welfare reform is more explicit within European continental corporatist states than within liberal welfare regimes (Rhodes 2001). It is through the development of social-pacts that these relationships are managed.
Unlike the US and the UK, Ireland has engaged in a level of intervention aimed at managing the constraints of market liberalisation through the use of social pacts that deal with tri-partite national level wage agreements (Larragy 2006; Murphy 2010). Ireland is distinguished from other tripartite social pact structures due to its unique configuration of a social partnership process which involves not just employer representative organisations, trade unions and the state but also expanded to bring in farming, environmental, and community and voluntary sectoral representation (Roche 2009). The European partnership model Ireland follows is described by Rush (2006, p.53) as having ‘a corporatist confidence in an integrated welfare state in which public economic and social policies are closely and explicitly connected’. Within Ireland’s unique version of liberal corporatism the social pacts have been ‘conceptualised as “lean … [or] … competitive corporatism” (Rhodes, 2002) and ‘organised decentralism’ (Regan 2010, p.3), with a strong focus on enterprise and market competition, rather than being premised on the distributional agenda of social democracy.

Since 1987 changes in the substance of discussions within social partnership have shifted from macro-economic matters to structural and supply-side policies (O'Donnell 2008). Ireland’s involvement with the EMU and deeper integration with the EU closed off macro-economic alternatives to dealing with economic crisis (such as devaluing the currency or adjusting interest rates) and freed up partners to discuss real issues that ‘affect competitiveness and social cohesion: corporate strategy, technical change, training, working practices, the commercialisation of state-owned enterprises, taxation, public sector reform, local regeneration, welfare reform and active labour market policy” (ibid 2008, p.83). There was also a corresponding growth in the range and
scope of working groups, fora and frameworks emerging to deal with the widening list of issues.

However, Dukelow (2011) argues that greater emphasis remained on the articulation of economic policy with the assumption that it in turn would address social policy issues. This was all framed within a deep commitment to and belief in the ‘idea that economic globalisation is good for Ireland and essential to its growth and prosperity’ (ibid, p.8). In fact, she points to the immediate and voluntary use of austerity, principally by way of welfare retrenchment, as the key mechanism to addressing the financial crisis facing the state in 2008, as demonstrating an ever increasing commitment towards ‘neo-liberal means of navigating Ireland’s relationship with economic globalisation’ (ibid, p.17).

However, Ireland’s collective bargaining mechanisms have reduced in effectiveness as the numbers covered by the agreements decline (Geary 2008; Roche 2009). This is in line with trends in many of the Anglo-American states where trade union density has decreased as has the bargaining coverage of agreements (Aidt and Tzannatos 2008) allowing corporations increased flexibility to respond to market demands through adjustment of wage rates and conditions that are negotiated through in-company systems. Evidence suggests, that there is a move towards a more individualist neo-liberal approach to dealing with labour, equality and work life balance issues (Roche 2005)

In terms of the level of influence of various ideologies however, Adshead (2008b) argues that overall Ireland has a lack of ideological boundaries and limited ideological differentiation between political parties so therefore, the development of economic and
social policy is driven more by pragmatism. In her review of the patterns of politics over the years she reveals the following enduring traits:

... the 'non-ideological gradualist nature of Irish political culture'; the 'commitment to empirical solutions'; the Catholic flavour of Irish democracy; elements of deference and conservatism; plus a typically pragmatic and opportunistic approach to policy. State goals tended to be minimalist rather than maximalist, of a conservative nature, and concerned primarily with the development of an effective political and administrative system and economic growth. (ibid, pp.70-71)

The hybrid nature of Ireland’s style of neo-liberalism that seems to borrow from other welfare regimes in this context is explained by a ‘pragmatic and opportunistic approach to policy, which has contributed to some extremely flexible and rather innovative responses to various policy problems [including] social partnership’ (ibid). She argues that the state’s increasing reliance on neo-liberal policy tools that facilitate a reliance on third parties to deliver services is less likely due to any ideological commitment. Instead, it keeps the state distanced from service delivery accommodating its limited service delivery capacity due to its extensive historic reliance on the Catholic Church to deliver public services such as health and education. The gap left by the withdrawal of the church from service delivery in more recent years has been filled by private service providers and, in areas of market failure, the community and voluntary sector. The wider implications of this are summed up by Adshead (2008b, p.71) when she states that the:

... voluntary partnership between the church and state in the realm of social service provision is notable not only because it signifies the extent of Catholic influence but also because it sets a precedent for state co-option of para-governmental institutions in policy delivery; it also embedded in the state system from the very start a positive predisposition for sharing the responsibility for policy delivery in areas where the state enjoys only limited capacity.
5.1.2 A developmental or competition state?

A Statist approach has been adopted by many Irish scholars in an attempt to explain the nuanced version of neo-liberalism associated with the Irish approach to economic and social development. It is an approach that places greater emphasis on formal and informal ‘institutional constraints … on individual behaviour’ and sees the ‘state as something more than a neutral arbiter between competing interests’ (Adshead 2008b, p.51).

Ó Riain (2000) offers an alternative theoretical approach and classified Ireland as a *Flexible Developmental State* (FDS) in his review of developments in the 1980s and 1990s. He highlights the interventionist role of the state in the FDS in creating and animating ‘post-Fordist networks of production and innovation and international networks of capital’ (ibid, p.165). He describes a range of networks and structures that act to connect the various units locally, nationally and internationally within a *network polity* through the creation of sociopolitical alliances. In his initial analysis in 2000 he refers to positive spaces of developmentalism and democratisation, such as social partnership, and the variety of agencies created as well as indigenous innovation regimes, but he concludes that, despite the economic success of the time, inequality of outcomes prevailed. He attributes this in part to the *flexible* nature of national wage agreements and the provision for special local bargains allowing higher rates of wage increase in *high-end* employment categories.

Ó Riain’s (2008) assessment of the state shifts in more recent times and he defines Ireland as being a *competitive state* (Cerny 1997) where the nature of state regulation shifts from harnessing ‘market forces for the welfare of society to one that seeks to
impose competitive disciplines on society for the good of the market’ (Kirby 2006, p.116). Ó Riain notes the drive for lower taxes, deregulated markets, reduced welfare expenditure and the reassertion of central state control on social innovations that had taken place during a period of substantial EU funding in the 1990s and early 2000s such as local area regeneration partnership companies. Within this perspective a splintering of the state itself takes place in which ‘the actual amount or weight of government imbrication in social life can increase … at the same time as the power of the state to control specific activities and market outcomes continues to diminish’ diminishing the capacity of state agencies (Kirby and Murphy 2011, p.15).

The contention that Ireland is best described as a competition state is supported by Kirby and Murphy (2011). On a positive note, Ó Riain in 2004 had asserted that there existed ‘a political space for struggles within and through existing institutions over how development could and should be structured’ (cited in Kirby and Murphy 2011, p.6). In order to test empirically if the claims that unknown political possibilities existed that could enable the state to move beyond neo-liberalism to social democracy, Kirby and Murphy undertook a review of changes to the social security regime in Ireland from 1987, the year the Fianna Fail government that was credited with laying the foundations for the Celtic Tiger took office, until 2008. The aim of Kirby and Murphy’s research was to fuel the debate about how states were ‘adjusting to the pressures of today’s globalisation, focusing attention in particular on how these pressures are mediated by institutions, actors and political cultures to account for the varied nature of outcomes observed’ (ibid, p.16).

They were to demonstrate that Ireland had developmental aspirations but confirmed that its actions (as opposed to its rhetoric) aligned it more to a competition state where
economic competitiveness was prioritised over social cohesion and welfare. Within the literature on the competition state it was acknowledged that ‘liberalization, deregulation, and privatization have not reduced the role of state intervention overall, just shifted it from decommodifying bureaucracies to marketizing ones’ (Cerny 2007, p.17). So rather than taking economic activities out of the market it puts activities into the market and behaves ‘even as a market actor itself’ (Kirby and Murphy 2011, p.7 - original emphasis).

One of the five key indicators reviewed was defamiliarisation, Lister’s (1994) concept of ‘the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or social security provision’ (Bradshaw, Finch et al. 2005, p.1). Within a competition state the characteristics are that:

*The quality of women’s employment will be determined by the degree of individualisation of social security, access to quality education and training and sufficient investment in appropriate and affordable childcare and/or family leave arrangements. The increased labour-market participation of women commodifies caring functions.* (Kirby and Murphy 2011, p.8)

Kirby and Murphy (ibid) found little evidence of a transformative developmental approach to women’s equality in the labour market (or elsewhere) or the provision of childcare. The structural transformations identified, such as a reliance on market-led responses to childcare and proposals to extend work obligations to lone parents and dependant spouses, adhere to market norms. While some attempt had been made to individualise personal tax credits, the Irish social security ‘remains a strong male breadwinner regime in a family-based, gender-differentiated social security system
where women experience considerable obstacles to registering as unemployed or accessing labour market supports’ (ibid, p.14).

In terms of the impact on access to services, Ó Riain and O’Connell (cited in Millar 2008, p.105) describe the emerging behaviour of citizens within a governance system ‘which mixes public and private components in a manner that allows those with advantages generated in the market to supplement their social citizenship rights with their own resources’. The result is that market-based inequalities are reinforced as an expanded middle classes accept a very basic level of state provision that they supplement with market based delivery. The selection and design of policy tools within this system have resulted in ‘socio-economic inequalities [that] have become deeply ingrained’ with the apparent ‘acquiescence on the part of citizens’ (ibid, p.118).

While the overall aspiration of social policy should be to ensure a ‘greater equality in the distribution of the benefits of economic growth’ (Kirby 2010, p.50), this has not been realised in the Irish case. There was no improvement in terms of poverty as Ireland’s position as second from last of 19 industrialised countries in 1998, when assessed under the United Nations Development Programme Human Poverty Index, remained intact in 2007-8 despite the economic boom (ibid). Kirby also refers to Breathnach’s work in which he sought evidence of a polarised growth in high skilled (professional) and low-skilled employment sets. His conclusion was that ‘occupational restructuring’ taking place in Ireland since the 1990s has ‘involved both an increasing professionalisation and polarisation of the Irish workforce, with the growth of female employment playing a key role in driving both these processes’ (cited in Kirby 2010, p.58). The growth in low skilled jobs has resulted in a significant increase in ‘in-work poverty’ (Rush 2006, p.54).
Simultaneously, public services were structurally adjusting to rely increasingly on privatised service provision which resulted in a two tier health system evolving in which those with private health insurance could avoid lengthy waiting lists for often critical services and public housing needs were being met by a growing stock of privately rented houses. Similarly, parents were left to look to the market to address childcare needs. These neo-liberal trends were compounded by educational expenditure that was revealed to be structured to benefit the most advantaged and a tax system that is described as regressive as, relative to the rest of Europe, it relies heavily on taxes on goods on services (Kirby 2010). However, in order to try to predict the form that policy tools design may take, a review of the levels of adaptation to New Public Management is a useful complementary perspective.

5.1.3 Ireland’s new public management (NPM) adaptation

[NPM] ‘constitutes a political response to the persistent critique of both welfare statism and Neoliberalism. While the welfare state has been accused of being excessively authoritarian and costly, the neoliberal marketisation strategy has failed to alleviate the burden of the state since the creation of well-functioning quasi-markets requires a time-consuming and resource-demanding regulation. By contrast, … governance networks are deployed as part of an advanced liberal governmentality urging the state to ‘govern at a distance’ by means of mobilising a plurality of self-regulating actors and networks within an institutional framework ensuring a certain degree of conformity with broadly defined objectives.’ (Sorensen and Torfing 2009, p.238)

As described above, a shift to NPM (Hood 1991) is considered, particularly by those advocating a third-way, to be a way forward that focuses on a new form of governance that facilitates a flexible and inclusive response to global and local pressures. A central tenet of NPM is an economic rationalism that asserts ‘the quality of public services would improve if subjected to market-driven pressures, and that adopting administrative
styles associated with the private sector would produce better performance’ (Hardiman and MacCárthaigh 2008, p.2). Dukelow (2011) describes how, since the onset of the economic down turn in 2008, the rhetoric of the state has developed to emphasise the need for the public service to be fit-for-purpose to facilitate the development of a modern and competitive economy. Highlighting the ‘protected status’ of public servants relative to private sector employees, a range of pay cuts and freezes were put in place as part of the austerity measures along with an intimation of ‘further salary cuts … if the public sector does not follow private sector standards’ (ibid, p.27). There are also claims that Ireland has adapted to two other key features of NPM that impact considerably on the design of policy tools: the development of multi-organisational arrangements in the form of public service networks (Pollitt 2009); and a form of deregulation in which compliance is increasingly ensured through self-regulation rather than legal sanction (Boyle 2005).

Increasingly in the era of NPM a governance regime can be defined as ‘a system of multifaceted inter-agency relations and associated modes of coordination’ (Bode 2006, p.347). The extensive agencification that has taken place in Ireland was driven by ‘growth in regulation, desire for efficiency gains, political expediency and international influence’ (Quinn 2008, p.19). Quinn outlines how the economic growth in the 1990s provided the resources needed while the social partnership process increased the state’s bargaining position ‘with other political actors’ and increased levels of trust needed to facilitate ‘a more disaggregated framework of governance’ (ibid) which emerged in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Within this model it is anticipated that the sharp distinction between public and private diminishes with an increased emphasis on managing relationships between stakeholders whether it be via consultation or contractual
relationships. In addition to the agencification common to NPM, the push for
deregulation which was advocated by the OECD was also embraced by the Irish state
(Boyle 2005) resulting in a shift towards less authoritative control and command
mechanisms and a tendency to favour self regulation or independent monitoring bodies
(Nolan 2008), further increasing the range and scope of network activities.

Despite these changes, Hardiman and MacCárthaigh (2008) describe Ireland as
conservative adaptors of NPM with ‘strong evidence of the cherry-picking of reforms
inspired by NPM doctrines more associated with the Scandinavians and continental
European states’ (p.20). There appears to be no clear apparent administrative reform
strategy involved in the extensive agencification that has taken place. At times ‘it has
been suggested that new agencies have been formed … in order to devolve
responsibility for problematic issues into less high-profile bodies’ (ibid, p.12). Central
administration has held on to key functions such as HR and finance with little evidence
that public servants in Ireland have adapted the market-consistent values of:
productivity; efficiency; risk taking; or accountability; which feature in NPM systems
(ibid). They reveal that despite superficial changes in structure and process, public
servants have held fast to the traditional values of: procedural correctness; equality of
treatment; risk avoidance; and strict adherence to rules and regulations (ibid). The
austerity measures focusing on reform of the public service to date appear to focus on
reduction of numbers rather than restructuring or a shift in mind-set. Hardiman and
MacCárthaigh concur with Adshead’s argument that Ireland’s pragmatic governance
style and an overall lack of ideology have been responsible for the selective and
nuanced style of NPM development.
Despite Ireland’s complex positioning as a neo-liberal welfare regime with corporatist tendencies or as a suppressed developmental state that is restricted by competitive patterns of government action, it has embraced to some degree many of the features of NPM, particularly in terms of agency creation and regulatory reform (Hardiman and MacCárthaigh 2008). Given this, certain patterns in terms of policy tool choice and design can be expected such as an increase in procedural tools as the state is inclined only to step in to counter ‘various market failures and imperfections … that, in the absence of regulation, produce sub-optimal results and reduce consumer welfare’ (Nolan 2008, p.14). As a result, a decrease in direct forms of coercion and control should also be expected.

Following trends in Europe, formal consultative and participatory processes are favoured (Goodin, Rein et al. 2006). Increasingly mechanisms for obtaining public input are utilised including green papers, census, referendum, and so on. In line with a more bottom-up approach to participation more ‘deliberative processes working to democratize the existing political order’ are becoming evident (ibid, p.10) in Ireland such as: the emergence of Educate Together schools which emphasis parental involvement and focus on democratic principles for children (Buchanan and Fox 2008); the establishment of Dáil na nÓg, the youth parliament (Leahy and Burgess 2011); neighbourhood regeneration planning exercises that comprise of extensive consultations with local residents and community groups; and so on. However, the state’s reluctance to tackle barriers to the effective realisation of genuine civic engagement is frequently called to question (Mulcahy 2002; Kilkelly 2007; Shaw 2008; Geoghegan and Powell 2009; Harvey 2009).
5.1.4 Social policy planning

A major facilitator of the opportunistic and pragmatic approach to policy development has been the lack of a significant plan or an architect of social policy, which is in stark contrast to economic policy development in Ireland (Dukelow 2011). However, in 2005 in response to concerns about the integration of economic and social development, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) published the *Developmental Welfare State* (DWS) which outlined a vision for the state of working towards the developmental ideal in which economic and social policy development could be more successfully integrated. It outlines how ‘the development of a dynamic, knowledge-based economy has inherent social implications that can serve social justice and a more egalitarian society’ while also being ‘integral to sustaining the dynamism and flexibility of Ireland’s economy’ (Cousins 2007, p.297). The report outlines how VCOs would have a key role to play in ‘operationalising the DWS using a life cycle framework as part of Ireland’s corporatist partnership model’ (Carney, Dundon et al. 2011, p.1).

The objective was to avoid intergenerational discord, in light of prospective changing demographics and the increase in new *risks* which can result in periods of distance from the labour force, through a re-distribution of resources amongst age groups. In particular, children, older people, people with disabilities, the unemployed who lack educational attainment or have family or caring commitments were identified as being a focus for this form of policy design. Tailored or *progressive* universalisms were identified as the mechanism through which income and wealth could be redistributed to the most vulnerable (National Economic and Social Council 2005).
Many key documents, such as the current national social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006a) and *The Agenda for Children’s Services: A Policy Handbook* (OMC 2007) have embraced the concept of the developmental welfare state as a ‘perspective that sees the goal of State provision as the development of capacity within individuals, families, communities and the economy’ (ibid, p.38). Despite the adaptation within policy documents, it is acknowledged that the translation of developmental *rhetoric* into policy *actions* or outcomes via a more transformative social policy process remains a significant challenge for Ireland (National Economic and Social Council 2005; Cousins 2007; Kirby and Murphy 2011).

In a review carried out by Carney, Dundon et al (2011) they conclude that the *voluntarist* nature of a market-led social partnership model, that was identified by NESC as the key operationalising structure, was not adequate to drive the structural and cultural changes needed to manage any consequent political fall-out. There were inadequate enforcement mechanisms available and increasingly, the state was choosing to make unilateral decisions in relation to economic and social reform as the social partnership process was being increasingly sidelined (Geary 2008; Ó Riain 2008). The development of ECEC has been identified within several key policy documents as an essential element of economic and social development but there remains a lack of clarity about the level of commitment of the state to its development and the overall rationale driving investment in the area.

### 5.2 The emergence of Ireland’s childcare problem

The demand for childcare in Ireland evolved quite suddenly as women began to participate in large numbers in the workforce in the 1970s after Ireland joined what was
then referred to as the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1972 the First Commission on the Status of Women, outlined what it considered the role of ECEC to be in Ireland at that time:

*In dealing with the question of the provision of day-care facilities for babies and young children, we wish to stress that we are unanimous in the opinion that very young children, at least up to 3 years of age, should, if at all possible, be cared for by the mother at home and that as far as re-entry to employment is concerned, the provision of day-care for such children must be viewed as a solution to the problem of the mother who has particularly strong reasons to resume employment.* (Commission on the Status of Women 1972, Para. 310)

As is evident, the state was not fully supportive of women with young children entering the workforce. Calls for the provision of childcare services over the next three decades emerged from many sources including the National Women’s Council as well as the trade union movement, as ECEC was inextricably linked to women’s (right to) participation in the workforce (Kennedy 2001). It was the 1990s before the issue of childcare was formally addressed by the state. In the spirit of the social partnership model that emerged in Ireland in the 1990s, an *expert working group* was convened by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) to draw up the first National Childcare Strategy (1999). The first childcare strategy recommended a series of supply and demand side actions that if implemented would combine to provide a comprehensive development of affordable, accessible, quality childcare services. With a membership of over seventy individuals representing VCOs, employers, trade unions, parents and various statutory agencies it also included no less than six government departments: Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Health and Children; Social Community and Family Affairs; Finance; Education and Science; and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The impetus for this report was the draw-down from Europe of significant funding that was to enable the DJELR, under its equality brief, to develop
the first dedicated funding strand for the development of ECEC services in Ireland, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP).

5.2.1 Economic impetus for change

Changes in work related conditions have been catalytic in creating the demand for ECEC services. While women have been key economic contributors in the past, it is the place and conditions of employment in recent times that has driven the need for childcare outside the home. In the past Ireland was a small closed economy, characterised by a strong agrarian way of life in which people worked at home, on the land or in a craft with all family members participating in activities that generated income or food for the family (Share, Tovey et al. 2007). The influence of the Catholic Church was significant and dominated behaviours in the area of family and sexuality (Kennedy 2001). Today Ireland is a more open and exposed society and economy and the influence of the church has been diluted significantly. Our exposures to the EU, globalisation and general technological modernisation have ensured that Ireland now follows a typical pattern of social and economic development as seen in much of the western world, although the pace of change may have differed from many of our European neighbours (ibid). A key feature of this change was that the demarcation between work and home was greatly increased with people more dependent on a wage from an employer, including the state. Increasingly the state’s rhetoric advocates for all adults of working age, including the family carers, where possible to participate in the workforce (Lewis 2001; Esping-Andersen 2002).

While the change in Ireland took place very rapidly, the influence of the catholic church and Ireland’s loyalty to a traditional view of family, as endorsed within our constitution,
have combined to slow and deter the State’s involvement in direct ECEC provision for most of the population, with the exception of those targeted under national social inclusion measures and the limited educational initiatives (Kiersey and Hayes 2010; O’Donoghue-Hynes and Hayes 2011). Research carried out by Morgan (2002) revealed that where levels of state and church alignment are high, as they were in Ireland, the emergence of ECEC services tends to be slow relative to states such as France where conflict over ‘who should shape child socialization’ resulted in a ‘scramble to bring children into the Catholic or secular system as early as possible’ (p.140). In fact, given the dominance of the church (Share, Tovey et al. 2007) it is in some ways surprising the level of change that has taken place in areas such as the role of women in the family, divorce, contraception and abortion. Kennedy (2001, p.17) attributes this progress to increasing importance of economics.

*Once economic factors become sufficiently strong, they can dominate tradition and Church teaching, and while cultural background and history can slow down response to these forces, they do not in the long turn tend to override them.*

Society has accepted a change to the traditional concept of family, despite its continued encapsulation within the Irish constitution, as behaviours have changed and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of different family forms and decreasingly polarised views of the roles of men and women in terms of work and caring duties. However, there still seems to be a reluctance amongst politicians to clearly articulate support for the idea that *all* women should work (Daly and Clavero 2002) or that it is acceptable (or even good for young children) to be cared for outside the home (Hayes and Bradley 2009).
5.2.2 A complex policy problem

As reflected in the composition of the childcare strategy’s expert working group, policy dealing with children and the provision of ECEC services was seen to impact upon labour, family, health, equality, social inclusion and educational policy areas. However, in Ireland it was to be the employment and equality agendas that were to drive the development of the first major investment in ECEC. The funding programme was framed within the context of a wider social inclusion focus emanating from the social partnership process that facilitated targeting the majority of funds at children of women that were resident in designated areas of disadvantage who were being targeted to ‘return to work, education or training’ (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2000). This strand of investment was to play a part in the shift that was taking place in Ireland at the time within the welfare system. There was a move away from a redistributive system that decommodified citizens so that they did not need to depend on the market for income, towards ‘a productivist workfare state that “commodifies” citizens by encouraging and/or requiring them to work’ (Murphy 2006, p.2).

It was noted in several policy documents, including the National Partnership Agreement, Towards 2016, (Government of Ireland 2006d) that the provision of ECEC was a key structural condition needed to ensure all people of working age could access work or undertake training or education that could lead to employment. The government and the social partners at the time believed employment to be the major mechanism for solving many of the state’s problems as they considered it to be the ‘major factor for people exiting out of poverty and that it also influences quality of life and social well being’ (ibid, p.51). So, in order to realise this goal of maximising employment, the childcare question needed to be addressed.
However, the OECD published a second *Start Strong* (2006) report that reviewed developments in Ireland and went on to identify five policy goals for Ireland: co-ordination of ministries, agencies and resources; improving general access; improving access for children with additional needs; improving quality of ECEC; and financing new measures (OECD 2006, pp.357-358). The second *Childcare Strategy 2006-2010* (Government of Ireland 2006b; 2006c) - which was not a document but in fact two small leaflets, one aimed at parents and one for service providers - seemed to indicate a shift in the state’s objective. It aimed to ‘further develop the childcare infrastructure to meet the needs of children and their parents for quality early childhood care’ (ibid), a move, rhetorically at least, towards a more child-centred focus rather than a continued focus on parents’ return to work, education or training.

While it may have been expected that education would have played a strong role in defining how ECEC was developed in the state this was not the case in the initial phases of development. Although the Department of Education and Science (DES) published *Ready to Learn, White Paper on Early Childhood Education* in 1999, this policy document was framed within an overall aim to develop a life-long learning approach to all education and training as advocated by the EU, the OECD and UNESCO (Dehmel 2006). The White Paper highlighted two objectives that could be met through an investment in early learning: the development of human capital and tackling social and educational disadvantage. Operationally, however, the focus of the DES was limited to the development of targeted programmes that focused mainly on interventions for children who were disadvantaged or had special needs.

It was not until 2008 following the end of the EU funded investment in ECEC that a decision was made to provide a limited number of free pre-school hours for all
qualifying children in advance of starting school, bringing Ireland in line with many of the continental states in Europe (OECD 2006). This was also the point at which the State actualised a *split-system*, not uncommon throughout Europe, in which children under three years of age accessed childcare services with no clear pedagogical goals to be realised, while children over three years of age participated in pre-school, the first step on the educational ladder (OECD 2006; European Commission 2009).

5.2.3 What about the children?

While the focus on women and their participation in the workforce has been a critical reason for creating a demand for ECEC, there is a need to look past this issue and focus on the child’s needs and rights. It is only since Ireland’s ratification of the UNCRC and the development of two national frameworks for service providers focusing on quality, *Síolta* (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education 2006), and an early learning pedagogical approach, *Aistear* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009), that there has been any significant focus on the children’s experience of ECEC.

After Ireland made its first submission to the UNCRC in 1996, the feedback report noted ‘the incoherence of Irish children’s policy and structure’ (Greene and Kerrins 2008, p.226). Following significant media coverage of the major criticisms and recommendations to Irish government in 1998 the Minister for Health announced the state’s commitment to publish a national strategy for children (Keenan 2007). In 2000 the National Children’s Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives*, (Government of Ireland 2000a), a cross-government initiative, was launched following extensive consultation. The strategy was ‘an important benchmark for children’s policies and services in Ireland
and can be seen to herald a new era of child-centred policy development on the part of the Irish government’ (Greene and Kerrins 2008, p.229). The overall aim of the strategy was to improve the lives of children and this was expressed through a vision of: 

*An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.*” (Government of Ireland 2000a, p.4)

It has been argued that a focus on children and their *rights* has been gaining some attention in Ireland:

*The ... trend I have identified in contemporary European countries is towards treating children as objects of social policy. This involves a move away from the principle of subsidiarity ... and a move towards granting children autonomous rights.... While this can be interpreted as a manifestation of a trend towards individualisation, it has three other roots: a more general recognition of children as agents, and interest in the well-being of children, and concerns about social sustainability.* (Daly 2004, p.139)

Despite this assertion, Kamerman and Moss (2011) in a more recent international review of parental leave (which both influences and is influenced by ECEC policy) noted that ‘[o]ne group noticeably absent in our case studies are children themselves, who are represented in policy making neither directly nor indirectly through adult advocates’ (p.9). This casestudy approach reveals that a review of policy documents may indicate a range of policy and programme initiatives that may be enveloped within the rhetoric of children’s rights but it is only when an in depth review of what a state *does* rather than *says* is undertaken that the true level of commitment to an issue such as rights is revealed.
In Ireland, several initiatives have been developed and a number of structural changes have taken place under the auspices of children’s rights including: the development of the National Children’s Strategy (Government of Ireland 2000a); the establishment of the Ombudsmen for Children’s Office in 1992; and the establishment of Dáil na nÓg, the National Youth Parliament. The state is also recognised as having a ‘comparatively strong institutional base’ (Carney, Dundon et al 2011, p.66) within the children’s stage of the life-cycle model since the establishment of a specific governance framework for children depicted in figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 Governance Framework: Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supra-national</th>
<th>UN Convention of the Rights of the Child</th>
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<tr>
<td>National Strategy</td>
<td>National Children’s Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Co-ordination</td>
<td>Office of the Minister for Children (OMC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Carney, Dundon et al 2011, p.66

In addition to the UNCRC and the National Children’s Strategy, the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) emerged after many years while a number of monitoring groups were established in tandem to oversee implementation of the various actions of the OMCYA/DCYA.

A review of key educational, employment, children and ECEC policy documents (Department of Education and Science 1999; Government of Ireland 1999; 2000a; 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; OMC 2007) reveals that children were constructed as: rights holders; service users; life-long learners and workers of the future; and socially

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6 As of March 2011, the OMC is known as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
excluded, and a range of aims were identified that if realised would impact on all these areas. The objectives were commendable but a review of the actual targets contained in the ‘Programme for Government’ documents (Government of Ireland 2007b; 2009; 2011) revealed a limited focus with an emphasis on the provision of services aspect of children’s rights, and the access element of the childcare trilemma. So, despite the changes in policy rhetoric, and in line with Kamerman and Moss’s (2011) findings, the State’s commitment to children’s rights does not shift much beyond symbolic rhetoric when it is reviewed closely (Hayes 2002; Kiersey and Hayes 2010; O'Donoghue-Hynes and Hayes 2011).

One argument that emerges from within feminist literature that may explain in part the lack of political commitment to realising children’s rights and the provision of quality ECEC services for all children regardless of age or background is that caring activities in general are not valued politically.

5.2.4 Valuing Care

‘The traditional male breadwinner model assumed that men would take primary responsibility for earning and women for caring. It did therefore make provision for care work, albeit at the price of women’s economic dependence on men. How care work is to be accommodated in the new model [the adult worker model family]—in which all adults, whether male or female, parents or not, are assumed to enter full-time work—is a major issue.’ (Giullari and Lewis 2005, p.iii)

It is the ethics of care discourse that has revealed the undervaluing of care in society, because of its association with women, which is something that impacts upon all involved in care situations, carers, children, men as well as women (Porter and
McLaughlin 2006). In order to explain this theoretical stance more clearly, the care elements is broken down into four phases:

... caring about, which is noticing the need to care in the first place; taking care of, which involves assuming responsibility for care; care-giving, the actual work of care that needs to be done; and care-receiving, which is about the response to the care by those who receive it. (ibid 2006, p.32)

The general contention is that caring about, and taking care of are the duties of the powerful while care-giving and care-receiving are left to the less powerful women and children. The gender template that categorises women as natural carers is also reinforced through the development of an ECEC system in which low paid jobs for women are promoted in order to care for the children of other women (McKie, Bowlby et al. 2009) – particularly for the under threes. The lack of value placed on caring duties is reflected in how carers (who are predominantly women) in employment are categorised. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2003) classify those who are employed as care workers as semi-skilled workers, the second lowest occupational ranking by the CSO while those employed in private households, as childminders or au pairs for example, are classified at the bottom as unskilled workers (Lynch and Lyons 2008). However when early childhood care is viewed as educational rather than just care those employed are classified as professional and numbers of males participating is higher.

Without adequate recognition that caring relationships and activities are the cement that holds society together the pace of change and level of political will to affect change for women and children will remain frustratingly inadequate, a case that many of the feminist-inspired scholars have been highlighting (Lynch 2007). This challenge is
significant given Lynch and Lyons’s (2008) contention that women’s designation as carers ‘is constructed as a free choice … [y]et there is a moral imperative on women to do care work that does not apply equally to men’ (p.164).

Within a system that stresses self-reliance and which aims to promote market-oriented citizens, women are expected to be rational economic actors (REA) who work and consume and use this mechanism to become care commanders who use care foot soldiers to do their care work (Grummell, Devine et al. 2009). The reality for most women is a little different. What is ignored is the role of emotions in relationships and how they impact upon decision making. Much higher percentages of women than men with children either leave the workplace or work reduced hours and many have more limited employment options because of caring demands (ibid), despite higher participation rates in third level education (World Economic Forum 2010). This increases women’s risk of living in poverty, with Irish women ranking highest at risk of any of the 27 EU states in 2006 after social transfers were taken into account (Lynch and Lyons 2008). For those women who continue to work full time they can feel conflicted and torn as they seek to balance work and caring responsibilities, a fate that does not appear to be part of the male trajectory.

However, it is only by investigating the interface between ‘the private and the public, between care and love relations in the private domain of the household and family, and the public world of politics, the economy and culture, that a major reason for women’s subordinate status becomes clear’ (ibid, p.164). The challenge of realising a significant change in consciousness that would shift the societal norms that exist is significant given the reliance the state places on the family to address social issues. In fact, ‘too
often in Ireland the family was set up not as the basis of society but as an alternative to the social itself” (Higgins 2011).

Care is not as undervalued or confined to the private domain of families in all parts of the world. Ireland has embraced a model of the REA that promotes a system of individual human capital development, ignoring the levels of human interconnectivity needed to ensure societal, and thus economic, survival and progress (Baker, Lynch et al. 2004). Rush (2006) points out that the political ethic of care that has become embedded in comparative welfare theory in Ireland embraces the concepts of care and social interdependence ‘to balance classical liberal individualistic conceptions of justice based on protecting the freedoms of rational autonomous independent actors’ (p.56).

5.2.5 A patriarchal state?

However, uneasiness emerges between two distinct perspectives within this welfare debate. There is a strong body of feminist literature that aims to influence social policy to address the barrier to autonomy and oppressiveness of family based care for women but this contends with a debate on care emanating from a grouping supportive of family oriented care. This alternative view argues for the right to a social wage for carers and emanates from a desire to develop social capital and promote voluntarism. Politically there has been a reluctance to shift too far away from the constitutional position in which mothers are granted social protection from the labour market (Daly and Clavero 2002; Rush 2006) yet policy rhetoric and actions can be seen to support both positions.

On one hand, economic policy is fuelled by a deep commitment to and acceptance of globalisation (Dukelow 2011) and by a range of EU directives advocating for structural
measures, including state responsibility for the development of an ECEC infrastructure, to facilitate women’s participation in the workforce. This is countered by national policies, such as Strengthening families for life: Final Report of the Commission on the Family to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs (Government of Ireland 1998), which supports the constitutional position that ‘the function of the family (to provide care and nurture for its members)’ (p.146) should be supported by the state. This is reiterated in the Children’s Strategy (Government of Ireland 2000a) which places ‘an emphasis on the empowerment and support of families and communities as the most effective way of supporting children’ (p.8) as the ‘the family generally affords the best environment for raising children’ (p.10 - emphasis added).

While feminist research has had a particular focus on the impact of welfare policies on women and their caring responsibilities and levels of dependency, O’Connor (2008) uses a statist approach to review the formal and informal institutions of the state in order to identify the state’s gender regime. She identifies Ireland as a patriarchal state in which women are disadvantaged at several levels. This has been manifested in:

*the predominantly male character of the state’s senior administrative and executive structures; its social welfare policies, which continue to rhetorically value female domesticity; the failure to recognise women’s contribution to economic growth; and the generally unreflexive prioritising of a male agenda (particularly a middle-class male agenda).* (ibid 2008, pp.162-163)

Other states, however, have taken a clearer stance in relation to women and children’s position in society and the role of family and work. Through a review of the various welfare regimes that have been classified, it is possible to see models amongst the Nordic countries and in Italy, where the love of the family remains critical to children but *care and solidarity* work (Lynch 2007) complement (not replace) this work through
the development of quality ECEC services that focus on identity and belonging as well as individual development and well-being, even for children under three.

Overall, however, within the area of family policy in Ireland a conservative view of family permeates policy design providing a rationale for non-involvement in the affairs of young families more closely aligned to some of the conservative States rather than those expected within a neo-liberal state (Hantrais 2004). This traditionalist view acts as an impediment to the adoption of a clear neo-liberal approach to managing female participation in the labour force and the states involvement in family issues generally despite extensive policy rhetoric that states otherwise.

5.2.6 Gender gap

Ireland differs from the US, which is the archetypal neo-liberal state, in terms of the economic participation and opportunity for women. The level of female labour force participation is a critical factor in drawing political attention to the childcare problem. The Gender Gap Report 2010 shows Ireland ranks 25th while the US ranks 6th (World Economic Forum 2010). The reason for this difference may be attributed to the ‘less traditional gender roles in the US’ (Anxo, Flood et al. 2007, p.21) rather than any attempt at fostering employment regimes and family policies that narrow the gender gap, as evidenced in the Nordic states. Other neo-liberal states also perform similarly to the US with Canada and New Zealand positioned in 8th and 9th place respectively. The UK, also a member of what is considered the Anglo-American neo-liberal states, comes in at 34th place. Kamerman and Kahn (1997) point out that despite similarities to Canada, New Zealand and the US in ideology and a ‘dominant Protestant ethic despite a religiously-diverse population and a strong Catholic presence … with a resulting stress
on individualism, self-reliance, the work ethic, voluntarism, and a strong private sector’ (ibid, p.10) the UK differs in terms of policies that impact on families and gender issues due to its proximity and involvement with the EU. As demonstrated above, Ireland’s industrial relations model incorporates features associated with a more European style system, although it is a system currently under threat. So while Ireland may often be classified as belonging to the neo-liberal grouping, the treatment of many of the policy areas deviate from what is theoretically expected as it has unique characteristics that differentiate it based on its history, culture and geographical positioning.

Both Hantrais (2004), when looking at family policy in Europe, and Van Dongen (2009), in his focus on labour, expand on the three welfare regimes incorporating two additional groupings of states within Europe. This more detailed grouping of states offers us the chance to identify more specific patterns within Europe, the region that most strongly influences our policies because of our membership of the European Union and the Euro zone.

The southern European states, that include Italy, Spain and Portugal, are characterised by a strong commitment to the traditional family form and typically family assume primary responsibility for relatives in both law and practice. The state will only intervene and take over as a substitute for family care as a last resort (Hantrais 2004). As Ireland has a similar strong catholic history, it is often seen to have much in common with these states, particularly in how it views family. This distinguishes them from the continental conservative states, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany (and to some extent Greece), where obligations are not as wide reaching with legal duties restricted predominantly to being between parents and children (ibid). The state, and in some instances the church, play a supportive role in the provision of services to families.
The second grouping that is not dealt with in the original welfare typology is the central and eastern European (CEE) states. Historically women were required to work within former communist regimes and services were provided to facilitate this. These states have, however, experienced significant change following the economic and political transitions that has taken place post 1989 with most experiencing a significant withdrawal of the state from social protection. Welfare and economic development are often far behind other European states (Van Dongen 2009). The need to become more self-reliant happened suddenly as governments struggle to contain public spending in the wake of the collapse of Soviet rule while striving to implement EU driven legislation that focused on work-life balance and gender equality. The result has been that families have been left to fend for themselves as ‘[g]enerational solidarity has become a more meaningful concept in a situation where families can no longer rely on the state and employers for support’ (Hantrais 2004, p.130). These states historically have been instrumental in shaping developments that have emerged in terms of labour market policy as the ‘ideology of the Soviet bloc countries led to increased efforts at implementing a full employment policy and, therefore, policies that would support such patterns’ (Moss and Kamerman 2011, p.263). Building upon the introduction of childcare/childrearing leave introduced first in 1967 in Hungary and then in other former Soviet bloc countries, the Nordic states were to introduce mechanisms that were more focused on the gender equality issues.

The impact of the changes in CEE states has been mixed in relation to the gender gap with ranks ranging from Moldova placed 10th in relation to women’s economic participation and opportunity while Slovakia ranks 70th. Overall, it is not surprising that the Nordic states out-perform Ireland and the UK given their commitment to equality.
Corporate conservative states that do not favour state involvement in family life tend to perform a little worse than Ireland and the UK ranking in between 30th and 40th position while the Southern European states that favour and protect the traditional family such as Portugal, Spain, Greece and Italy rank 56th, 78th, 79th and 97th respectively. So while Ireland may have a traditional view of family, as do the Southern states in Europe, we have structurally been able to facilitate higher levels of female labour force participation that many of our European counterparts, regardless of regime type.

5.2.7 ECEC in Ireland

Within a neo-liberal framework, ECEC is typically constructed as a consumer commodity where demand is satisfied by the free market (Rigby, Tarrant et al. 2007). Hayes and Bradley (2007) draw on Bennett’s typology of early childhood systems that situates Ireland alongside Australia, Canada, Korea and the US. They are described as a low public investment, mixed market model where:

high value is placed on individual family responsibility for young children. National early childhood policies have traditionally been weak. Several departments share responsibility for policies affecting young children. The childcare sector is weakly regulated and conceived of as a service for working mothers. Public investment is less than 0.5 percent of GDP. (2006, p.172)

Collins and Wickham (2001) describe how the Trade Union movement and even the Equality Authority were advocating for the provision of quality childcare but within the social partners ‘cracks in the consensus’ about provision of services were evident as ‘Employers’ representatives … tentatively suggest that childcare is not now a major impediment to women’s labour force participation. … In particular employers are wary of making major investments in workplace crèches which then turn out to meet only
short term need’ (:10 emphasis in the original). This combined with the lack of success of an Employer Demonstration Initiative (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003) that was funded under the state’s first pilot ECEC initiative in 1998, to indicate a strong reluctance amongst employers to become involved in solving the childcare problem. This was not to impede the Social Partners’ continued reference in policy documents to the role of ECEC in the state’s social and economic development.

ECEC is an area where the neo-liberal approach increasingly favoured by the Irish government comes into direct conflict with the more conservative ideology around family and children that drives family policy development in Ireland. The traditional view of family, as endorsed by our written constitution, has been influenced by values derived from a catholic, traditional, nationalist and rural history (Kiersey and Hayes 2010). Barry (2008, p.22) describes an interlocking Catholic Church-State alliance on which the state was founded as combining with a ‘fragile sense of legitimacy of a State born of partition’ to give rise to an interventionist State that played a central role in how people lead their lives, particularly in terms of contraception, divorce and sexuality. A social code was developed based firmly on the traditional notion of a family.

Kennedy (2001) identifies Ireland as a late-starter in terms of changing patterns of marriage, births and labour force participation but overall concluded that it has followed a similar path to other nations. However, the rate and pace of change in Ireland since the 1960s has been rapid relative to other EU states. While woman’s traditional role as homemaker has been challenged since the introduction of legislation to comply with EU directives on equality, the State is conflicted in trying to please those holding on to a traditional view of women and family while keeping pace with the equality measures of our European partners and conceding that the model of society has shifted so that many
women *need* rather than *chose* to work as an economic necessity (Daly and Clavero 2002; Barry 2008).

Policy makers in Ireland, however, strive to ‘tread a fine line between providing for those who wish to purchase childcare and not undermine those parents who wish to care for their children themselves’ (Daly and Clavero 2002, p.61). The reluctance of the state to rush in and deal with the childcare problem is politically motivated. Hantrais (2004, p.149) describes how the ‘Irish population remains conservative and cautious about state intervention in family life when it is not upholding the status quo’ (emphasis in original). She noted significant differences in public opinion on policy intervention in family life across Europe and concludes that in Germany, Ireland and the UK ‘where family policies are [only] partially co-ordinated, the principle of outside intervention receives relatively little support among the general public, particularly when it is considered as interfering and intrusive’ which contrast with the situation in France where ‘state intervention in family life is most strongly supported by the public [and] the right of the state to intervene in the private lives of individuals to implement permissive and supportive policy measures in undisputed’ (ibid, p.149). However, she noted that while the relationship between the state and family is blurred it is shifting as Ireland accepts the changing role of women in society and acknowledges the changes to family structure with the introduction of divorce and an increase in the number of single parent households. This gives rise to an acceptance that the State may need to become more involved in managing the risks associated with the new forms of family as well as the changing work patterns of parents.
5.3 Conclusion

Ireland is currently struggling under the weight of a diverse range of influences including: its national history, culture and politics that informs thinking in relation to women, children, work and family; the impact of EU membership on national policy; and globalisation which exposes the various players in the state to other markets and regimes. Overall, there exists an ambiguity about where Ireland sits in relation to the classic typology of welfare states, with different policy areas demonstrating different adaptations of various welfare characteristics. While the State looks to corporatism, liberalism and even social democracy (Ó Riain 2008), it is argued that Ireland is ‘moving further towards Boston’ rather than Berlin in favouring a neo-liberal system (Schäfer 2009, p.118). The US styled regime calls for an increased reliance on the market to solve both social and economic problems, diminishing the role of the state.

The statist classification paints a picture in which the transformative potential of a developmental state is constrained by the market logic of the competitive state (Kirby and Murphy 2008) while the paternalism that strives to protect the constitutional construction of the traditional family model within a patriarchal state (O’Connor 2008) restricts real progress for women and adequate attention being paid to the needs of children outside the home. Once again a distinguishing feature within the literature in this field is the ‘contradictions that characterise Ireland’s development, the deepening inequality it is fostering and the inability of decentralised state institutions to deal with these’ (Adshead, Kirby et al. 2008, p.12). The role of the state has changed over the years rather than diminished with a move away from maximisation of welfare towards the promotion of enterprise becoming evident.
Whichever classification is used, the overall impact has been a widening of the gap between the richest and poorest in Irish society. Those outside the labour market experience a higher risk of poverty (Kirby 2010). There are natural elements of competition between national objectives as family and labour, in particular, compete for women’s time. Women and children, and policies associated with them are progressed within the context of economic and labour policy influenced by marketisation principles while family policy acts as a brake on any a clear focus on children (particularly those under three years of age) and any rights they may have to services, protection or participation in decision making outside the home. However, within the social democratic, the corporatist conservative and even the Southern European regimes examples exist of better quality ECEC services than those in Ireland (OECD 2001; 2006) which may be because they have a clearer communal understanding how family and work interact and how women are framed within this context granting a clearer focus on the child and the democratisation opportunities ECEC can provide.

Within the area of ECEC the inequity and inequality that are symptomatic of a consumer driven approach to service provision are compounded by a power dynamic that is at play politically that serves to deprioritise issues that impact upon women and children as well as the more disadvantaged in society. Neo-liberalism characteristics are identified as driving the development of a system where elites influence what is prioritised within the policy agenda while care itself is undervalued because of the association with women (Lynch and Lyons 2008). Without an acknowledgment that care is a social process that involves all and is an integral part of democratic citizenship then care, and those involved in its giving and receiving, will continue to be marginalised (Porter and McLaughlin 2006). This combines with a shift to the
allocation of rights based on workforce participation to result in a situation where children’s rights remain overlooked in Ireland, despite rhetoric produced by the state that claims to commit itself to the realisation of children’s rights in Ireland.

Children and their rights are being obscured by the dynamic of a neo-liberal individualistic push for women to enter the workforce while a conservative and constitutional view of women as carers first and foremost exerts a pull back into the home. As women’s participation in education exceeds that of men in Ireland it may be assumed they begin adult life with ambitions of significant participation in economic activity. It is often not until women have children that they realise how guilt inducing and complex a position they find themselves in. These personal dilemmas are virtually ignored by the state with consequent tensions being individualised ensuring no social movement gathers momentum. The question of who should mind the children is difficult to address when the question of why they need to be minded in the first place remains unresolved. The review of policy tools selected in Ireland to address the childcare question in chapters seven, eight and nine demonstrates empirically how the state’s reluctance to face into these issues has created policy misalignment (Howlett 2009) between the rhetoric of stated policy goals and the tools selected to realise these goals.

Table 5.1 below summarises the models selected, indicators identified and the evaluative criteria identified in the chapters to this point. The research process involved classification of all policy tools as informational, statutory, organisational or financial (Hood 1986) in order to determine their effectiveness at realising national policy objectives that were tracked through the seven indicators selected, protection, provision of services, participatory rights, as well as coordinated, accessible, affordable, quality
ECEC as well as their ability to realise the principles and values articulated in policy documents such as *justice, equality* and *democracy*. The informational, statutory and organisational policy tools were evaluated in chapter seven and further categorised as either *substantive* or *procedural* (Howlett 2000). In chapter eight, the financial policy tools were reviewed to reveal whether they rated as high or low in relation to the dimensions of *directness, visibility, coercion or automaticity* (Salamon 2002). In order to evaluate the impact on the values being advocated in national policy chapter nine reviews the policy tools designed as social inclusion measures. They were evaluated to identify whether they were designed as *authority, incentive, capacity, symbolic* and *hortatory* or *learning* policy tools (Schneider and Ingram 1990) and then to explore, through a comparison with the Free-Preschool Year Programme, whether policy targets where constructed as *advantaged, contenders, dependents or deviants* (ibid 1993).

However before the findings are presented, a review of the research methodology is presented. The overall methodological approach was informed by the decision to adopt a policy tools approach. The use of five models emerging from a multi-disciplinary field has resulted in the development of a diverse and mixed approach to the research.
Table 5.1 Models, categories, indictors and evaluative criteria used to conduct research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Classification</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One: macro-level classification of all policy tools</td>
<td>Informational (Nodality); Statutory (Authority); Organisational; Financial (Treasure)</td>
<td>Hood’s basic tool-kit of government resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two: macro-level classification of nature of all policy tools</td>
<td>Substantive; Procedural;</td>
<td>Howlett’s resource-based taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three: macro-level identification of financial policy tool dimensions</td>
<td>Directness; Visibility; Coercion; Automaticity</td>
<td>Salamon’s Policy Tool Dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four: micro-level identification of behavioural assumptions informing design of social inclusion policy tools</td>
<td>Authority; Incentive; Capacity; Symbolic and Hortatory; Learning Tools</td>
<td>Schneider and Ingram’s Behavioural Assumptions informing policy tool design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five: micro-level identification of social constructions informing design of subsidy policy tool</td>
<td>Advantaged; Contenders; Dependents; Deviants</td>
<td>Schneider and Ingram’s Social constructions of policy targets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicators selected as representative of National Policy Objectives:

- Protection
- Provision of Services
- Participatory Rights
- Coordinated and Integrated ECEC
- Affordable ECEC
- Accessible ECEC
- Quality ECEC

Values incorporated into the understanding of ‘effectiveness’, the evaluative criteria:

- Justice; Equality; Democracy
Chapter Six: Methodology

6.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used to carry out this research in which a range of policy tool models were applied to data both collected and generated as it seeks to address two key research questions:

- What impact does policy tool design have on realising national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children in Ireland?
- What actions can be taken to increase the effectiveness of ECEC policy design decisions in Ireland to realise national ECEC policy goals that recognises the rights of children?

It begins by presenting the rationale for a mixed methodological approach. The ontological and varied epistemological influences are then discussed and include a review of: elements of the research questions; the range of analytical models being used; and the nature of the objects being investigated. Within this context, an ancillary research question was identified that was addressed during the research:

- Are the research findings presented in voluntary and community organisation reports advocating against proposed changes to ECEC social inclusion measure policy tools credible?

From there, three distinct elements of the research are identified which include a macro-level classification and review of all policy tools except funding programmes; a more
detailed review of the various funding programmes used to support ECEC development; and, a micro-level investigation of impact of subsidy design on policy targets. These investigations combine to provide a wide socio-policial review of design decision along with a detailed socio-cultural investigation of the impact of these decisions on various policy targets. Impacts are not felt evenly amongst the population so the micro level review and comparative element of the research seeks to reveal how policy tool design can be used to perpetuate or challenge inequities and stereotypes in society. This has particular relevance when reviewing how more disadvantaged populations are treated and constructed by the state relative to others.

The justification for managing the varied array of data and analytical models by use of a *bricolage* is then presented. The chapter moves on to review the design and methods selected, highlighting the benefits of incorporating some quantitative data alongside the qualitative data. Much of the data collected already existed, however, for the purposes of an *illustrative* example contained in the micro-level review of subsidy design, additional data needed to be generated. The participative approach adopted during this phase is emphasised as are the ethical issues, such as consent, confidentiality, managing expectations and timing of access to information being generated. The chapter concludes by identifying a range of techniques used to test the validity and credibility of the data.

### 6.1 Rationale for the research methods

The methodology for this project was directed by the research questions posed and the theoretical models selected to help answer them. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, theories on children, their rights, the welfare state, the policy process and
policy tool design have emerged from a multi-disciplinary background and have been significantly influenced by each of the major research frameworks in the social sciences – positivist, interpretivist and critical (Oswick 2008, p.18). This mixed epistemological background carries through in this research which is framed within a moderately constructivist ontology (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), where a broad subjective view of the world is assumed.

6.2 A moderately constructivist ontology

Arguments in favour of either of the two extreme ontological positions of positivism and constructivism have a particular focus on whether objectivity or relativism respectively inform a researcher’s understanding of reality. In the 1980s there was an acceptance by some scholars of the multiplicity of perceived realities that saw social science move away from a concern with guaranteeing truth or utility to a focus on offering defensible interpretations of what is in the world (Dunn and Kelly 1992). This increased the appeal of a constructivist perspective which assumes that the world is a function of personal interactions and perceptions which are subject to interpretation rather than precise measurement (Merriam 1988).

Within the field of policy analysis it has been accepted by many that policy making is a political process rather than an analytical-problem solving one (Peters 2002; Salamon 2002; Fischer 2009) but the rational approach that characterises the positivist tradition continues to be respected and promoted by many policy analysts. Becker and Bryman (2004, p.20) suggest that its status as a normative model and as a ‘dignified myth’ is often shared by the policy makers. There may be pragmatic reasons for the longevity of a rationalist approach, despite its inability to ‘produce anything vaguely resembling a
causal, predictive science of society, nor has the policy analysis sub-field been able to provide indisputably effective solutions to pressing economic and social problems’ (Fischer 2009, p.119).

The positivist paradigm has a clear advantage in respect to the analysis of policy as it facilitates the identification of what are believed to be clear cause and effect relationships based on natural laws which once understood become predictable thus enabling planning and control. The rational approach offers the possibility of analytical problem-solving which arrives at an optimal solution by separating out variables that can be controlled. The prescriptive and normative approach is a model for ‘ideal decision making procedures’ (Smith and May cited in Becker and Bryman 2004, p.20).

Fischer (2009) on the other hand argues from the perspective of constructivism that facts are normative therefore ‘scientific work is better understood as an active mix of discovery and construction of reality, rather than straightforward uncovering of a given reality awaiting to be revealed’ (p.112). It is an ontology in which complexity is embraced but when an extreme position is adopted differences are emphasised and the arrival at a consensus position is not tenable. In the latter scenario the difficulty of defending a position becomes apparent for politicians and policy makers relative to the absolute position that is offered by a more positivist approach.

However Fischer goes on to argue that a pragmatic decision to adopt a rationalist position in which there is only one defensible position is ‘not only methodologically misguided, but serves as well as an ideology that masks political and bureaucratic interests’ (ibid, p.119). He constructs the social scientific community as a social structure that is part of the sociopolitical process that act as ‘authoritative gatekeepers of
knowledge’ in which the status of data is determined ‘through a consensus that certain data and/or theories are useful to the largest number of practitioners who are entitled to participate in the decision process’ (ibid, p.113). Partly in response to this, the constructivist ontology has yielded a participatory shift in order to give voice to multiple perspectives that exist which in turn offers the opportunity to challenge the vested interests that have traditionally controlled and managed the construction of knowledge which may have stymied efforts to realise a more democratic and socially just society.

This research strives to respond to the rhetoric of the state, which is articulated in the literature and information it disseminates by joining the ranks of US scholars, such as Ingram and Schneider (2005), Sidney (2005), DiAlto (2005), Soss (2005), Schram (2005), and Bensonsmith (2005) as well as Irish scholars like Carney (2009), Harvey (2009), O’Connor (2008), and Millar (2008), who highlight the plight of minority populations, and Dahlberg and Moss (2005), and James and James (2004) who present the perspective of children in order to highlight a different reality about the impact of policy decisions and seek to affect change as a result of their research. However, a moderate constructivist position is adopted for this research which acknowledges that there is no one version of reality but also recognises that to embrace an extreme commitment to this perspective results in a situation where a move beyond description to analysis or evaluation becomes impossible as there is no single truth (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Bergman 2008b). A moderate stance accommodates the belief expressed by Fielding (2008, p.39) that the existence of multiple perspectives ‘does not rule out the possibility of their ultimately being a single empirically adequate understanding’ of a phenomenon.
6.3 A mixed epistemological perspective

‘We make our framework of inquiry incommensurable only when we allow ourselves to remain fixed within a closed system of human agency. We blind ourselves to the objective reality that more than one framework of inquiry may be used to strengthen the overall phenomenon being studied.’ (Oswick 2008, pp.425-426)

Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and that being researched and whether the nature of knowledge can be communicated as either objective or subjective (Creswell and Clark 2006). A positivist paradigm identifies an objective reality in which the researcher is impartial and distanced. The emphasis shifts from seeking to explain to seeking to understand and explore within the constructivist paradigm. An extreme position asserts the researcher interacts with the object of the inquiry thus making it impossible to distinguish the inquirer from the subject thus eliminating the distinction between ontology and epistemology (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Critical researchers accommodate both objectivity and subjectivity. They address the paradox of ‘how to develop an objective interpretive science of subjective human experience’ (Schwandt 1994, p.119) through acknowledging ‘the permanence of the real world of first person, subjective experience, yet … seek to disengage from that experience and objectify it’ (Graham 2011, p.106).

Becker and Bryman (2004, p.404) assert that ‘in the absence of reflexivity, the strengths of the data are exaggerated and/or the weaknesses underemphasised’ so the overall stance of the researcher needs to be made explicit. The researcher adopts the position of policy outsider (Maloney, Jordan et al. 1994), as one of the research aims is to interpret and present information from the perspective of those that are impacted by the policy tool design decisions, not those making the decisions. While it could be argued that
membership of the DCCC positions the researcher as an *insider* as the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were directly involved in the implementation of many of the recent funding programmes, this role was managed by the OMCYA and DCYA to ensure the role was one of *peripheral* rather than *real* insider (ibid). The CCCs, like many agencies and VCOS, have had little influence over policy or implementation decisions (Harvey 2009), so in effect continue to be *outsiders*.

In this research the policy target populations (Schneider and Sidney 2009) include children, parents, ECEC service providers and VCOs. Key public officials and politicians operating within the key departments are deemed to be the *real* insiders (Maloney, Jordan et al. 1994) and decision takers for the purposes of this research and as such, may hold a different perspective on how the tools are described or classified within the research. The overall objective is to assess whether the policy has been realised effectively and whether the norms being endorsed are compatible with national policy.
### Table 6.1 Research Overview

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<td>Primary Element: Effectiveness of Current ECEC Policy Tool Design in Ireland</td>
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<td>Ancilliary Element: Credibility of VCO Research Generated for Advocacy</td>
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#### Research Questions

- **Primary Element:** Effectiveness of Current ECEC Policy Tool Design in Ireland
- **Secondary Element:** Recommendations for Change
- **Ancilliary Element:** Credibility of VCO Research Generated for Advocacy

#### Moderate Constructivist Ontology

#### Research Elements

<table>
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<th>Models Applied</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Basic tool kit of government actions (Hood 1986)</td>
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<td>- Classification of tools as either procedural or substantive (Howlett 2000)</td>
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#### Models Applied

- Basic tool kit of government actions (Hood 1986)
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- Policy tool dimensions (Salamon 2002)

#### Models Applied

- Basic tool kit of government actions (Hood 1986)
- Classification of tools as either procedural or substantive (Howlett 2000)
- Policy tool dimensions (Salamon 2002)

#### Models Applied

- Behavioural assumptions informing policy tool design (Schneider and Ingram 1990)
- Social construction of target populations (ibid 1993, 2005)

#### Mixed Methods

- Qualitative > Quantitative

#### Data Sources

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<th>Existing Data</th>
<th>New Data</th>
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<td>Dublin City Childcare Committee internal minutes and reports</td>
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<td>Personal correspondence</td>
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#### Data Management

- **Thematic Analysis** (Coding Sheets and SPSS software)
- **Seven Indicators** (Access, Affordability, Quality, Co-ordination, Protection, Provision, Participation)
- **Evaluative Criteria** (Effectiveness – efficiency, democratic & justice)

#### Data Presentation

- **Bricolage**
The thesis is structured so that three distinct research elements are identifiable. As outlined in table 6.1 above, the first macro-level investigation was concerned with reviewing existing literature to identify the range of policy tools that existed and selecting those that would be included in the review. The first of the policy tool design models was then applied. Tools were classified using Hood’s basic tool kit of government actions model (1986) with the financial policy tools being selected out at this point for a more detailed review at a later point. The application of the second framework, in which tools were judged to be either substantive or procedural (Howlett 2000), was also undertaken in order to move beyond description to gain an understanding of the nature of the policy tools and how they combine and work together. In addition to an extensive review of literature produced by academics, VCOs and the state, the researcher relied on significant *experiential knowledge* (Becker and Bryman 2004) gained through participation in discussions and critiques of ECEC policy tools as member of both the DCCC board and the Dublin City Community Forum Childcare Focus Group. These discussions provided a detailed and nuanced understanding of how the policy tools operated on the ground and the range of consequences, both intended and unintended of the specific designs on policy targets.

The second research element continued to utilise Hood (1986) and Howlett’s (2005) models but involved a more intricate examination of the state’s financial policy tools, the most visible and often highly contested tools. Hood and Howlett’s work was complemented with the application of the third framework in which the specific *dimensions* of the financial tools were identified (Salamon 2002).
The final research element involved a more detailed review of the state’s main ECEC subsidies designed for two distinctly different policy targets; social inclusion targets and other citizens who do not qualify for or opt not to avail of ECEC places under the social inclusion programmes.

In order to gain the level of detailed insight into the operation and impact of the policy tools design features, additional data needed to be generated. This was achieved through the administration of questionnaires to sixty-two parents using community childcare services in disadvantaged areas in Dublin City as well as semi-structured interviews with Managers of the ten community childcare services.

DCCC estimate that there are approximately 400 childcare providers in the city of which 124 are community childcare providers (non-commercial, community run services, located in designated areas of disadvantage), all of which are eligible for the CCSS (DCCC 2006, p.21). The ten services selected for inclusion in the research represent approximately 8% of the city’s community service providers and just under 1% of the state’s community service providers (ibid).

While the research looks at how to increase the influence of children’s rights on the policy process, the views of children were not elicited during this phase of the research. This was largely a pragmatic decision as the relevant behavioural impact of policy implementation decisions was the major focus of the data generation so the adults were deemed by the researcher to have most insight into interpreting this dimension.

The remaining two models developed by Schneider and Ingram (1993; 1997) were applied to a review of the two most significant policy tool design changes that took
place during the course of this research. The initial focus was to generate data through interviews and questionnaires on the impact of the change in ECEC social inclusion policy tool design, from a Staffing Grant to the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). This facilitated the identification of the underlying *behavioural assumptions* (Schneider and Ingram 1990) informing policy tool design decisions.

Following on from this, the introduction of a second subsidy in 2009, the Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Education and Care (FPSY), presented the opportunity to introduce a *comparative* element to the study as this scheme was designed as a universal programme for all children rather than a targeted programme. So the micro level investigation expanded to review the *social constructions* (Schneider and Ingram 1993) of the social inclusion and non-societal inclusion target populations.

These three elements correlate approximately with chapters seven, eight and nine in this thesis, although some of the data generated was not solely confined to use within these chapters.

In line with the moderate constructivist position adopted a degree of subjectivity in terms of the researcher’s position as *advocate* or *impartial observer* is acknowledged although the stance of the researcher relative to the subject shifts during the research, with differences being most apparent during the data generation and data analysis stages. Elements of what Robson (2002) describes as *real world techniques* were influential in choosing data collection tools where an *interpretive* approach incorporating *partnership* and *co-construction* as key characteristics of a research relationship which is ‘between equals and not exploitive’ (p.10). During the analysis of data, a more *critical* stance comes to the fore as a critique of the prevailing ideology.
which purports the superiority of modern Western societies and the social structures and practices that ensure the underlying logic remains, is challenged (Dahms 2008). All of this takes place within a context in which multi-epistemological models are being applied to the data. This research can be said to be contributing to an *International Political Economy* approach favoured by researchers in Ireland, such as Murphy (2006; 2009; 2010), Kirby (2002b; 2006; 2010) and Ó Broin (2009b), which has a ‘normative, multidisciplinary and critical theoretical approach which plays special attention to the role of power in economic life and how this serves to establish a particular relationship between the market, state and society’ (Kirby 2010, p.123).

### 6.3.1 Elements of the research questions

‘*Social policy research … has the objective of developing, monitoring or evaluating policy and its related practice.*’ (Ritchie 2003, p.45)

‘*Social policy is also the term used to refer to the practice of social intervention aimed at securing social change to promote the welfare and well-being of citizens. … Social policy is thus the study of policy practice in order to contribute to policy reform. It is not only descriptive but prescriptive.*’ (Becker and Bryman 2004, p.4)

The first research question ‘*What impact does policy tool design have on realising national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children in Ireland?*’ aims to *explore* and *explain* the subject area. De Vaus (2001) stresses that good description and exploration plays an important role in the research project as it ‘can challenge accepted assumptions about the way things are and can provoke action’ (p.2). The descriptive exploration serves to generate *why* questions and allows new insights to be developed while the explanatory element examines ‘the reasons for, or associations between, what exists’ (Ritchie 2003, p.27). However, this research moves on to incorporate a strong
evaluative element as it seeks to appraise the effectiveness of current ECEC policy tool design in Ireland in realising children’s rights within an ECEC context.

As the number of policy tools selected and the variety of theoretical models used to analyse the data were extensive, seven representative indicators were identified that were tracked to assess the impact of policy design on children’s rights and ECEC policy goals in order to ensure the manageability, transparency and replicability of the work. The three children’s rights indicators: protection; provision of services; and participatory rights, were selected as they incorporate a broad rather than a legalistic interpretation of rights and embrace a socio-cultural interpretation of children and childhoods that provides an optimistic and respectful frame in which the development of policy concerning children can be understood. The four ECEC indicators selected: access; affordability; quality; and co-ordination, were chosen because of their prominence in the literature but also because their interpretation within the OECD’s Start Strong documents (2001, 2006) complement the strategies and theoretical frameworks for the development of efficient, effective and equitable ECEC being advanced by key children’s rights advocates and scholars.

The second question ‘what actions can be taken to increase the effectiveness of ECEC policy design decisions in Ireland to realise national ECEC policy goals that recognises the rights of children?’ focuses on making recommendations for change. Locating the problem within the realm of political action and seeking a solution through empowerment methods were themes that emerged from the political science literature, and its sub-field, policy analysis (Hudson and Lowe 2009; Robichau and Lynn Jr 2009). Mayall et al (1999) argued that the research process is by definition a political activity where the intersecting interests of researcher, those being researched and the socially
dominant political structures are constructed and reconstructed. This project embraces a belief in empowerment and strives to produce knowledge that will assist in empowering those actively seeking change, as is the goal of many critical theorists (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

6.3.2 The emergence of an ancillary research question

During the data generation phase for the micro-level review, four VCO reports were selected for thematic analysis in order to identify a range of topics that could be investigated with parents and CSPs (Appendix A). Arguments presented within the VCO reports were based in large part on theoretical extrapolation or anecdotal evidence. Other weaknesses identified included a limited quantification of data in order to ‘combat anecdotalism’ or ‘quasi-quantification’ through the use of words such as many, much, often (Bryman 2008, pp.599-600). The VCOs had undertaken some interviewing but overall the methods tended to be limited so their findings were not tested rigorously, with little triangulation or verification done leaving them open to criticism about their credibility. Becker and Bryman (2004) argue that this lack of attention to scientific rigour provides the state with justification for ignoring this type of document. This research presented an opportunity to review and verify whether the information captured in the VCO reports was an accurate representation of the issues as experienced by the target populations and as such could be considered a credible source of information by the state.

Therefore, the aim of the research expanded to include the ancillary question; Are the research findings presented in voluntary and community organisation reports advocating against proposed changes to ECEC social inclusion measure policy tools
In order to address this research questions, the data collection methods were developed to facilitate a comparison of findings from this research project with those contained in the VCO reports.

6.3.3 Multiple analytical models

The theoretical frameworks informing the understanding of children’s rights, the rationales for ECEC provision, the role of welfare regimes and the understanding of the policy process contained within this research have emerged from within extensive multi-disciplinary fields of study that span the epistemological spectrum. The need for interdisciplinary inquiries has been central to the thinking driving the development of implementation theory (Lester, Bowman et al. 1987). Miller and Salkind (2002) suggest that ‘[i]f evidence refuses to recognise the artificial boundaries of the scientific disciplines, analysts have no choice but to expand their perspectives and overcome the prejudices of their discipline’ (p.66). Schneider and Sidney (2009) describe how their policy design theory integrates theoretical and empirical research that straddles both interpretivist and positivist world views rather than choosing between them. Similarly the models developed by Hood (1986), Howlett (2000) and Salamon (2002) have emerged from within a field that expanded through the generations to move beyond its positivist roots to acknowledge the political nature of the policy process (Peters 2002; Salamon 2002). As such the models have been designed to look ‘not only at the technical aspects of a policy but also its implicit ideas, values and broader meaning in society’ (Schneider and Sidney 2009, p.112). Causal relationships are considered to mean looking for reasons and motives as well as the mechanical causal explanations (Oswick 2008). The positivist tendencies within the models combine with the critical stance of the researcher to facilitate interpretation and classification of tools within
definitive categories in order identify representativeness and generalisability (Fielding 2008).

Even the understanding of the context selected for the investigation, the welfare state, has shifted. The rise of the welfare state in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was informed by 18\textsuperscript{th} century ideals that ‘centred on social and economic progress achieved through grand social and technological designs, on reason and rationality, and on a powerful and self-consciously political human subject’ (Williams 2004, p.135). However, a focus on ‘subjectivity, identity and difference’ (ibid, p.136) was seen to emerge from the 1970s on. Social movements and activist professionals challenged the construction and definition of problems, issues and solutions and worked to develop ‘alternative models of practice aimed more specifically at promoting social justice and democratic participation’ (Fischer 2009, p.32). Social constructivism has informed the growth of the bottom-up approaches to policy analysis that acknowledge the political nature of policy development; the socio-cultural perspective on childhood; and the role ECEC can play in realising a \textit{democratic} project of citizen development and emancipation. This in turn would facilitate the identification of a wider range of possible solutions as policymakers and citizens gain greater insight into the meaning making that informs their interpretation of the issues and their expectations of what policy should address and how they evaluate the effectiveness of implementation.

6.4 An implicit bricolage made explicit

The product of the research is complex and \textit{quilt-like} in which several parts connect to produce a ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). A ‘bricolage typically is understood to involve the process of employing … methodological strategies as they are needed in
the unfolding context of the research situation’ (ibid, p.316). It facilitates a combination of instrumental styles that focus on performance measurement and indicators of efficiency with interpretive styles that focus on processes, power and impact on competencies (Bryman 2001). The interpretive bricoleur produces a:

\[
\text{pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. “The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the bricoleur’s method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p.161) that changes and takes new forms as the bricoleur adds different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation to the puzzle. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.4) }
\]

The management of data generated from interdisciplinary sources is facilitated within a bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Accepting the complexity of the policy area being reviewed, the bricolage enables a review of instruments and policy tools at a macro level utilising models that appear almost positivist in their genesis while also applying more interpretivist approaches to gain insight into perceived realities of policy target populations at a micro level. This facilitates a broad multi-faceted inquiry and investigation without having to blend several models which are informed by different ontological traditions in order to arrive at an interpretation of reality. The use of a bricolage means that multiple theories developed by key authors in the field of policy design can be applied as each focuses on a unique aspect of the problem.

McLeod (2001) argues that the identification of the researcher as bricoleur highlights that knowledge is not generated by method as:

\[
[T]here is no methodological ‘sausage machine’ that allows the researcher to crank the handle and produce ‘findings’. The bricoleur is not a machine operator of this kind, but is conceived as someone whose work is informed by a broad philosophical and interdisciplinary perspective. ... The bricoleur is
\]
McLeod describes the vision presented by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) of a bricoleur who subversively questions the status of mainstream qualitative methods through the innovative use of their extensive methodological expertise. Carrying on from this he also raises the issue of a rhetorical eclecticism that may emerge as research is written up reflecting the diversity of methods and meanings that may be contained within the research. However, the objective of this research is not to explore new frontiers of methodological knowledge. Nor does it fall into the category of research identified by Bergman (2008b, p.18) where those attempting a mixed methods strategy misuse Lévi-Strauss’ original conception of the bricoleur (Levi-Strauss 1966) ‘in order to defend wobbly premises’. The objective is to generate knowledge from data gathered from a variety of sources using multiple methods through the application of a variety of models with varying tendencies that span from positivist to constructivist in order to release a version of reality that more closely reflects the impacts of policy design decisions from the perspective of policy target populations. Therefore the expertise and ownership the researcher purports to have focus on the integrity of the data collected and generated as well as an extensive experiential knowledge of a broad and complex subject area.

6.5 Research Design

A predominantly, but not exclusively, qualitative approach was favoured. There were quantitative elements incorporated into the research, particularly when generating new data, as the inclusion of basic statistical information provided extra insight and clarity to the study.
The level of debate within the scholastic research into the approach of combining or mixing qualitative and quantitative methods is extensive. Much of it focuses on the strong demarcations that have evolved in which qualitative research has become associated with a constructivist approach while quantitative methods are the remit predominantly of the positivist school of thought (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Creswell and Clark 2006; Bryman 2008). It has been argued that mixing methods need long and careful consideration in order to ensure the validity and credibility of the research as tensions between theoretical perspectives are expected. However, ‘research design is always a matter of informed compromise’ (Bechhofer and Paterson 2000, p.71).

Bergman (2008a, p.2) points out that ‘practitioners tend to conduct mixed methods research which should actually not be possible, if some of the demarcations between qualitative and quantitative research methods were taken seriously’. His view is that qualitative and quantitative methods are large and heterogeneous groups of methods that do not neatly fit into the diametrically opposed ontological and epistemological frames. As such, data collection and analysis techniques do not need to be categorised as belonging exclusively to one side or the other. A mix of research methods was employed that were deemed to most adequately answer the research questions.

6.6 Research Methods

There are two main areas of focus within this discussion about research methods. The first is on the type of data used for the research and how and where it was sourced from. The second focuses on the techniques used to manage and analysis an extensive data set.
Within the field of qualitative research it is acknowledged that a wealth of information exists within ‘documents’. Documents were the principal data source for the research. Documentation and text generated by the State and academic sources were relied on extensively. In addition materials generated by VCOs, service providers, parents and the media was included as it expanded out the usual range of literature search options and elaborated on the practical side of the research, ensuring it was well informed and located within the existing knowledge base on the topic research (Gomersall 2007). There was a very high reliance on information gathered from the web-site of the DCYA/OMCYA as it was the primary source of detail in relation to the detailed rules and regulations applying to many of the various funding mechanisms developed by the state. Web-based fora and discussion pages were also accessed to gain insight into the opinions and reaction of parents and service providers to design features contained in ECEC policy tools. This information was publically available and accessible which enabled a review of the more substantive elements of policy tool design being investigated. It provided ample data from the perspective of the state but the views of target populations remained obscured so alternative data sources were sought.

Access was granted to internal minutes and reports generated by the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) providing supplementary information in relation to the perspective of less frequently focused on population targets. This information source was used to address two information gaps that emerged during the research. Firstly, the researcher gained access to research commissioned by DCCC with private service providers (Partas 2011) as no other data source emerged focusing on these targets. Secondly, the minutes supplied data about requests by the DCCC to the
OMCYA/DCYA to redesign the Childminder Tax Relief policy tool as discussed in chapter eight, as once again, little data was available in relation to childminders. These two data sources provided valuable insight into the less visible procedural elements of policy tool design, thus providing a more complete picture of the state’s actions which was a key aim of this research.

However, this data was sufficient to conduct much of the macro-level investigation into the impact of policy tool design on the seven indicators identified but did not enable the detailed micro-level review that was concerned with the capturing the views of individual targets of policy. It can be described as non-reactive as it was not written to address the project’s specific research questions (Bryman 2001).

In order to deepen the understanding of the impact of policy tool design and selection, a body of reactive data needed to be collected. The documents being reviewed up to this point had been written ‘in order to convey an impression, one that will be favourable to the author and those they represent’ (Bryman 2008, p. 527), thus form a separate documentary reality. For this reason, relying on these records alone would have limited the inquiry into the underlying realities for target populations so additional research tools were developed in the form of questionnaires and interviews to generate supplementary data for the inquiry.

Given the extensive range of data gathered that needed to be reviewed as well as the extensive use of classifications and categorisation within the first generation policy design models (Hood 1986, Howlett 2000) thematic analysis was the principle analytical tool used to organises, describe and search for patterns in data in order to facilitate interpretation (Boyatzis 1998). This form of qualitative analysis was used
extensively as it produces accessible results while accommodating multiple types of interpretation, highlighting similarities and differences in the data as well as being flexible and enabling rich descriptions (ibid). While the policy tool design models identified were utilised to guide the presentation of this work, thematic analysis was utilised at several points in the research in order to manage the volume and complexity of the data. Key points at which thematic analysis was used were:

- When deciding the overall themes for the research. This involved a review of an extensive array of materials generated internationally, nationally and locally to decide how broad or narrow the research should be. Key themes were evident based on the research questions, such as a focus on ECEC in Ireland and children’s rights within that context and the seven indicators selected were used to put parameters on the review. However, as much of the focus within Irish VCO reports was on ensuring that social inclusion targets were treated equitably in the terms of access, affordability and quality (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2008, Dublin Inner City Partnership 2008, Irish Childcare Policy Network 2008, PLANET 2008) the decision was made to include this issue as a key theme. This in turn impacted on the decision about which models to select to answer the research questions.

- When identifying themes to guide the development of the questionnaires (Appendix A). VCO documents and newspaper articles were reviewed to determine a range of issues and possible outcomes from intended changes to the design of the ECEC Social Inclusion Measure.

- When reviewing the outcomes of questionnaire results and interviews to identify actual outcomes and impacts to include in the findings. Questionnaires were
designed with themes so that the sixty-two completed questionnaires could be analysed easily using SPSS software. However, issues identified during the nine interviews were more varied and a manual review of each of the interviews was required to identify themes that were common to all as well as themes that were unique to individual Managers.

While many of the decisions made, including the selection of research methods, may appear to be influenced by a pragmatic world view in which the researcher uses whatever works to drill down through the various layers (Creswell and Clark 2006), the decisions around the design of the research tools were considered and a strong advocacy and participatory element incorporated into the data generation phase (Fischer 1993; 2009).

6.7 Generating new data using an interpretive approach

An interpretive approach to identifying what is real was a natural fit within the constructivist position adopted. The interpretive researcher is interested in a ‘syntheses of understandings’ that come about by combining a variety of understandings to put together a single explanation (Rubin and Rubin 2005, p.29). Within interpretivist methodologies there is an increased focus on participation and meaning making from the perspectives of policy targets (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Yanow 1997; 2000; 2006) and seeking their views around decisions affecting them (Robson 2002). Methods were employed to ensure a participative element to the data collection techniques.

Critical theorists aim to discover and rectify societal problems by empowering the oppressed but they explicitly take sides by studying underdog groups in the pursuit of
tackling oppression (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Yanow (2000) offers an alternative to this standpoint. Within the interpretivist tradition it is recognised that the researcher is non-objective however, they can take the role of translator rather than advocate so that the voices of policy targets can be involved in the policy conversation about problem definition and identification of possible solutions. It was this alternative role that was adopted by the researcher during the data generation phase of the project.

When generating data for the illustrative example, the research sought to identify ways to illicit the views of parents and community Childcare Service Providers (CSPs) and ‘to accord legitimacy to the local knowledge possessed by actors’ (Yanow 2003, p.10). This element of the research was an attempt to ‘challenge the approach, that speaks of the ‘targets’ of public policies, that treats persons on whose behalf policies are crafted as if they lacked agency’ (ibid 2007, p.111). A participative approach to generating data was selected to support the work and models developed by Schneider and Ingram’s (1990, 1993, 1997, 2005) which highlighted the different constructions of various target groups in terms of deservedness.

6.7.1 Selection decisions

The replacement of the Staffing Grant social inclusion measure with the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme was one of the most significant changes to policy tool design during the course of the research. It drew attention to how policy tool were being designed for social inclusion policy targets and raised the issue of whether these revisions in design would address or perpetuate inequalities within Irish society.
The development of the CCSS gained the attention of the media and caused VCOs to initiate a campaign to critique the proposed design as they anticipated a range of negative impacts on policy targets if the scheme proceeded as planned. This meant that there was a body of evidence in existence that could be utilised to inform and guide the study. VCO reports prepared by The Dublin Inner City Partnership (2008), the DCCC (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2008), PLANET’s (2008) Children’s Policy Group, which is a network of Area Partnership Companies and Irish Childcare Policy Network (2008) as well as a range of newspaper articles were reviewed in order to identify a range of impacts from the proposed policy tool design change. A questionnaire was then developed for parents and a set of semi-structured interview questions prepared for CSP Managers.

The researcher restricted the application of questionnaires and interviews to the Dublin City area for practical reasons. It had a concentrated number of services so travel to each was convenient. It also had a significant number of community services located within the city due to the high levels of urban deprivation. Dublin City’s population was 505,739 in 2006, with over 105,000 children under the age of 16 of which 36,288 are six years old or under (Haase 2008, p.1). While Dublin City accounted for 11.9% of Ireland’s national population, the above average concentration of pockets of economic and social disadvantage was reflected in the high numbers of designated areas of disadvantage under Area Development Partnership and Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) programmes. Seven of the 38 Area Partnership companies were located in Dublin as well as eight of the 25 RAPID programmes (DCCC 2006, p.12).
Efforts were made to ensure a geographic spread across the city when identifying CSPs for inclusion in the research so that a wide representation of city experiences was captured. The five administrative areas of the city were used as a guide and two service providers were selected in each of the areas. The researcher’s knowledge and memberships of city level structures involving childcare providers was used to identify and recruit participants into the study. The two city level structures accessed were the Dublin City Community Forum’s Childcare Focus Group (DCCF/CFG) and the DCCC. The DCCF/CFG was the structure established at a city level to nominate the parent and childcare provider representatives to the DCCC. Four of the nine CSP managers interviewed were fellow members of the DCCF/CFG. These four CSP managers agreed to review and advise on the content and design of the parental questionnaire. The remaining five CSP managers were identified by the DCCC. They identified a number of services in each area that was actively engaging with that they felt would be willing to participate in the research. The researcher then contacted them directly explaining the purpose, scope and methodology of the research. All but one service provider agreed to participate. Consequently, only nine managers were interviewed but one manager was responsible for two services so they agreed to distribute additional questionnaires in their second service so that their administrative area was adequately represented in the survey.

There were 62 surveys completed from a total of 80 distributed (eight in each service). Managers identified parents they felt were most likely to complete and return questionnaires. Time constraints of providers and availability of parents were the key reasons for not completing all questionnaires within the 2 week time frame given to
providers. Responses were distributed amongst the five administrative areas with an average response rate of 78%.

Table 6.2 Survey response rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Area</th>
<th>Area One</th>
<th>Area Two</th>
<th>Area Three</th>
<th>Area Four</th>
<th>Area Five</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Responses</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Rate</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Parents accessing services in this study fell into one of four bands displayed in Table 6.3: ‘Band A’ parents were in receipt of a welfare payment and entitled to a full subsidised place; ‘Band B’ parents were in receipt of Family Income Supplement payment or certain state training schemes so received a lower subsidy rate; ‘Band C’ parents held a medical or GP card and received the lowest subsidy rate; while ‘Band D’ parents received no subsidy.

Table 6.3 Community Childcare Subvention Rates paid to Community Service Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add €30 per full-time baby reduced pro-rata</th>
<th>Band A</th>
<th>Band B</th>
<th>Band C</th>
<th>Band D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Day 5hr+</td>
<td>€100</td>
<td>€70</td>
<td>€45</td>
<td>€0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time 3.5-5hr</td>
<td>€50</td>
<td>€35</td>
<td>€22.50</td>
<td>€0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter hours 2.25-3.5hr</td>
<td>€33</td>
<td>€23</td>
<td>€15</td>
<td>€0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Session less 2.5hr</td>
<td>€16</td>
<td>€11</td>
<td>€7.50</td>
<td>€0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To maximise the response rate, the researcher visited each Manager and explained the rationale behind the research and went through the questionnaire and agreed on the interpretation intended for the project. In each instance, the researcher offered to administer questionnaires to parents in the centre but all but one preferred to administer to their own parents as they felt it would be less intrusive and easier logistically for
them to manage rather than scheduling interviews with the parents and the researcher. At the request of one CSP Manager, the researcher administered three questionnaires in one service as the Manager could unable to do so within the given time frame. This experience revealed that parents talked around questions, outlining their interpretation of the questions, before agreeing on a final comment or indicating which category to be ticked that best captured what they meant as accurately as possible. Experienced CSP Managers were able to capture these interpretations in the comments section of the questionnaires.

Each CSP was asked to recruit up to eight parents from a mix of CCSS funding bands with the result that the percentage of parents participating in the survey under each funding band, aligned very closely to national figures for parents being funded under each funding band as presented in Table 6.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Participation Rates</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Funded Under Each Band Nationally*</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Parents (n=62)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Information provided over the phone by OMCYA personnel 04/09

This method of data collection, in which the researcher was distanced from the parent providing the feedback, had advantages and disadvantages. As outlined by the CSP Managers, it was efficient, less intrusive for parents to deal with the Manager, and it increased the likelihood of a high response rate. An obvious disadvantage was that CSPs would select parents that would present a view similar to the manager thus
limiting the voice and meaning of policy targets. To counter this, managers were asked to be conscious of this and try to mitigate against this bias. They pointed out that based on their local knowledge of the situation and the parents they worked with, that parents selected were representative of views being presented to them by parents. Also, the researcher missed the opportunity to view and capture the spoken and nonverbal language that personal administration of the questionnaires offers. This would have facilitated a more complete understanding of policy targets as interpretive research focuses on “values, beliefs, and feelings as a set of meanings, and … human action as expressive (of meaning)” (Yanow 2000, p.ix). However, the researcher felt that this element of the research was minor relative to the scope and breadth of the overall thesis and that the time and resources needed to extend to focus on language and behaviour was unjustified.

6.7.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data from parents (Appendix B). Many closed questions were asked and the Likert Scale was used to develop a sense of what parents’ feelings and thoughts were on various issues. As these techniques are grounded in positivist traditions that facilitate measurement of results, the outcomes can possess an artificial sense of precision (Bryman 2001). A series of open ended questions were included that enabled respondents to add comments, thus providing a context of understanding that provided insight into parents’ interpretation of the questions, thus shifting a static view of social life that emerges when relying solely on quantitative data to one that provides more insight into people’s everyday lives.
The CSPs Managers took responsibility for ensuring all parents were informed about and signed consent forms and for collecting data via the questionnaires. In most cases, the Managers administered the questionnaires and discussed answers with parents. In other cases, the questionnaires were distributed and returned without review by the Managers. It was evident in one area where the CSP manager was actively, rather than passively, involved in data collection, the quality of responses and response rates were higher. In Area One there was a 100% response rate in one centre, where the manager administered the questionnaire discussing them in detail with parents. This contrasts dramatically with the second service in the area which had a response rate of 38%. In this instance, the manager distributed questionnaires and parents could voluntarily return them. The manager in the first service was known to the researcher and enthusiastically promoted and encouraged the parents to participate while the manager in the second service was not known to the researcher and did not demonstrate a strong commitment or interest in the research which may have impacted on the levels of response in the service.

The data collected was organised using SPSS software allowing a very prompt generation of summary headline results. While predominantly quantitative in nature, it was to provide adequate information that could be further explored with CSPs.

### 6.7.3 Interview design

A very flexible design strategy was adopted when interviewing CSPs as the desire was to develop and maintain a sense of mutual respect. The research aim was to enlist the CSPs to assist in exploring the issues that had arisen from the questionnaires and to use
these as the context in which they would explore the issues they were encountering with the CCSS.

The researcher also paid particular attention to where interviews were conducted. All CSP interviews were held on site at the Community Childcare Centres as it was their environment and most CSPs took the opportunities to show as well as describe situations to the researcher. In line with techniques outlined by Yanow (2000), and in order to facilitate an honest and undistracted conversation, no recording equipment was used and only brief notes were taken as ‘taking notes and using a tape recorder [are] equally intrusive’ (p.32). A brief topic outline was prepared in advance identifying three areas of discussion to guide the interview and notes were written up in more detail after the meeting (Appendix C).

In-depth conversations took place for an average of forty five minutes and these interviews were followed up with phone calls and emails clarifying interpretations and gathering more detail on topics that required further explanation. The first area of focus was on the fee structures before and after the CCSS. Even within this relatively basic area of inquiry, there were varying degrees of detail given that may have reflected the level of comfort the CSP Managers had in revealing how they decided on fee structures. Following this, Managers were asked to discuss the processes for introducing the CCSS and how they informed parents about the new CCSS. The results from the parent questionnaires were then discussed and the Managers identified a range of additional impacts relevant to their services, the wider community and national policy.

During the conversation the researcher would repeat back the key issues that had been discussed and the CSP Manager would concur or clarify the interpretation and when the
researcher believed they had final clarification a note was taken of the issue. After each interview a summary list of key issues that transpired from the interview was typed up and sent back to the CSP Manager for verification, which is line with the practice of respondent validation (Bryman 2008, p.377). This is undertaken in order to test the credibility of the account captured by the researcher to ensure it correctly captured the social world of those studied (ibid). In some instances they made adjustments and reinterpreted the captured understanding to more accurately reflect what they meant. This co-construction approach was an integral part of the discussions and on-going feedback. This goes some way to realising a key aim of participative research which is to shift the sense of expert away from the analyst and acknowledge the importance of local knowledge (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Yanow 2000; Robson 2002). The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and mixed data obtained from questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis.

6.8 Ethics

Approval was granted from the Dublin Institute of Technology’s Research Ethics Committee for the data generation element of the research (Appendix D). The committee reviewed the overall research proposal, the questionnaire, interview questions, processes for gaining consent and providing advice prior to participation in the research as well as a general risk assessment and review of potential conflicts of interest. In addition, the researcher was very mindful to manage expectations of research participants about what could be accomplished by participation in the research. CSPs are frequently asked to participate in consultation but increasingly there is a sense of cynicism developing amongst the consulted that it is a fruitless exercise as nothing changes as a result of their input (Murphy 2002).
This could have been further compounded as the findings generated for this research project were not accessible to other practitioners or participants within a short time frame as the rigours of the PhD process needed these findings to be peer reviewed and await publication. Miller and Salkind (2002, p.63) describe the tension that practitioners as researchers encounter as follows:

*Academic researchers are usually under rather heavy pressure to publish their work with scientific standing. Patterns of hypothesis testing based on guiding theory must then be followed. This requirement will influence the design towards basic research standards, but the demand for practical policy guidance will always be a strong opposing pull.*

The researcher was aware that many of the CSP Managers saw the researcher as DCCC Board member, or practitioner, rather than researcher so expectations that findings would be quickly available needed to be managed. The researcher discussed the process of academic research and outlined how findings would be presented at conferences, both nationally and internationally but the information would not be used by the DCCC for advocacy or lobbying until research was published through a peer reviewed channel. The researcher also asked the DCCC Board to minute the request for access to information and the consent thus given to access research prepared for DCCC by Partas as well minutes of the Board.

As part of the process efforts were made to provide opportunities for empowerment of the CSP participants through an increase in knowledge, a potentially transformative process that again sits within the realm of political action (Bensimon, Polkinghorne et al. 2004) by forwarding information such as DCCC’s *Policy Position Paper* (2009) and copies of published articles and conference presentations containing information gained from the data generated for this research.
6.9 Validity and credibility

‘The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, [and] perspectives ... in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry.’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.5)

While the research had a predominantly constructivist ontology it was not without its positivist tendencies. The criteria that have emerged for evaluating the quality of constructivist research focus on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This is a move away from the more traditional positivist criteria of external validity, reliability and objectivity (Becker and Bryman 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Bryman 2008). Due to the mixed nature of the research, elements of both are necessary to test the quality of the research work with a techniques identified that test the credibility, transferability, dependability, validity and objectivity of the research.

The bricolage facilitated triangulation rather than verification (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) through the application of multiple theoretical models and a review of a wide set of artefacts (Yanow 2000) including letters, minutes from meetings, leaflets, web-based discussion boards as well as reports, policy documents and scholarly materials.

Triangulation was also achieved through a use of a multi-method approach that captured qualitative and quantitative data, through the macro and micro level review as well as the use of comparative elements within the research. It reflected an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of policy tool design and selection in Ireland, thus strengthening the credibility of the research.
While elements of the research may be difficult to replicate, such as the CCSS evaluation with parents and CSPs, as much of the information captured was time specific, the research gives rise to *moderatum generalisations* that emerge where they ‘can be seen to be instances of a broader recognizable set of features’ (Williams 2002 in Becker and Bryman 2004:250). These patterns can be incorporated into theories that can be used as guidelines or comparison in similar situations thus allowing a certain level of *transferability*.

The criteria for classification are outlined throughout the research in order to be as consistent and transparent as possible in order to make visible the inevitable *inferences* (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2008) that were continuously made throughout the process. As well as the usual techniques of transparent and accurate record keeping and presentation of information to peers, additional processes were developed to meet the quality criteria in order to increase the *dependability* of the research. Quantitative statistical data, such as the percentage of service providers included in the research or the numbers of children directly affected by quality initiatives, are presented throughout the research to contextualise information giving a sense of the scale of a problem. This helps to *validate* the information being presented. *Reflexivity* was used to address the issue of *objectivity*, bias or influence while *respondent validation* was used to verify that information captured in interviews was a reflection of interviewee’s views. Collaboration with the CSP Managers at several points was a deliberate strategy to dilute the influence of the researcher and increase the participation of the Managers in order to *confirm* and *interpret* finding.
6.10 Conclusion

The final three research questions that emerged focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of current policy tools in realising all policy goals, including the values being promoted; the identification of recommendations to more effectively realise rights and ECEC policy that benefits children and realise positive values promoted by state policy; and the opportunity to assess the accuracy of the information presented in reports prepared by VCOs. Addressing these questions required elements of *exploration, explanation, evaluation* and *prescription*. The theoretical models selected to address the first two questions have emerged from diverse background and have followed different trajectories in terms of their fit within the prescribed epistemological perspectives that range from positivist to constructivist.

Three distinct research elements were presented. Through a review of existing documentation a macro-level review of non-financial ECEC policy tools was conducted before a more detailed investigation of the financial policy tools followed. New data was generated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to carry out the final research element, an illustrative example in which an in-depth micro-level review of ECEC subsidies in Ireland was carried out.

The findings and recommendations contained within this research emerged from a multi-level investigation utilising a variety of models, each with a unique focus within the field of policy tool design. As such, a *bricolage* (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) of pieced-together representations emerged in which an eclectic mix of findings encompassing both qualitative and quantitative elements and sit comfortably together.
In light of the focus on equality and democracy within the research, data generation for the purposes of the *illustrative* example within the research was undertaken using a strong *participatory* approach. The involvement of participants was limited overall as it was acknowledged that this was a broad study of a considerable number of policy tools and as such some level of depth has been sacrificed. However, the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews served as simple, quick and effective methods of data collection. It resulted in the involvement of sixty two parents accessing community childcare services for their children in designated areas of disadvantage and nine Community Childcare Service Providers. Adopting an *interpretive* approach as described by Yanow (2000) during this phase, efforts were made to position the researcher as *translator* rather than *advocate*.

Overall, the research methods combine to enable the investigation of a complex set of data within a broad framework. As such, efforts are made to ensure the validity and credibility of the work by using techniques such as researcher reflexivity; comparative analysis, participant validation of results; triangulation of data; and making inferences visible.

The following chapter presents the context for the findings and discussions of this research. It takes a closer look at the unique political, social and cultural developments in Ireland so that policy tool choice can be better understood. It demonstrates the range of influences ranging from global to local and historical to present that play a critical role in influencing policy tool design decisions.
Chapter 7: Informational, Statutory and Organisational Policy Tools

7.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews and evaluates key informational, statutory and organisational policy tools impacting on ECEC and children’s rights in this context. This overview provides the context for the more detailed review and evaluation of financial policy tools that follow in chapters eight and nine.

An extensive range of policy tools were identified in Ireland that were designed to contribute towards the development of co-ordinated, affordable, accessible, quality ECEC services in which all elements of children’s rights were recognised. Since Ireland’s ratification of the UNCRC in 1992, the state can document plenty of activity in relation to implementation of policy for children however this does not necessarily mean that the activities yielded effective results.

In this chapter, the primary tools of the state are identified and presented for classification and evaluation. This chapter identifies key national policy tools but also consider two key international instruments, the UNCRC and the Lisbon and Barcelona targets, which have impacted upon the policy decisions in Ireland.

Following a review of the National Children’s Strategy (Government of Ireland 2000a), the Programme for Government documents (Government of Ireland 2007b; 2009; 2011) which detailed the operational plans that realise policy, and the Irish government’s Second Report for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (National
the following key policy tools were selected because of their impact on ECEC developments or children’s rights in an ECEC context and their relevance in an understanding of how the financial policy tools were developed:

- Referendum on the Rights of the Child
- Establishment of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO)
- Lisbon and Barcelona Summit Targets
- Creation of a Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs
- Organisation of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
- Research on children
- Statutory Instruments
  - Notification / Registration of Childcare Providers
  - Vetting of Childcare Staff
  - Inspection of Childcare Services
  - Child-Staff Ratios and Space Requirements
- Agencification
  - Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE);
  - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
  - City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs);
  - Pobal (formerly Area Development Management (ADM))
  - Atlantic Philanthropies

Policy tools were classified using Hood’s (1986) NATO model. Within this chapter the categories reviewed were the *nodality* or *informational*; *authoritative* or *statutory*; and
**organisational** resources of the state. The policy tools were then further classified using Howlett’s model (2005) as either **substantive** or alternatively as **procedural**. The latter refers to decisions about *how* resources were used and the extent of communication and participation with stakeholders within a networked environment. These tools ‘‘all act to guide or steer policy processes in the direction government wishes through the manipulation of policy actors’’, actions which provided insight into how the state managed relationships (Howlett 2000, p.424).

The classification and analysis of policy tools revealed details of the contextual environment in which funding programmes and services were consequently designed and delivered. If viewed in isolation, the findings in relation to each tool did not reveal a lot, but together they provided a more comprehensive picture of the behavioural trends of the state when dealing with children and their right to access, quality, affordable well co-ordinated ECEC services. This exploration reviewed the development of many of these policy tools over time giving a developmental view of how the picture in 2012 evolved, which provided an additional angle from which to view the state’s patterns of behaviour. The **substantive** tools were often overt and highly visible and portrayed a picture of significant activity and attention to the area while the **procedural** tools provided information about the less visible methods used to manage stakeholders, their roles in policy implementation, and international relations and perceptions.

The chapter begins by presenting the policy tools designed to realise children’s rights in general, as this provided the wider contextual details for the review of the ECEC policy tools. The children’s rights tools are discussed and a summary of the general findings and discussion are presented before moving on to a review of the five categories of ECEC policy tools. As the final two categories, the statutory instruments and
agencification, have a range of sub-sections, summaries are presented at the end of each of these sections. The chapter concludes with an overall review of how the design of the policy tools impacts on the three elements of children’s rights and the childcare trilemma and the overall co-ordination of the area.

7.1 Policy tools selected under the Children’s Rights heading

The UNCRC is a key policy tool driving the children’s rights agenda internationally however, the impact of the UNCRC in Ireland has been minimal. The key obstacle to its comprehensive implementation in Ireland has been the need to revise the position of children contained within the Irish constitution (Kilkelly 2007; Children’s Rights Alliance 2010b). The proposed solution was the passing of a referendum on children’s rights (Government of Ireland 2007b), so, the state’s actions in relation to this were also considered in this section.

The Irish government’s Second Report for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (National Children's Office 2005) outlined key developments in the state up to that period. These included the launch of the National Children’s Strategy, the establishment of the National Children’s Office (which was subsumed into the OMCYA/DCYA), and the creation of the post of Minister for Children and the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children (Lalor, de Róiste et al. 2007). The journey towards the creation of a Ministry for Children, which included the establishment of the National Children’s Office, is reviewed later in the chapter under the ECEC heading, but the National Children’s Strategy’s goal of establishing the OCO is explored here under a Children’s Rights heading.
7.1.1 UNCRC

The most significant and authoritative policy tool to be considered under the children’s rights heading is the UNCRC itself. The UNCRC in Ireland has been described as soft law as:

*Ireland has not incorporated the CRC into domestic law, despite recommendations to this effect. This means that the CRC is not binding law in Ireland and, despite its binding international status, its potential to directly inform law and policy is limited. Nor are the courts required to act in conformity with the CRC when interpreting law and policy. Apart from the CRC’s lack of status in Irish law, its principles and provisions are also absent from legislation in various areas.* (Kilkelly 2007, p.79).

So while it is a very high profile instrument, it has a only a moderate authoritative impact being considered only a ‘source of guidance and moral force’ (Greene and Kerrins 2008, p.226). However the procedural element of the monitoring and reporting process has provided the strongest mechanism for advancing children’s rights and attracting media and political attention to the issue. VCOs were invited to make submissions and these reports have had considerable significance attached to them by the UN (Keenan 2007) putting in context the State’s submissions which were written in a ‘promotional genre’ which aimed to ‘sell the government as successful in implementation of the Conventions’ (Kiersey and Hayes 2010, p.327). However, the state has been late in submitting its reports to the UNCRC reducing opportunities for VCOs to respond to submissions.

7.1.2 Referendum

The state looks to the passing of a children’s rights referendum, a substantive policy tool, as ‘Ireland’s progress in realising children’s rights is hampered by the terms of the
constitution through its ‘strong’ provision for the family’ (Kilkelly 2008, p.2). The Children’s Rights Alliance contend that this move will ‘reinforce this new societal view of children and set down a marker for us all: that every childhood counts and we have a duty to respect and protect the rights of children’ (2010b, p.2) as well as providing ‘the necessary legal grounding for all children (not just those in difficulty) so that everyone will have access to such things as a good education, good healthcare and a safe place to play’ (Children's Rights Alliance 2005). Despite constitutional change being ‘recommended in 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2006 by national bodies and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’ (ibid), an allocation of €3million for the referendum to take place did not happen until 2012 giving hope that the referendum may take place sometime in 2012. So rhetoric is strong but action is weak in this area.

7.1.3 Ombudsman for Children’s Office

The establishment of the OCO was a significant organisational advancement as it began the development of an infrastructure that would focus specifically on children. However, while the OCO has carried out research that devotes some attention to ECEC, its main area of focus has been on investigating complaints that were predominantly in relation to health and education for older children. The OCO has been involved in exercises to increase the profile of children’s rights, and examples of youth participation were evident in Ireland (Leahy and Burgess 2011), but the limited resources of the OCO has meant the office has focused predominantly on school aged children (Ombudsman for Children's Office 2010). The OCO continues to play a key role in the broader context of trying to increase the profile of children’s rights amongst children, the general public and statutory bodies but no specific brief or indication of a focus on early years’ services is evident.
7.1.4 General findings and discussion about policy tools to realise children’s rights

Overall, the state has invested in creating an organisational infrastructure through the establishment of the OCO although the scope of its work has been limited. It has been a highly profiled and commendable development that has enabled the state to promote (Kiersey and Hayes 2010) a positive picture of advancements in the area in its report to the UNCRC (National Children's Office 2005). However, the state has delayed dealing with the more significant and contentious issue of increasing the authoritative or legitimate (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007) power of the UNCRC and children’s rights under the constitution, the most significant barrier to realising all three elements of rights for children in Ireland (Kilkelly 2007; Ombudsman for Children's Office 2010). On the international stage, the procedural reporting arrangements of the UNCRC give voice to and empower VCOs reflecting a stronger commitment to ‘participative’ democracy than the Irish State which includes only small reference to the concerns and recommendations of the sector in its report to the UNCRC (Kiersey and Hayes 2010). This enabled the VCOs to present a more real picture of the lack of progress in realising the rights in Ireland (Keenan 2007). This international mechanism remains the key tool for advocates for rights in Ireland. The regular requirement to report and the media interest in the concluding observations of the UNCRC on Ireland’s progress provide the policy windows (Petchey, Williams et al. 2008) in which the opportunity for change increases. In an attempt to address late submission of reports, the state has committed to submitting a combined third and forth report in 2012 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012b).
7.2 ECEC Policy Tools

The range and scope of activities dealing more specifically with ECEC was extensive. Again, the international context was considered and a review of the international targets set for ECEC development within the voluntarist structures of the EU is presented first in this section. From there the incremental process of the creation of a full Ministry for Children was reviewed as it demonstrates how the profile of children has moved up the political agenda over the years. The development, organisation and operation of the ministerial office was investigated as it impacted considerably on the coordinating objective of the state in relation to ECEC development. The legislative approaches taken to enforcement in the area of ECEC shed more light onto the state’s NPM adaptation and the tendency towards minimising the number of areas in which actions were mandated, preferring instead self-regulation. Finally, an increased reliance on networked governance in the state drove the need to review the state’s strategies for utilising agencies and third parties to support ECEC development in Ireland.

7.2.1 International policy tools

The targets that the state sets itself in relation to participation rates in ECEC had been influenced firstly by the EU’s Lisbon Strategy, which aimed to make Europe the world’s most competitive economy, and then the 2002 Barcelona summit targets, which were set with respect to childcare in order to address gender equality issues and economic growth. Embracing the NPM model that looks to targets and other measurable outcomes (Hardiman and MacCárthaigh 2008), the Member States voluntarily agreed to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between three years old and mandatory school age (which is six years of age in Ireland) by 2010. They also agreed to provide childcare to at least 33% of children under-three years of age by 2010.
In line with NPM trends that shift away from command and control techniques (Boyle 1999) towards soft instruments, an Open Method of Coordination was adopted to monitor the Lisbon Strategy. It emphasised negotiation, active participation, consensus building and self-regulation rather than sanctions. Reviews of the Open Method of Coordination process revealed that it was not effective at instigating change in states which treated targets ‘as a routine administrative burden, not an opportunity for real debate and deliberation’ (Trubek and Trubek 2005, p.359). O’Donnell and Moss (2005) concluded that Ireland did not use the Lisbon targets effectively, seeing their tracking as an administrative task only. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) however, give more insight into the problem facing tracking childcare targets as it reported in 2011 that ‘[p]rogress towards these targets in Ireland cannot be measured at present due to a lack of Irish data’ (Central Statistics Office 2011). The targets in relation to childcare had become an informational resource for the Irish state in large part due to their voluntary nature of monitoring with no sanctions for non-compliance.

7.2.2 Ministerial Focus on Children

Following the ratification of the UNCRC, a Minister of State at the Departments of Health, Education and Justice with special responsibility for children was appointed by the Government in 1994 (Children’s Rights Alliance 1997), a substantive organisational policy tool. This appointment began a process of co-ordinating across departments a range of issues relevant to children, in response to comments by the UNCRC and the OECD (2006) about the lack of co-ordination. The status of this ministry was enhanced following a procedural change in 2005 when it was decided that the Minister of State for Children would attend cabinet meetings. While symbolically important little actual
power accompanied the position as the Minister had no voting right but it did provide the opportunity to influence.

The new Fine Gael-Labour coalition government in 2011 were to address this power deficit as a third procedural change was to result in the creation of a full cabinet Ministry for Children. The creation of this full ministry gave the new coalition government the opportunity to differentiate itself by being seen to demonstrate through its structures a stronger commitment to children than its predecessors.

Several key high profile events may have prompted the decision to create a full ministry. The publication of the Ryan Report (Ryan 2009), a report into child abuse in residential institutions, acted as a minor flashpoint that served to ‘condense political discontent’ and ‘attract the gaze of the media’ (Taylor 2005, p.6). It added to shortcomings already identified by the UNCRC Comment and OECD Start Strong report (2006). The use of procedural changes to increase the power and profile of the Ministry has enabled the state yet again to promote a positive picture of activity but tangible outcomes in terms of realising rights were not apparent. The former Minister of State with special responsibility for children, Michael D. Higgins, made the following point in relation to the appointment:

*The appointment of a full minister with responsibility for children and their welfare, to sit at Cabinet, can make a real difference, but the Minister has to be supported. ... I wish the Minister for Children every success, but stress that she will have to be groundbreaking in her approach. She will not be able to assume any automatic consensus for the radical establishment in a real sense of the rights of the child.* (Higgins 2011)
Higgins, since elected President of the state in October 2011, has continued to advocate for children’s rights so there is a level of political support available to the Minister to support any real political changes the Minister may wish to make.

7.2.3 Organisation and operation of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs

The development of organisational resources through which the Children’s Strategy (2000) and the Childcare Strategies (Government of Ireland 1999; 2006b; 2006c) were delivered was a lengthy and complex process. As far back as 1982, recommendations were made by the Working Party on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents, that the ‘Department of Health should have overall responsibility for childcare services’ (Government of Ireland 1999, p.104). However, responsibility for ECEC was to weave its way through several departments before it finally fell under the remit of the newly formed Ministry for Children in 2011.

The first National Childcare Strategy (1999) was the responsibility of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) as it fell under the equality brief of that department. The equality rationale for investment in childcare can be traced back to the Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women in 1993 in which they ‘[c]onsidered childcare from the twin perspectives of gender equality in the labour market and child protection and development’ (Government of Ireland 1999, p.105). In 1994 the Working Group on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents identified the ‘current absence of a national strategy for the general development of childcare provision’ and to a lesser extent, ‘the fragmentation of responsibility for child care issues at the level of Government as the principal reasons for inadequate provision of
childcare facilities’ (cited in Government of Ireland 1999, p.105) as key barriers that needed to be addressed by the state.

It was in 2001 following the publication of the *National Children’s Strategy*, ‘the watershed that allowed ... significant things to happen’ (Keenan 2007, p.75), that the *National Children’s Office* (NCO) was established to implement the strategy, to address the issues of *coordination* of responsibility and increasing the supply of childcare services. In 2005 the NCO was subsumed into the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) which looked to *co-location* as the primary *procedural* mechanism for tackling the cross-departmental nature of the children’s issues. The OMCYA was to focus ‘on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people’s participation, research on children and young people and cross-cutting initiatives for children’ (Department of Health and Children 2008, p.12).

The result was a complex arrangement where a number of sections from different departments were co-located to form the OMCYA unit which formed part of the Department of Health and Children. Following the creation of the full Ministry however, the following units were to combine for form the DCYA:

**The DCYA units that are part of the Department of Health and Children include:**

- Minister’s Office Staff and Advisor
- Child Welfare and Protection Policy Unit
- Childcare Directorate (formerly part of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform)
- National Children and Young People’s Strategy Unit (formerly the National Children’s Office)

**The following Units will transfer into the DCYA**

*Irish Youth Justice Service (Department of Justice, Equality and Law*
A range of procedural co-ordinating initiatives, such as the National Children’s Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG) and the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC), were also established. These structures remained predominantly invisible and closed to the policy-outsider so it was difficult to assess their role in relation to realising policy goals or children’s rights.

7.2.4 Research to inform policy

A key development has been the initiation of a significant longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland*. It is an important informational tool that captures information on children so that policy can be better informed. From the perspective of promoting the state’s actions in relation to children, this is an attractive policy tool as it is a well profiled and positively received initiative that is seen to address the need to capture data on children highlighted by the OECD (2006). The first publication from the research *Growing Up in Ireland* (Williams, Greene et al. 2009), attracted some media attention but the authors have expressed the view that it is ‘disappointing that things have not improved much for mothers who juggle parenting with paid employment’ (Wayman 2010), so despite the high profile of the reports little impact on policy was evident.
Another informational policy tool was *The State of the Nation’s Children* (OMC 2006; OMCYA 2008e; 2010b), a biennial series of reports prepared by OMCYA\(^7\) in association with Central Statistics Office and the Health Promotion Research Centre of the National University of Ireland, Galway. These reports track key indicators of children’s well-being. While a very positive step, criticism of the limited range of indicators was made by VCOs highlighting the inflexible and limited nature of the information gathered. The Children’s Rights Alliance (2006) was critical of the uncomprehensiveness of the indicators selected and the inflexibility of an approach that did not allow for indicators to be added. Barnardos were critical of the type of information contained in the reports:

> Apart from figures on the numbers of children in care, referred to juvenile justice programme or immunised, the most recent *State of the nation’s children* (OMCYA, 2010) provides almost no information on children’s services or projects in its 252 pages. Even in areas where such a listing would be relatively easy to compile, information is poor. For example, there is no list of Springboard projects or their location, even though they are cited as models of good practice. (cited in Harvey 2011, p.16)

*Information provision* was managed tightly by the OMCYA. They utilised their website to provide information predominantly to service providers and had limited staff to deal with individual queries. Most information was disseminated via third parties as the OMCYA remain obscured in the main (with the exception of the Free-Preschool Year that will be reviewed in more detail in the following chapters). The OMCYA invested in some informational tools as they funded a range of research initiatives increasing the amount of academic research focusing on ECEC generated in Ireland. A review of the abstracts of the studies funded was presented on the OMCYA web-site and it revealed a

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\(^7\) The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) was changed to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in summer 2011. References made to the OMCYA refer to activities of the Department prior to its changed status.
considerable focus on children and gaining insight into their experiences, in line with national policy goals, but there was a marked lack of evaluation or critique of the implementation of state policy. As key funders who promote the research, it is unlikely that within the arrangement as described too much criticism will emerge into the future. Without building in processes for evaluation and reflection, the state can not learn from its past actions. It means reaction to and changes in response to criticisms, comments and recommendations by organisations such as the OECD and the UN are informed by a non-evidence based decision making process.

7.2.5 Legislative enforcement

The Childcare Act 1991, the Childcare (Pre-school) Regulations 2006 and the Childcare (Pre-school) Regulations Amendment 2006 were the key authoritative instruments that outlined areas of compliance for childcare service providers in the state. They included a focus on five substantive areas: notification of service providers with the Health Service Executive (HSE); maintaining child-staff ratios; provision of physical space requirements; vetting of staff; and inspection of services. In addition the establishment of a Childcare Regulations Implementation Group was a key procedural tool utilised to address the implementation.

(i) Registration of childcare service providers

In terms of notification, all ECEC service providers were required to notify with the Health Service Executive (HSE) as must childminders where four or more children under the age of six are minded (Childminding Ireland 2009). However, ‘the Regulations do not cover childcare personnel working outside pre-school care (those caring for 80 per cent approximately of children in day care)’ (Kilkelly 2007, p.51).
All childminders were encouraged to ***voluntarily*** notify to avail of tax allowances, grants and training however, the number of childminders notifying was very low. Childminding Ireland (2011) reported less than 700 of its members were notified nationally while an estimate based on CSO figures\(^8\) (2006; 2009) reveals there could be over thirty thousand children accessing home-based care. In addition, the regulations do not apply to any after-school services.

(ii) **Vetting of childcare staff**

While compulsory vetting of staff working with children was a very welcome development, the *procedural* complexities of the process caused a series of practical problems for services providers. In February 2011 it was taking up to four months for staff to be vetted because of a backlog (National Children's Nurseries Association 2011b). A contributing factor was that vettings were non-transferrable so individuals needed to be vetted for each organisation they work, visit or volunteer with if in contact with the children. This inefficiency also created significant recruitment difficulties as staff could not be hired until the vetting had been completed but with a wait of four months, potential employees for practical reasons could seek alternative employment. Research conducted by the DCCC (Partas 2011) revealed the frustration of service providers at what Hardiman and MacCárthaigh (2008, p.17) described as the public servants loyalty to traditional values of ‘procedural correctness’ rather than the NPM consistent values of *flexibility*.

\(^8\) The Central Statistics Office 2007 *Quarterly National Household Survey* reported 12% of the total number within the sample were being cared for by a childminder/au pair/nanny and with approximately 300,000 children aged five and under in the state according to Census 2006 the number of children being cared for in the state could be estimated to be approximately 36,000.
(iii) Inspection of childcare services

The Child Care Regulations Implementation Group was established to ‘provide a forum for key stakeholders in the sector during the initial period when the new regulatory requirements were being implemented’ (Child Care Regulations Implementation Group 2010a, p.1), reflecting a participatory approach to implementation. As the state aimed to ensure ‘that regulation does not become over bureaucratic’ (Boyle 2005) the criteria for inspections was not outlined in the regulations. These inspections were to be carried out by HSE childcare inspectors/officers. However, no criteria were evident within HSE literature requiring staff to have any ECEC expertise or qualifications. At least eleven of these posts had been filled by HSE staff who were previously Public Health Nurses and they were required to have a nursing qualification (Health Service Executive 2008) but this requirement was ‘applicable to Public Health Nurses only who [we]re appointed to the post of Pre-School Officer’ but ‘no national agreed eligibility criteria for the post’ was developed for staff being recruited from other areas (Labour Court 2010).

While a seventy six page standardised Inspection Tool (Health Service Executive 2009) was produced that covered all areas of the regulation, there was extensive discretion left to individual inspectors as to how to interpret the regulated areas. It was the role of the Implementation Group to introduce a standardised inspection process for the Pre-School Inspectorate of the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The National Standards for Pre-School Services (Child Care Regulations Implementation Group 2010b) were developed to give inspectors more guidance and ensure more uniformity of inspections. It widened and standardised the elements of
service delivery that needed to be inspected and drew from elements of the national frameworks, *Aistear* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009) and *Síolta* (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education 2006), that viewed children from a socio-cultural perspective with extensive rights. The *forward letter* published with national standards drew attention to the fact that regulations themselves had not required a high level of **quality** and outlined the aim of the newly developed standards:

*In developing this document, a conscious effort was made to ensure that the Standards would encourage providers to deliver a higher level of quality than is strictly required under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations.*

(Child Care Regulations Implementation Group 2010a).

While the aspirations to address the inadequacy of the regulations were commendable, the **procedural** discretion of the HSE to ‘determine the precise manner in which these Standards will be taken into account in the course of pre-school inspections’ (ibid, p.2010a) with no time frame outlined for adoption meant, once again, that implementation phase was subordinated to the more highly profiled phase of **document development.** The strong discretionary element to how and when the standards were used transformed them to become less **authoritative** and more of an **informational** policy tool with respect to the **quality** and **participatory** elements of the goals being reviewed.

So while the **Standards** aim to increase the focus beyond the regulations the original regulations remain the focus of the HSE inspectorate. In March 2011 an additional document was prepared **Child, Health, Welfare & Development Assessment Guide, Regulation 5** (Health Service Executive 2011a), which addressed specifically how each child's learning, development and well-being would be practically supported by service
providers. There were plans by the HSE to modify the original seventy six page inspection tool to incorporate this seven page in-depth focus on the development of the child with a view to ‘improving and becoming more transparent on how the HSE inspect and document the finding of the health, welfare and development of the child – Regulation 5’ (Health Service Executive 2011b).

While the range and number of reference documents childcare service providers were referred to increased, the attention to the quality element of the childcare trilemma also increased although the prescriptive checklist methodology adopted was unlikely to be effective. This positivist approach fails to capture the experiences of each child and demonstrates a weak understanding of the socio-cultural understanding of a pedagogical approach.

(iv) Child-staff ratios and physical space requirements

The child-staff ratios range from: 3:1 for babies; 5:1 for 1-2 years; 6:1 for 2-3 years; and 8:1 aged 3-6 in full-time or part-time services, was relatively positive as ‘[c]lassrooms with child-staff ratios of 7 to 1 or less scored significantly higher on a measure that primarily assesses the quality of the learning opportunities in the classroom’ (Gilliam 2010, p.6). While the basic requirements in relation to space requirements, which were a minimum of two square meters per child, and child-staff ratios impact on the key policy goal of quality, the regulations have been criticised for failing to adequately address this key issue.

O’Kane described how the original 1996 Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations focused on the structural aspects of settings rather viewing ‘quality in terms of process
variables’ (2004, p.232) with no attention paid to staff training. The variables identified included ‘Development of Child; First-aid; Adult/child Ratios; Class Sizes; Premises and Facilities; Equipment and Materials; Food; Safety Measures; and Insurance’ (ibid, pp.232-233).

The state had an opportunity to address this deficiency in 2006 when it developed and issued the new Childcare Regulations. Despite an assertion in the National Strategic Plan 2011-2013 Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes (OMCYA 2011b, p.2) that ‘[a] professional, well trained and competent early childhood workforce is fundamental to the provision of quality and developmental experiences for children’ this was contradicted by the actions of the state when they took a ‘retrograde step, which may yet serve to undermine the professionalism ascribed to at policy level. [which] has been brought about through the absence of a statutory training requirement in the revised Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations, 2006’ (Moloney 2010, p.195).

This point was highlighted by Schonfeld, Director of the CECDE, a year before the CECDE was closed, in an article in the Irish Examiner (2007) newspaper in which he states that:

*It is disappointing therefore that the new Regulations again don’t require any training or qualification of childcare providers, managers or staff. However, the “Explanatory Guide” published together with the Regulations acknowledges the importance of training and advises that “in centre-based services, it is considered that the person in charge should aim to have at least fifty percent of childcare staff with a qualification appropriate to the care and development of children. The qualified staff should rotate between age groupings.” This guidance is rather timid as it still avoids saying what “appropriate” means in this context and considers up to fifty percent unqualified staff in a childcare centre as satisfactory. The deliberate absence of any requirement for a minimum qualification does not represent good practice if compared to most other OECD countries.*
The revised regulations did ‘embrace the nine dimensions of childhood development as espoused in the NCS [National Children’s Strategy] (2000). This serves to firmly establish quality as a core principle of practice within ECEC’ (Moloney 2010, p.191). To realise this principle, high levels of competency, knowledge and skills would be required of staff but the Regulations required only that staff be ‘suitable and competent adults’ (Government of Ireland 2006a, p.6) rather than having to possess any specific child related professional training.

The link between quality and staff qualification has been well established (Sylva, Melhuish et al. 2003) with high quality pre-schooling being ‘related to better intellectual and social development for children’ while ‘those settings in which staff have higher qualifications have higher quality scores, and children make more progress’ (National Women's Council of Ireland 2005, p.42). The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2002) demonstrated empirically that the quality of nonmaternal caregiving was associated with cognitive and social competence. Through the use of structural equation modeling they were also able to show a mediated path from both caregiver training and child-staff ratio to quality of caregiving (nonmaternal) and then on to cognitive and social competence. They argue that “more caregiver training may lead to better interactions between children and adults, while lower ratios may lead to more interactions” (p.206).

Thus it is evident that adults providing such a quality service must be highly trained rather than just competent as outlined in the regulations. The level of professionalism needed requires significant training which needs to be rewarded adequately in a work environment if quality staff are to be attracted and retained within the sector. However, difficult with staff retention within the sector has been a major issue as staff are
frequently paid little above the minimum wage (National Children’s Nurseries Association 2008).

7.2.6 General findings and discussion in relation to legislative enforcement

The overall strategy of the state was in line with NPM trends to rely on guidance rather than direction through the development of tools such as the Explanatory Guide to address the quality issue rather than making specific demands in relation to staff qualifications. A key failing was that the regulations were applicable to a minority of children in ECEC settings as the majority of children were cared for in home-based rather than centre-based services.

Vetting of staff for services with children was a very positive move but the rules and staff shortages within most public sector departments and agencies dealing with the vetting process meant that the practicalities of trying to operate childcare services were complicated by delays. By excluding any requirements for professionally qualified staff within the regulations, the state ensures it had no part in driving up staffing costs and potentially reducing supply, which could have impacted upon an extensive private sector that the state had come to rely on to address the childcare problem.

This market approach, it has been argued, encourages business efficiency and a better balance between supply and demand, while extending consumer choice (Lloyd and Penn 2010). However, equitable provision within childcare markets is highly problematic, as parents pay for what they can afford and parental income inequalities persist or widen (Shlay, Tran et al. 2005). But a potential negative impact on quality extends to all children as an indirect consequence of the market approach as
demonstrated in the UK and the Netherlands (Lloyd and Pen 2010). Low levels of pay have increased the likelihood of high staff turnover with more experienced practitioners inclined to leave the sector (Ryan and Whitebook 2012). This loss of experienced personnel is critical as research in the UK demonstrated that more experienced practitioners tended towards a model of democratic professionalism in which work with young children was “relational, analytic and reflective, cultural and aesthetic, and drawing on broad, cross-disciplinary knowledge base” (Hevey 2010, p.164). Hevey goes on to point out that experienced practitioners have also been shown to demonstrate “professional autonomy and a mature democratic professionalism through their confidence to question and challenge practice and directives” (2010, p.165) which was in contrast to young professionals who lacked the self confidence or sense of authority to challenge or change practice or policies. The retention of experienced and skilled practitioners is an imperative if the ECEC in Ireland is to be developed in line with visions outlined in national policy and the national quality and curriculum frameworks.

Also, the range of documents dealing with inspection of services expanded to include an increased focus on quality but the systematic and bureaucratic approach revealed a limited understanding of the socio-cultural concepts of children and childhood meaning the participative element of children’s rights would be difficult to realise.

Within these substantive tools a focus on the welfare or protection of children dominated. So the rhetoric of rights abounded within the policy documents but there appeared to be little statutory commitment to realising the rights beyond basic protection and welfare.
A review of the detail of policy instrument design revealed that procedural issues (such as the limited number of children covered by the regulations, delays in having staff vetted and the discretionary nature of implementing inspection standards), were not easily identifiable without a detailed review of the design of the policy instrument.

7.2.7 Agencification

NPM advocates a limited use of regulation to address the more subtle issues of implementation but the belief is that transparency, participation and trust within the network of actors combine to provide the most efficient and effective solution for the issue in hand (Macdonald 2005; Quinn 2007; 2008). This section considers the state’s strategy for engaging with other actors. Within this section there was a significant emphasis on the procedural decisions about how to manage the organisational resources within the new model of governance that was characterised by an increased range of actors involved in the policy process.

The state adopted a dual strategy in which it chose to utilise existing agencies as well as establish new agencies. The existing agencies included Pobal (formerly Area Development Management, ADM) which was used to administer funding and provide technical support to funding applicants; and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which was contracted to develop a National Early Learning Framework, Aistear (2009). However, the OMCYA also established additional agencies or third party organisations including the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CDCDE) and a network of thirty three City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) located in each of the local authorities areas in the state. It was to utilise the CECDE to develop the National Quality Framework, Síolta (2006).
before it was shut down in 2008, while the CCCs were to join Pobal in extensive administrative support in addition to their own local area brief.

(i) The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

The CECDE was established in 2001 and was jointly managed by the Department of Education and Science and Dublin Institute of Technology. The key task of the agency was the development of Síolta, *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education 2006). It was developed using a process of extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders including practitioners and academics (Duignan, Fallon et al. 2007). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) worked closely with the CECDE to publish a consultation document *Towards a framework for early learning* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2005). Following another round of extensive consultation, the final document, *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was published in 2009.

While research and consultation were key features of the development of both national frameworks, the same level of commitment to dissemination and implementation was not evident. The IPPA and the NCNA (National Children’s Nursery Association)\(^9\) were contracted by the state to provide a limited number of information sessions in relation to Síolta and Aistear as well as the *Regulation 5* changes that were introduced in September 2011.

\(^9\) The IPPA and the NCNA will merge to form the Early Childhood Ireland in 2011
The need for third party membership organisations to *interpret* literature produced by the state and provide information on the numerous policy initiatives, funding programmes emerging and complex rules and regulations attached to each was high. IPPA and NCNA reported a combined membership of 3,200 (Irish Preschool Play Association 2011; National Children's Nurseries Association 2011a) while the state reported in excess of 4,500 childcare service providers in the state\(^{10}\) in receipt of funding revealing that a majority of services sought membership from one or other of the organisations. While this offered a clear opportunity for advocacy, IPPA and NCNA relied not just on membership fees but on a significant amount of funding from the state leaves them vulnerable as there was evidence within the sector of funding withdrawal from agencies that had been too critical of the state’s actions (Kirby and Murphy 2009).

Both national frameworks have been described as embracing a construction of children as rights bearers with the features of agency and competency advocated within a socio-cultural perspective (Brennan 2009; Moloney 2010). However, ‘in spite of the seminal nature of the National Children’s Strategy, Aistear and Síolta … little progress has been made in terms of adequately resourcing the ECCE sector to enable the vision espoused in these initiatives to become a reality’ (Moloney 2010, p.195). There was also significant concern about the capacity within the sector to adopt the new frameworks (Palaiologou, Walsh et al. 2009).

However, the role of the IPPA and NCNA in the sector into the future is likely to change given their merger, a rationalising move supported by the state. The IPPA have been instrumental in advancing issues that focus on children and their right to *play* with a strong representation of sessional and playschool services amongst their membership.

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\(^{10}\) Personal correspondence with Pobal staff 7-10-11
The NCNA have a particular expertise and focus on supporting full day centre based services, particularly in relation to the more complex operational and management issues faced by service providers. The coming together of the two organisations offers the potential for building up a critical mass within the sector that can advise and advocate for change, however, there is also a danger that the strong focus on the child advocated in particular by the work of the IPPA (Irish Preschool Play Association 2010) may be subsumed by the prominence of practical management issues as an increasing number of service providers become dependent on state funding since the introduction of new funding programmes (reviewed in the following chapter).

Adherence to the frameworks was voluntary with the exception of children availing of state subsidised pre-school hours. The coverage amounted to approximately 60,000 (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2011c) pre-school children nationally for a total of 570 hour within a school year. This was not considerable when it could be estimated that up to 150,000 children (Central Statistics Office 2006; 2009) were cared for by people other than their parents and this care can span years, and up to 2,400 hour per annum.

As the majority of staff were required only to be competent adults a significant staff capacity gap existed in the sector if Síolta and Aistear were to be implemented. Another document, the Workforce Development Plan (OMCYA 2010c), was published in December 2010 that many in the sector believed would address this issue. It outlined a set of seven actions focusing on a range of coordinating activities, however, each of the seven actions include the word ‘should’ rather than will or must indicating the aspirational tone of the document. As with the quality frameworks, the state seemed to shy away from the quality issue as it would have required substantial investment to
ensure there was no adverse affect on **affordability** and **access**, an investment the state seemed unprepared to make.

(ii) **The City and County Childcare Committees and Pobal**

Pobal (formerly Area Development Management-ADM) had been actively involved in the administration of funding and provision of technical assistance to pilot projects funded under the original EOCP but their role was altered considerably following the establishment of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2002. In 2003 the Department commissioned a review of ADM and it concluded that:

> [t]he absence of Government responsibility for appointing the chairperson and board of directors of ADM is striking unlike the position for other semi-state agencies. This is an extremely unusual position for an agency with grant giving powers given that all funding is from the Exchequer or the EU. This was based on an original Government /EU decision in a period when the scale of funding was much smaller and the percentage of EU funding much higher (Indecon International Consultants 2003, p.iii).

In light of this, a new Board was put in place in 2005 that was politically appointed and ADM became Pobal. This resulted in reduced independence for Pobal as the state assumed greater control over membership and consequently operational issues.

The role of the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and the range of work they became involved with also changed considerably since their establishment in 2000. As with ADM/Pobal, the initial composition of the Boards of Management (BOMs) was prescribed by the state in the spirit of social partnership11.

11 ECEC VCO organisations were brought together and funded by the OMCYA/DCA to form the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC) incorporating Barnardos; Childminding Ireland;
Integration and cooperation were key objectives of the CCCs. Each CCC was required to prove their strategies against the corresponding City or County Development Board strategies which was ‘designed to be the key instruments in the move towards improved co-ordination at local level’ (Quinn 2007, p.9). In an effort to contribute towards the creation of more joined up government (Fitzpatrick 2003) all CCCs were encouraged to use integrated work practices and use their funds to leverage funds from the other board member organisations in order address local needs in the area of ECEC (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2003). In 2007 the Value for Money Review of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme reiterated the local development role of CCCs highlighting the need to ‘take on a more proactive role in identification of local needs and progression of appropriate projects, and in ensuring that services are adhering to standards in relation to quality provision’ (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007, p.79).

In 2011 the OMCYA also used procedural tools to modify the role of the BOMs in line with their strategy of using CCCs as an administrative extension. The OMCYA suggested the board membership should now:

reflect the principles that the range of skills held by Board members is paramount, with members selected on the basis of their skills rather than the constituencies they represent, and that the core responsibility of the Board should focus on organisational direction and governance. (OMCYA correspondence 2011)
Members were required to simply monitor operations and ensure compliance with statutory requirements applying to any BOM, their sectoral expertise no longer considered to be an important criterion for membership.

The history of the Dublin CCC BOM membership and meeting attendance would indicate a very prominent and active representation from amongst the NVCC and service providers. This may have appeared to the OMCYA be a form of capture (Singleton 2000) by parties that were at times critical of the state’s actions. These social actors would have been perceived to be social policy agents advancing principles based on ‘community values and empowerment of the individual’ (Quinn 2008:22). Despite the publication of a White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000) which endorsed ‘the policy-making role of voluntary and community organisations, [and] also affirmed their right to speak, to independence and freedom of action’ (ibid, p.28), the state was to use funding allocations and restrictions to reconfigure and disempower the sector. This was a procedural device typically used to restrict social networking (Howlett 2005). Organisations that had been critical of the state were closed down, such as the Community Workers Co-operative, while other had their funding restricted so much they were powerless to investigate complaints against the state, as happened to the Equality Authority (Harvey 2009; Kirby and Murphy 2009). The withdrawal or reduction of funding had been used as a tactic to ensure community action strategies that ‘conceives of community development within civil society as an activist realm that exists in tension with, but extraneous to both formal politics and the market’ and ‘seeks to change policy decisions by altering the balance of power’ (Geoghegan and Powell
2009, p.97) were discouraged or extinguished. This may account for the management of the CCCs to diffuse and extinguish dissent from within the ranks of the BOMs.

As funding became more mainstreamed and structured under the NCIP however, there was less discretion at a local level to determine how funds could meet local needs. CCC staff were increasingly relied on to assist in the administration of funding programmes and as annual budget cuts began being implemented during the recessionary years many of the CCCs, like DCCC, had to cut back on provision of soft supports aimed at development of the sector as staffing costs took up the majority of the budget. The ability of the OMCYA to delegate an increased administrative workload to CCCs addressed a pragmatic problem for the OMCYA as a public sector recruitment embargo introduced in 2009 posed difficulties in increasing internal staffing numbers to deal with the additional workload new funding programmes were generating.

Funding was also used to manage the various actors in the ECEC sector. Funding ceased to the CECDE once they had produced Síolta. The CECDE website is still in place with a message from the BOM that states:

*The closure of the CECDE will mean a significant loss of expertise and capacity to this important area of policy development and implementation and signals a disengagement from Government commitments to the early childhood sector and to commitments under educational disadvantage.* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2008)

The NVCC have had funding cut while simultaneously being enrolled to administer the Garda vetting process and assist in the roll-out of the national frameworks.
The procedural manipulation of financial policy tools was used to diminish the overall capacity of the sector to mobilise and network as there were few advocacy agencies or representative groups with the independent resources available to facilitate these critical actions. This politicisation of the funding regime in order to shift the focus of concern away from ‘redistributive justice and social change towards provision of services’, (Kirby and Murphy 2009, p.145) emerges as a strategy of the state.

The reaction to the changes affecting CCCs was very muted, with DCCC being one of very few CCCs that wrote to object to the changes in the Board composition, reflecting a ‘situation where the sector is muddling through the present while fearing the future’ (Wilding 2010, p.97). The dilemma for the staff and BOM members was that their own capacity to resist the shift in focus from quality and capacity building to administering funding was compromised by the level of financial dependence VCO members and service providers had on the state. Harvey details how those working in childcare ‘were told to cease criticising government if they wanted to continue receiving funding’ (cited in Kirby and Murphy 2009, p.144). As many of the VCO board members had experienced first-hand a disciplinary funding regime (ibid) that had been used to control the sector, they were reluctant to been seen to engage in any criticism of OMCYA decisions.

(iii) Atlantic Philanthropies

Ireland’s pre-disposition for partnership (Adshead 2008b) was evident as the OMCYA extended its management of organisational resources within the sector through the formation of a strategic alliance with the high profile and influential US philanthropic organisation Atlantic Philanthropies. The OMCYA became involved in activities like
co-funding a range of events and projects with Atlantic Philanthropies such as the €36 million Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) ‘which aims to prevent children from succumbing to the risks associated with disadvantage, as well as providing them with the resilience to overcome those risks by focusing on interventions which impact on the lives of children at critical points’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011).

Under Atlantic Philanthropies’ Children & Youth Programme it ‘promotes the value of prevention and early social investment in children’s lives, and seeks to advance children’s rights by supporting advocacy for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (Atlantic Philanthropies 2011). It was responsible for funding Start Strong, a VCO that aimed to advocate for the development of high quality ECEC as a right for all children. It also funded the Advocacy Initiative to look at wider challenges facing the VCOs in the community and voluntary sector in terms of capacity and opportunities for social justice advocacy.

A key strand of the methodology used by Atlantic Philanthropies was the involvement of government in their initiatives. They describe how:

*The creation of the Office for the Minister for Children (OMC) in the Republic of Ireland (Langford 2007) was ... serendipitous. The leadership and key staff in the OMC were in touch with developing practice in communities, including that supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies. This confluence of circumstances meant that the government was open to the programme. Senior policy-makers were concerned about improving public services, the lack of customer focus and the failure to make use of the evidence base.* (Little and Abunimah 2007, p.63)

Atlantic Philanthropies engaged a Logic Model that sought to provide ‘support for indigenous organisations to boost capacity in the country for service design, rigorous
evaluation and dissemination of results’ (Little and Abunimah 2007, p.62). The focus on service delivery dovetailed with an emerging managerialist logic of social service provision (Kirby and Murphy 2009) that the state envisaged for stakeholder in the sector. However, the commitment to the bottom-up approach of empowerment and Atlantic Philanthropies’ expressed aim to ‘fund advocacy organisations with the goal of moving children up the political agenda’ (Little and Abunimah 2007, p.62) posed a threat to the power balance that had been carefully managed to ensure a dependency culture and the development of ‘non-adversarial partnerships’ (Harvey cited in Kirby and Murphy 2009, p.144).

Singleton (2000) points out that in ‘political systems where state bureaucracies are well protected from outside scrutiny, we would expect to see both more cooperation and more capture’ (p.5). The risk of the state’s capture of the philanthropic sector was highlighted by Harvey (2009), but the bargaining power of Atlantic Philanthropies was considerable due to their international standing and the extent of the resources held by them, possibly making it more resistant to capture.

7.2.8 General findings and discussion in relation to agencification

Overall, the creation of the DCYA and the implementation of the National Children’s Strategy resulted in the creation of new structures as well as the expansion of the brief of existing agencies to incorporate the work of the DCYA. The production of Aistear (2009) and Síolta (2006) documents were key substantive developments in a journey towards the realisation of children’s rights to participation and addressing the quality element of the childcare trilemma however, little activity took place beyond document production. They were highly visible policy tools but a range of obscured complex
administrative arrangements and rules procedurally limited the adoption of the standards incorporated in the frameworks throughout the sector.

Agencies were utilised to assist with the increasing administration associated with an expanding range of funding programmes (that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter). In part, due to staffing embargos as part of the state’s austerity measures, the DCYA looked to both Pobal and the CCCs to take up the additional workload. When established first, both mirrored the structure of the national social partnership model but incrementally, the BOMs were reconfigured or captured to take on an administrative role and their role as representatives and advocates was curbed. The state used obscure procedural management of financial resources to ensure this position was maintained, while closing down agencies, such as the CECDE, which had been critical of the state’s performance. This strong management of relationships reduced opportunity for criticism or consultation extended beyond agencies dependant on state funding. The state established partnership arrangements and developed strong working ties with Atlantic Philanthropies, an independent and well resourced third party with a clearly stated aim to influence policy.

Overall, the complex administrative arrangements and relationships resulted in significant operational difficulties for childcare service providers as a strong emphasis on monitoring and reporting increased the hours spent on administrative tasks leaving less time for working with children in services. However, Atlantic Philanthropies funded several initiatives that were positioned to challenge some of the changes taking place in the sector but the financial dependence of VCOs on both the state and Atlantic Philanthropies within the sector leaves them vulnerable.
In the wider community and voluntary sector, initiatives driven by traditional advocacy agents, such as the trade union movement and individuals within the church driving a social justice agenda were involved in trying to challenge the neo-liberal methods and mindsets informing policy. *Claiming our Future*, a national initiative, hosted consultation events across the country in an effort to engage in a discourse about the type of society that should exist in Ireland. Similarly, *We the Citizens*, an initiative with a strong academic agenda to pilot and develop innovative and new methods of democratic participation and decision making, has tested a citizen assembly model. In addition, *The Advocacy Initiative* has been supported by the Centre for Non-profit Management at Trinity College to carry out research on barriers in the sector. Opportunities still exist within the ECEC sector to develop stronger links with traditional advocacy agents.

7.3 Conclusion

As can be seen, an extensive array of tools covering all three types of policy tools was developed over the past two decades. The substantive tools combined to paint a picture of how the ECEC sectoral infrastructure developed in Ireland while the procedural tools gave insights into how this growth and development was managed over the years.

There was much activity in developing organisational policy tools with departmental coordination as well as expansion and contraction of the network of actors being a focus of much work. The slow and incremental structural developments yielded positive results as the OCO was established as was a full Ministry for Children. However, the scope and power of these structures to realise rights for children or ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to the development of accessible, affordable,
quality ECEC services was questionable. The OCO had limited resources and no specified role in relation to realising the rights of children to access quality ECEC services. Until 2011 the Ministry had no voting rights and as such its creation was only symbolically significant.

In terms of the management of organisational resources to effectively realise the objective of increasing coordination, it was difficult to conclude that this had happened effectively. While the creation of a full ministry was symbolically significant and co-location was a positive and innovative step, it takes a considerable time for the various cultures within the various departments to merge. Whelan describes how ‘[s]tructural change is less important than overcoming the cultural barriers to operating across silos’ (cited in Quinn 2008, p.25). A set of specific skills are needed to deal with inter-departmental and interagency relationships that were not highly developed within the Irish public service (Hardiman and MacCárthaigh 2008). Structurally, the changes were complex but they enabled the state to report considerable activity to the UNCRC in relation to addressing deficiencies of co-ordination in the past.

In relation to the nodality or informational policy tools of the state, much work had gone into the production of documents and the commissioning of research. Investment in these areas enabled the state to maintain control over the generation of key data that could be accessed by analysts and scholars both nationally and internationally. The UNCRC was classified as an informational rather than authoritative tool and it will remain so until the passing of a referendum on Children’s Rights so that the constitution can be altered. Despite the extensive rhetoric on the subject and lobbying efforts of VCOs (Children’s Rights Alliance 2010a), frequent opportunities to hold the referendum were passed by, even since the establishment of the full Ministry in early 2011.
However, following the allocation of funding in the 2012 budget, hopes are high in the sector that the referendum may come to pass.

The key *quality* initiatives focused on producing *Síolta* and *Aistear* and were developed through contracting arrangement with third party agencies, a strategy in line with NPM approaches. Most activity focused on *document generation* with less attention being given to enactment of the content.

The *authority* or *statutory* tools were limited in number and scope with minimal standards being outlined in relation to welfare, which addresses the rights of the child to *protection*. However, separate structures were established to develop monitoring systems. Given the extensive agencification that took place in line with NPM trends, it would have been expected that the voluntarist monitoring structures would have been developed in consultation with stakeholders but this was not the case. The development of inspection tool kits was marked by concerns with administrative procedural efficiencies. For example, Aistear outlines the conceptual principles of ‘*Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking*’ (NCCA 2009, p.5) that should inform practice. Yet the inspection tool to monitor this was designed as a document with tick-boxes focusing on quantifiable results designed for inspectors with no background in ECEC. In an effort to address this, a *National Standard for Pre-School Services Full day care services* (Child Care Regulations Implementation Group 2010b) document was developed for inspection staff outlining how regulations as well as the principles in Síolta and Aistear could be monitored in practice. For example, under the heading ‘*Nurture and Well-Being*’ one indicator was that ‘*Children are listened to, communication is positive and eye contact is maintained [and] [s]taff respond appropriately to non-verbal cues*’ (2010b, p.14). The development of this
document was a positive step but no timeline or deadline was given for its implementation and plans exists that have since been outlined for expansion of the existing tool-kit to include more tick-boxes focusing on quality indicators.

The voluntarist nature of the Open Method of Coordination of international covenants meant Ireland was not obligated to keep step with the rest of the EU in terms of provision. A lack of data impeded monitoring and reporting, however, the state has sought to rectify this through the design of the financial tools (to be looked at in the next chapter) so that all users of services funded by the state were traceable, a move that would create a different set of negative impact for policy targets.

The state combined the range of substantive policy tools with procedural policy tools to manage various stakeholders in the sector with the effect that opportunities for advocacy or contention were minimised. In particular, the reduction of budgets to CCCs and the NVCC and attaching conditions on how the funding could be spent resulted in extensive disempowerment of sectoral stakeholders making networking, lobbying and advocacy activities difficult. As funding was reduced for all government departments since 2008, the funding rates for substantive elements of the work of the CCCs and the NVCC have remained somewhat intact but the informational tools, such as training and capacity building have been reduced. The strategic management of organisational resources and procedural management of funding streams enabled the OMCYA and indirectly the Department of Finance, to move beyond steering to prescribing a service delivery role for the agencies and members of the NVCC undermining their role and capacity as advocates.
Less visible and mundane procedural issues such as delays in vetting and the incremental development of standards and inspections tools resulted in practical problems for service providers such as: delays in hiring staff; increased administrative burdens; and the development of a non-pedagogical approach to evaluation and inspection of quality conditions. They also resulted in an increased need for and reliance on third party organisations to act as intermediaries interpreting information relating to quality and funding in what appeared to be a top-down approach to implementation despite extensive consultation in the policy development phase.

Ideally, in a networked environment such as the one existing in Ireland power should be dispersed through a process of negotiation in which compliance was ‘neither ensured by means of legal sanctions of the state nor fear of economic loss on the market’ but ‘through trust and political obligation which, over time, becomes sustained by self-constituted rules and norms’ (Sorensen and Torfing 2005, pp.197-198). The state’s reliance on procedural tools to manage stakeholders to focus on service delivery, restrict channels of advocacy and influence, and undermine attempts to cultivate a pedagogical approach to practice would appear to suggest the levels of trust needed to implement through networks as described by NPM theorists did not exist. The public service appeared to remains loyal to a system ‘built on hierarchy, discipline and adherence to the wishes of the political system’ (Quinn 2008, p.22) rather than trust, negotiation and respect.

This analysis is supported by the findings of Quinn (ibid, p.51) who identified political reasoning as a key rationale for agencification in Ireland. Senior public servants describing it as ‘anchoring your interest group without bringing them inside the tent’ providing the policy insiders with ‘a political space for government to stay away from
the consensus that may emerge’ (ibid, p.52). This was a similar strategy adapted to the preparation of the various documents. Consultative methods were used to develop the key policy documents as well as the national quality and curriculum frameworks that captured views to develop a kind of consensus within a fragmented sector. However, the weak and limited targets emanating from these documents reflect the real agenda of the state, an agenda that will be investigated in more detail in the following chapters. So, rather than the negotiations which would be expected in a networked environment, the state has very effectively used procedural manipulation of organisational resources to ‘ensure that governance takes place in the shadow of a hierarchy’ capable of reducing autonomy of the network (Scharpf cited in Sorensen and Torfing 2009, p.236).

On-going investment in highly visible and profiled substantive resources resulted in tangible outputs such as policy reports, agencies, or childcare places and enabled the state to continue to promote itself in a positive light to national and more specifically, international stakeholder (Kiersey and Hayes 2010). The less visible procedural resources were used in the background to manipulate and manage dissent and reduce opportunities for real democratic participation rather than realising the aspirational aims and objectives expressed in the state’s policy documents.
Chapter 8: The financial policy tools

8.0 Introduction

The categories developed by Hood (1986) and Howlett (2000) used to distinguish the policy tools thus far facilitate a review of a broad range of tools and techniques of governance. This provides the context for a more detailed review and evaluation of the state’s financial policy tools. Their distinct characteristics are identified in order to reveal the state’s strategy in terms of their preference for direct, visible or coercive tools or automatic tools where state’s rely on existing structures rather than creating new ones (Salamon 2002). These four dimensions give added insight into how ‘distanced’ the state wishes to remain from a problem, how vulnerable programmes are to budget cuts, how committed the state is to realising the goals of the state and the levels of reliance on third party governance actors. By looking at them in tandem, it is possible to identify whether a pattern emerges in terms of the states reliance on particular tool types with similar characteristics.

Reviewing the policy tools utilised over two decades, a period in which several tools were brought into being while others were discontinued, has facilitated a review of the state’s reactions to key events during that period. The state’s access to EU funding beginning in the 1990s was instrumental in enabling the development of dedicated ECEC financial policy tools under the EOCPs.

The second event that was to instigate changes to the number and form of policy tools was the reduction in the amount of EU funding available and the increased reliance on Exchequer funding that framed the NCIP covering the period 2006-2010. The major
focus of change during that period, which began before the demise of the Celtic Tiger, was in implementing changes to the design of targeted social inclusion measures and introducing a new universal mechanism to support parents in general.

However, the state had to reconsider its actions in relation to the level of funding for ECEC in 2008 with the sudden onset of a recession. The state was forced to become more focused in its approach to funding universal provision in order to save money, which saw the sudden announcement of an initiative to fund early learning as distinct from childcare, giving life to a dual or split system in which learning was prioritised over care. This was also a period in which increasing supply was no longer a priority and the focus shifted to managing demand.

The chapter begins with an explanation of why the tools reviewed in this chapter were selected. It moves on to review of the primary tools in place prior to the development of the EOCPs which were:

- Child Benefit payments (CB)
- The Early Start Programme.

It progresses to review tools following the introduction of EOCP (2000-2006):

- Taxation measures;
- Capital grants;
- Staffing grants;
- Community Employment (CE) Scheme, an active labour market programme (ALMP).
Finally, the chapter considers the newest programmes to be developed under the NCIP:

- Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) scheme;
- Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS);
- Early Childcare Supplement (ECS);
- Free Pre-school Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (FPSY) scheme;

Most of these tools were substantive by nature but a number of procedural issues were identified that assist in explaining the impact on policy objectives. Each tool was reviewed and an assessment was made as to its levels of visibility, directness, automaticity or coercion. Finally, a conclusion is presented outlining the trends within the design of the state’s financial policy tools and the overall impact on the rights of children to access well co-ordinated, affordable, quality childcare in the state.

### 8.1 Selecting the policy tools for review

The key criterion used to select tools for inclusion in the review was that they were managed and developed by the OMCYA/DCYA, however, three additional policy tools were included because of their political and structural relevance to the sector. They were Child Benefit, Childminder Income Tax Exemption, and Community Employment.

*Child Benefit* formed part of a range of child income supports managed by the Department of Social Protection. It differed from the other three income support instruments, the Child Dependant Additions, Family Income Supplement and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, as it had been referred to by the state as a key mechanism for supporting *childcare* costs, as distinct from the cost of raising
children or the cost of attending school, both before and after the establishment of dedicated ECEC funding streams (Sweeney 2007).

A review of tax incentives was also undertaken as they were promoted by the DCYA although administered by the Revenue Commissioners. While they did not cost the exchequer a significant amount of money, the focus on the *Childminders Income Tax Exemption* was important as more children avail of *home* based rather than *centre* based ECEC in the state. As such, a review of the state’s commitment to supporting this less visible part of the sector adds insight into the state’s level of commitment to supporting the sector overall.

Finally, the *Community Employment* (CE) Scheme was included as it was the single most important financial and structural support for *community* childcare service providers apart from the funding received from the DCYA (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003).

There were a number of smaller initiatives such as grants for research and parent and toddler groups, which were mentioned throughout the chapter as they were also the responsibility of the OMCYA, but they were not singled out as they are not *key* mechanisms. Table 8.1 below summarises the tools and the rationale for their inclusion in this review.
Table 8.1: Rationale for policy tool selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Tool</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Benefit (CB)</td>
<td>Tool referred to by the state as key mechanism for addressing the childcare problem both prior to and after the establishment of dedicated ECEC funding programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Early Start Programme</td>
<td>Although started prior to the establishment of the OMCYA/DCYA, now falls within the remit of the DCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation measures: Childminders Income Tax Exemption</td>
<td>Key tool available to childminders who make up the vast majority of ECEC providers. The OMCYA/DCYA actively advocate for the take up of the childminders income tax exemption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Grants</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Grants</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Employment (CE) ALMP</td>
<td>Key tool accessed outside the DCYA that ensures the sustainability of almost all community childcare service providers in the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS)</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA/DCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA/DCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childcare Supplement (ECS)</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (FPSY)</td>
<td>Managed by the OMCYA/DCYA.</td>
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</table>

Prior to EOCP
EOCP years
NCIP years

8.2 Policy tools prior to the Equal Opportunities in Childcare Programmes

The EOCP was the first significant direct investment in ECEC however, prior to its establishment the state referred to Child Benefit as a key mechanism that should be used by parents to deal with the problem. Within designated schools, work on developing intervention programmes began in the 1990s aimed at tackling educational disadvantage.
8.2.1 Child Benefit

Child Benefit (CB) was a *universal* payment to parents or guardians for all children under 16 years of age (or 18 if the child is in full-time education) with expenditure of €2.2bn in 2007 (Department of Social and Family Affairs 2007). The scheme was administered by the Department of Social Protection reflecting the origins of the payment which was poverty avoidance and to support the family as an institution (Daly and Clavero 2002). Since the 1990s the state has looked to the CB payment as the primary solution to the childcare problem despite recognising that parents did not always regard this as an adequate mechanism. The *Tax Strategy Group Papers* that were generated in the lead up to budget ‘99 argued that CB increases were a benefit to all families regardless of employment status but goes on to express fears ‘that an increase in Child Benefit may not assuage the feeling of many taxpayers that the system does not recognise the very real expenses which they incur and requests for recognition of families in the tax code would probably continue after any increase in Child Benefit’ (Tax Strategy Group 1998, section 6.11). Yet this did not deter the state from continuing to rely on it as a primary tool to address the childcare problem (Hodgins, Hogan et al. 2007).

SIPTU, Ireland’s largest trade union, declared that ‘[t]he decision by Government to fund childcare expenses with CB misinterprets the original purpose of Child Benefit’ (SIPTU 2005). This announcement was made following a series of dramatic increases which saw the CB rates jump from €43.82 per month for the first child in 1999 to €125.60 in 2003 in ‘response to several concerns, namely to reduce work disincentives for families reliant of social welfare, to support working parents with the cost of childcare and to recognise the value of work in caring for children in the home’
(Sweeney 2007, p.88). This served as a compromise between working parents’ childcare expenses and those who were seeking payment for caring for children in the home (Coakley 2011). The complexity of the debate raging at the time was captured by Montague (2001) as he described key policy coalitions each lobbying with a different agenda. These comprised of SIPTU and IBEC, the employers representative body, lobbying for tax relief; the Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative lobbying for child benefit increases and a Childcare 2000 campaign lobbying for a parental childcare payment; and a Women in the Home lobby group campaigning against tax relief. He noted that these divisions limited the overall capacity of pressure groups to influence change in their favour.

The attractiveness of the cash payment as a neutral policy tool may have influenced the decision to announce the creation of a second cash payment in 2006, the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) which is reviewed later in the chapter, for parents with children under six years of age. However, despite this new scheme, the state continued to refer to the CB payment as a principal tool of the state to address the childcare issue. In a speech the Minister for Children states that ‘[l]ike Child Benefit, the Early Childcare Supplement will support all parents irrespective of income or employment status’ (OMCYA 2006b). The Minister goes on to outline the role of these cash payments in addressing the goals of both family and childcare policy, making no distinction between them.

As you see from all of these measures, the Government is taking a serious and long-term approach to childcare based on the continued development of sound policies and substantial programmes of investment to ensure the future welfare of our children and to assist their parents in their daily lives. (ibid)
Politically, the state looked to cash payments as the optimum mechanism for trying to ensure that the state was not seen to favour working parents over stay-at-home parents (Daly and Clavero 2002). The levels of coerciveness in terms of supporting parents to access affordable formal regulated ECEC services for their young children were very low as no conditions applied to the funding to ensure it was utilised to purchase ECEC services, nor were any monitoring mechanisms in place to track spending to see whether parents were choosing to invest in ECEC. In fact, within the limited sample of parents questioned for this research, 70% (or 35 respondents) indicated that they did not save their child benefit to pay for ECEC services but it was:

*Just used for whatever*

*... clothes and food and household bills*

*... used to cover mortgage, bills, general household costs*

This may be taken as indicative of the behaviour of parents and reinforced the point that CB was considered to be a more general payment by a substantial number of parents, even those using ECEC services. The payment may indirectly improve the lives of children and increase access to and affordability of ECEC services for children but this could not be verified.

There was a political attraction to choosing to rely on an indirect policy tool which supported the reluctance of the State to engage in debate about the value of ECEC services to parents or children. The use of a cash payment ensures the state remaining distanced from the problem by allowing parents full discretion about how to utilise the resources provided. Ireland’s reliance on cash payments and service delivery avoidance
had been high relative to other states. Figure 8.1 below shows that in 2005 only Luxembourg and Austria exceeded Ireland in terms of the level of cash payments provided to support families yet it falls behind both in terms of service provision, suggesting family support was one of the policy areas the state experiences a limited service delivery capacity (Adshead 2008b).

Figure 8.1 Public expenditure on family benefits in cash, services and tax measures, per cent of GDP, 2005

![Figure 8.1](image)

Source: OECD Gender Brief (2010)

However, CB was a very visible tool as it represented the largest social welfare expenditure in the State (Delaney 2006). As a highly profiled expenditure item, CB featured significantly in debates about how to implement austerity measures prior to the 2010, 2011 and 2012 government budgets. The debate about the CB payments focused on whether to tax, cut or means test the payment as a reduction appeared justified because the original increases had been to support childcare and during austerity this
could no longer be supported (Coakley 2011). However, the rate changes have were not dramatic with a monthly payment of €140 still in place following Budget 2012, probably in large part due to the potential political fallout of adjusting this benefit for all families.

Daly and Clavero (2002) found that CB was “attractive to Irish policy makers because it … is neutral as regards the employment status of mothers (which is a very sensitive matter in Ireland)” (p.54) . This may have been a fallacy as research existed showing cash payments actually discourage women’s participation in the workforce (Lewis 2006), a result with would run contrary to national policy on employment and equality (Government of Ireland 1996; 2006d). The OECD (2006) also found that cash payments tend to encourage rather than discourage greater use of informal care, which was also contrary to national policy.

8.2.2 The Early Start Programme

The most significant programme managed by the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills (which was co-located within the DCYA/OMCYA following its establishment) was the the Early Start pre-school project, which was established in 1994 in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage. This social inclusion ‘project involved an educational programme to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. The total number of spaces provided by the existing 40 Early Start centres is 1,680’ (OMCYA 2011c).
The tool was high in *automaticity* as it relied on existing schools to deliver programmes, but continued to remain moderately *indirect* as the state did not provide the services directly although conditions of funding were such that they had to be spent on service delivery. Since the creation and growth of other ECEC services outside the school environment, there has been little progress made in unifying or merging the distinct education and ECEC systems. The split-system poses a challenge to the adoption of an understanding of pedagogical practice contained in the national frameworks that were produced to be applicable to all children, regardless of location. Moloney (2010) pointed out that it was unlikely that the frameworks would replace the subject-based infant curriculum used in primary schools in the immediate future (Moloney 2010).

Addressing the *education-care* divide within the sector was difficult as the power bases differed dramatically in terms of negotiating power and recognition rights at a national level. The demarcation in terms of areas of work within schools were protected by very powerful teacher unions (Harford 2009; O’Donoghue and Harford 2010) while those working in ECEC had no sectoral union. Limited numbers of workers joined general unions such as SIPTU, with the member recruitment campaign being led by the union’s Community Branch for workers in Community Services, rather than a sectoral branch for all ECEC workers. There was no evidence that the trade union movement had looked to New Zealand who in the 1980s established a dedicated industrial union that became a significant player in increasing the politicisation of childcare workers (May 2007). The strategy employed assisted in developing closer ‘integration of care and education in terms of government administration, teacher education and funding’ (ibid, p.133).
Levels of coercion were low as the participation of children was at the discretion of parents. Barnardos (2009) indicated that the need for services was not adequately addressed due to insufficient funding. Unlike CB, which had an open budget that adjusted to pay all those entitled, the Early Start Programme had a closed budget (Purcal and Fisher 2006), that limited access for participants and provided little motivation for the state to actively encourage participation of all those who could benefit. To date the Early Start Programme has been only moderately visible escaping substantial cuts but the targeted approach separates out the funding as an identifiable line item rather than being integrated into other budgets leaving it vulnerable for possible future cuts.

**8.3 The EOCP Years**

Having accessed EU funding in the 1990s the state had to decide which policy tools it would utilise. With little experience or interest in direct service delivery and a familiarity with partnerships (Adshead 2008b) the state looked to third parties to ‘address public problems and pursue public purposes’ (Salamon 2002, p.8). The state initially used pilot projects in which funds were granted to community groups to construct purpose built childcare facilities in designated areas of disadvantage as part of the wider regeneration efforts that were taking place. This enabled learning to take place before mainstreaming was embarked upon.

The *Expert Working Group on Childcare* (Government of Ireland 1999) recommended a combination of supply-side measures that aimed to increase the supply of regulated ECEC services, with demand-side measures designed to respond to the demands that existed for services. Despite these recommendations, the key focus of the EOCP that emerged was on increasing the supply of services, with only limited attention paid to
encouraging parents to use regulated ECEC services for their children. The provision of 
Capital Grants to third parties to build new services was the primary tool selected after 
the pilot phase and the one that most of the financial resources went into during the 
EOCP years. It was supplemented with Staffing Grants for services operating in areas 
of market failure and changes to the tax system as well as access to active labour market 
programmes.

The state had some prior experience in grant provision to the Catholic Church to 
provide key services, such as health and education. However, as will be seen, the state 
was to redesign and fine tune grants to enable them to manage the behaviour of network 
actors to respond to events impacting on the state.

8.3.1 Capital Grants

The state developed extensive skills in developing and administering grants as new 
mechanism of investment into the sector. This was an indirect tool that enabled to state 
to remain distanced from direct service delivery but facilitated the development of a 
range of third parties to undertake this task. However, the state was able to develop 
criteria for accessing funding so that it directed or steered the development of the ECEC 
infrastructure.

The main investment was in the development of community childcare facilities as the 
funding was drawn down under the equality brief that aimed to facilitate parents to 
return to work, education or training. The most visible mechanism was the Capital 
Grant that was accessed primarily by the VCOs with grants of up to €1m available to 
build ECEC services, although smaller grants were available to private providers under
the programme of up to €50,000. Grants were an attractive investment option for the State as they were once off investments; the budget could cease when targets were reached or the allocation was complete; or suspended when funds were unavailable. The availability of grants was to expand to include minor grants for childminders/home based providers and parent and toddler groups for less than €1000.

Approximately €500m was made available in the EOCP primarily through capital grants and almost 47,000 childcare places were created with almost 80% of capital funding going to community childcare centres (OMCYA 2008d). While the EOCP budget was highly visible it was not vulnerable as the state had committed to *match fund* the EU contribution. However, in the second phase of the funding programme, the NCIP 2006 – 2010, there was a reduced reliance on EU funding and the state gradually ceased providing capital grants.

While low level of *coercion* were a feature of the grants, as service providers had discretion as to whether to apply, the amounts involved represented a powerful incentive to stimulate participation in the scheme (May 2002). A major outcome of this programme was the extensive growth in the number of CSPs. Many of these groups faced challenges in terms of capacity to deal with large scale construction projects, legal requirements with regard to hiring of staff, compliance with childcare regulations, and so on (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003). There was a strong reliance on other local development programmes funded under different measures, in particular the Area Based Partnership companies, who provided extensive one-to-one technical assistance through their enterprise and social economy development activities.
Overall, the level of automaticity can be described as medium as the private sector (in the form of private contractor) as well as existing local development and local authority structures were drawn into partnership along with often newly established community childcare service provider Boards of Management. The building of childcare facilities was at times part of a wider local development project resulting in highly complex administrative arrangements, with projects builds going on for several years.

Their primary objective was to increase the provision of services for children and improve access for parents, particularly those located in designated areas of disadvantage. As a consequence it improved affordability for these parents as rent or mortgage costs for the services were reduced by the capital investment but quality beyond the basic requirements under the Regulations was not addressed.

8.3.2 Staffing Grants

As the CSPs were located in designated areas of disadvantage, or areas of market failure, where many parents could not afford to pay the market rate for services (Keenan 2008) the issue of sustainability was always a concern. The conditions of funding for the capital grant were that services had to commit to being sustainable within three years, a condition that was impossible to achieve even where capital grants had reduced rent or mortgage costs as the most significant cost for service providers was labour. The state was to address this issue as it would have been politically dangerous to have invested so significantly into a very visible infrastructure of purpose built facilities that had become non-operational.
The staffing grant was developed to pay for up to three full time staff in a community service. This was a supply-side or operational subsidy as the payment was made to the service provider regardless of demand for services (Purcal and Fisher 2006). The CSP designed their fee schedule to facilitate access to local parents returning to work, education or training as this was a requirement of the funding.

As a percentage of the EOCP budget, the amounts paid in staffing grants were not substantial, with reported expenditure of approximately €200 million over a three year period (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003), making visibility low. It was indirect as third parties are relied on to deliver services with little direction.

As the state had such a significant role in supporting and expanding the community and voluntary sector through a variety of different programmes, the levels of automaticity were moderate rather than high as the sector could not have survived without state support. Although application was voluntary, few services could survive without it so coercion was relatively high, although indirect. Overall, this grant had a positive impact on all three elements of the childcare trilemma as it improved affordability and access for parents while also partially addressing quality of service for children through the provision of funding for qualified staff. However, this was only one policy tool used to address the sustainability issue as it was inadequate by itself in addressing the significant financial needs of the services and the populations they served.

8.3.3 Community Employment Active Labour Market Programme

An equally important tool for CSPs was gaining access to labour through another social inclusion measure, the Community Employment (CE) Scheme, an Active Labour Market
Programme (ALMP). The CE ALMP enabled qualifying adults in receipt of welfare payments to work and train in a community based service or activity. Figures provided by the Minister for Social Protection for December 2010 revealed that over 23,000 people participated on various CE Schemes costing the state in excess of €93 million (Dáil Debates 2011) making this a highly visible scheme and one which was also politically vulnerable as it catered for categories of people with low political power. While the scheme has come under scrutiny in a drive to reduce social spending, the OMCYA was able to negotiate the ring-fencing of approximately 2,300 CE places (OMCYA 2008d) for CSPs as the survival of these community services was unlikely without the continued support of the scheme (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007).

While the use of this scheme was vital for the sustainability of the sector, thus having a positive impact on access and affordability for targeted parents, it had a negative impact on the quality of services for children. In general, CE staff were only embarking on training when they started on the scheme (and the training was not always in the area of childcare) and staff only worked nineteen hours per week for up to three years. This meant there was little continuity of personnel which would have been critical for providing young children with a sense of stability and security while access to professionally trained staff has been identified as a key quality indicator (Mahoney and Hayes 2006).

CSPs continued to struggle to balance quality and affordability with little guidance or support from the State. The correlation between reliance on CE staff and fees charged within the sample of services surveyed for this research are presented in Table 8.2 below. While all services utilised CE staff, the staff ratios reported in the table refer only to staff working directly with children, and numbers were calculated based on full-
time equivalents (for example, two part-time CE staff were equivalent to one full-time staff member). As is evident in Table 8.2, the service with the lowest fees, *Service Provider 1*, had the highest reliance on CE staff working directly with children with two CE full-time equivalent staff members for every one directly paid full-time staff member. The most expensive fees were associated with *Service Providers 9 and 10*. They had no reliance on CE staff working directly with children. While other factors such as rent and capacity to attract additional financial support explained part of the variance in fees, CE had the most significant impact on fees being charged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Provider</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time weekly fee</td>
<td>€130</td>
<td>€140</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€160</td>
<td>€100</td>
<td>€173</td>
<td>€175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time weekly fee</td>
<td>€65</td>
<td>€100</td>
<td>€90</td>
<td>€90</td>
<td>€70</td>
<td>€80</td>
<td>€60</td>
<td>€107</td>
<td>€105</td>
<td>€100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio CE Staff: Paid Staff</td>
<td>1:0.5</td>
<td>1:0.5</td>
<td>1:0.66</td>
<td>1:0.66</td>
<td>1:0.85</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>1:1.33</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>0:1</td>
<td>0:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: (O’Donoghue-Hynes and Hayes 2011, p.40)*

CE was *indirect* and *non-coercive* as it did not incentivise or direct parents to utilise formal ECEC services for their children. Utilising CE to support ECEC delivery was a moderately *automatic* tool as it taps into an existing State funding stream that relies on VCOs to deliver services.

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12 Rent was also a contributing factor as rate ranged from €0 to €30,000 p.a. but information for all services was not available.
13 The fees for Community Service Provider 7 are subsidised with additional funding from a parent organisation so fees paid by parents are not comparable to other services
8.3.4 Tax expenditure relating to children

The tax system was utilised to provide some support for increasing the supply of ECEC services. The Commission on Taxation Report (2009) identified a range of expenditures relating to children. They were: exemption of child benefit from income tax; exemption of foster care payments from income tax; one-parent family tax credit; home carer tax credit; capital allowances for childcare facilities; income tax exemption for childcare service providers [childminders]; and exemption of employer-provided childcare from BIK [benefit in kind] charge (ibid, p.247).

All of these initiatives had high levels of automaticity as they were incorporated into the existing tax system. They were also indirect as they were aimed at third parties. The commission recommended abolishing the capital allowances and BIK schemes which were used by private business as well as the exemption on child benefit but the fourth item recommended for abolition, the childminders tax relief scheme, offered most potential to increase the supply of a highly flexible and responsive form of ECEC.

The report makes a valid point when it stated that ‘this relief does not require minimum standards of care as a precondition for entitlement and that the take-up of this relief has been limited with a total of 230 cases in 2006’ (Commission on Taxation 2009, p.253), highlighting the lack of linkage between funding and quality requirements and the low levels of uptake. In 2006, its first year of operation, it cost the state less than €1 million (ibid, p.247). While not highly visible, the low levels of participation have increased the vulnerability of this policy tool to budget cuts. Despite providing a financial incentive as a coercive mechanism to encourage participation, the necessary informational and capacity building tools to support childminders were not adequately developed.
While some funding was supplied to Childminding Ireland, a dedicated support organisation for childminders, the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) had approached the OMCYA on two occasions asking to utilise a small Childminders Grant of €1000 to provide technical assistance rather than equipment as was the condition of the small grant. The request was informed by board member experience in the administration of the Back to Work Scheme in which people entering self-employment expressed their anxiety about record-keeping and dealing with the revenue commissioners rather than needing equipment, a finding supported by Childminding Ireland (2011). Both times the OMCYA insisted the funds be used only for the purchase of equipment, even when the equipment was so minor as to be deemed to be current rather than capital expenditure from an accounting perspective. This inflexibility demonstrated how rules were prioritised over outcomes, a view which corresponds with the findings of Hardiman and MacCárthaigh (2008) that public servants had not inculcated the key values associated with a NPM’s market approach in which efficiency, productivity and an element of risk taking were be expected rather than adherence to the rules.

8.4 The National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) Years

The focus on increasing the number of places was significantly successful for the state as it was able to achieve its targets through the provision of once-off capital grants; increasing the profile of the sector so that it attracted in business interests to supplement the playgroup movement which had grown during the 60’s and 70’s (Spring, Daly et al. 2005); actively supporting the development of CSPs; and addressing accessibility, affordability and, to some minor degree, quality in areas of disadvantage through access to Social Inclusion Measures. EU funding was the catalyst for much of the
change but a ‘gradual shift in our funding base from the EU to the Irish Government’ (Brabazon 2005, p.4) marked the introduction of the NCIP 2006-2010. The focus shifted from increasing the supply of places to the adoption of a demand side or consumer subsidy funding model (OECD 2006) in which funds were supplied in response to the demand for services. This was demonstrated through the redesign of the ECEC social inclusion measure from an operational staffing grant to a targeted subsidy and the introduction of a universal subsidy to replace a failed attempt to continue to avoid addressing the childcare issue by introducing a very costly and inefficient cash payment. This period was also marked by a rationalisation of supports (Murphy 2009) which led to the abolition of childcare allowances paid by FÁS, the national training authority, and the Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) to qualifying students and the establishment of the Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) scheme in 2010.

8.4.1 Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) Scheme

Again the CETS scheme was indirect with high levels of automaticity as the OMCYA looked to services providers, both community and private, to deliver services and the CCCs to assist in administration. The budget was closed thus limiting access but this rationalisation supported the increased use of formal regulated care, a policy objective of the state. Previously, FÁS and the VEC made payments to childminders, even those not required to notify with the HSE, but under the CETS only notified centre-based services were eligible to apply. However, with the budget now centralised and amounting to approximately €23 million (O'Meara 2010) this could increase its visibility and vulnerability of this funding source in the future.
8.4.2 Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)

However, of more significance in revealing a strategy for managing ECEC funding was the state’s decision in 2008 to replace the Staffing Grant with the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). The key change was that community service providers were paid a fee subsidy amount in direct response to the demand for places by parents who were in receipt of a welfare payment. As with the staffing grant, the CCSS continued to be moderately automatic as it relied on CSPs to deliver services but a key change was a distancing of the state from the quality objective that had been contained in the Staffing Grant. No longer was funding restricting to staff costs but was paid as a general grant, which was more indirect than its predecessor.

Overall, it appeared that savings were made by the state as in 2007 it announced a projected spend of €153 million for a three year period for the CCSS compared with the €200 million spend on the Staffing Grant over the previous three year period (OMCYA 2007). The visibility and vulnerability of the budget seems evident however since the onset of the recession the amount committed to the CCSS budget decreased from €53 million in 2008 (OMCYA 2008d) to €42 million in 2011 (O'Meara 2010) despite the number of qualifying parents increasing during the same period.

In an attempt to rationalise the overall spend on social inclusion ECEC initiatives, the DCCC have reported a range of actions in 2011 that have resulted in reductions in spending by other government departments. The HSE reduced spending on intervention services, and the Department of Social Protection on emergency childcare places. Services losing funding were directed to apply for the CCSS which was designated as the principle source of ECEC social inclusion funding going forward.
Qualifying parents were restricted to accessing community childcare services, as private services were ineligible for the scheme. It was not mandatory for children to attend so it could not be considered a highly coercive scheme but the affordability issue was addressed directly for qualifying parents as the subsidy amount was up to €100 per week, thus providing an incentive to enrol children in regulated ECEC services. Like all of the social inclusion measures however, the budget was closed so access was restricted. The targeting of welfare recipients tightened up following Budget 2012 as subsidy rates were lowered for those qualifying for state payments on foot of pay related social insurance contributions (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012c). Only means-tested welfare payments would give parents a qualification for a fully subsidised place for their child as of September 2012.

8.4.3 Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) and Free Pre-School Year (FPSY)

As discussed when looking at Child Benefit, the government launched a new cash payment of €1,000 per annum for each child under the age of six ‘as a contribution towards their childcare costs’ in 2006 (OMCYA 2006a). In the press release prior to the first payment of the Early Childcare Supplement the Minister was quoted as saying:

*The policy of this Government is to support people in whatever decisions they make about the care of their children. That is why we have dramatically increased the level of direct financial assistance we give to parents. ...

*Governments make choices and as Minister for Children, I am delighted that this Fianna Fail led government has consistently chosen to increase the level of direct payments to parents, especially the parents of pre-school children. (ibid)

This was the first payment specifically for childcare costs the state made to parents in general and the state were still avoiding any controversy in relation to favouring
working parents over stay-at-home parents. In line with policy tool selection decisions for family policy, the state opted for the costly, highly visible and politically attractive cash payment rather than service provision. At the time, the state was famously awash with money (Clancy 2006) so the high visibility of a budget of close to €500 million (Children's Rights Alliance 2010b, p.3) was not of concern until 2008. In 2009 there was a significant shift away from the use of cash payments with the abolition of the ECS. It was replaced with the FPSY, which for the first time offered a limited number of free pre-school hours to children within a qualifying age band for one year prior to starting school.

This change resulted in a reduction in investment of approximately €300 million as the cost of the FPSY was estimated to be approximately €170m per annum (OMCYA 2009a). Despite extensive cuts in Budget 2011 and 2012 in many areas, adequate funding was provided to the FPSY to ensure places for all children, demonstrating the strong level of commitment to this initiative. However, Budget 2012 also saw the subtle erosion of quality elements of the FPSY design as the subsidy per place was reduced by approximately 3% from €64.50 per week to €62.50 and from €75 to €73 where staff qualified to degree level were employed (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012c). In addition, the ratio of staff to children was changed from 1:10 to 1:11, higher than those in the regulations. This trade-off could enable service providers with enough space to accommodate extra children to recoup lost income but it reduces the quality of experience for children.

One of the most significant features of the FPSY was the State’s apparent recognition of the educational element of childcare as the OMCYA were able to successfully negotiate ECEC services being classified as educational in the same way schools were for the
purpose of commercial rates assessments\textsuperscript{14}. While this was a very welcome development in terms of the status of ECEC services, the practical outcome of these negotiations have frustrated service providers as only services in receipt of 100% state funding, and receiving no fee income, actually qualified for the exemption (National Children's Nurseries Association 2011c), which excludes the majority of service providers.

While all CSPs in receipt of funding under the CCSS were required to offer the FPSY, this opened all services up to additional inspection requirements to ensure they were meeting the criteria of the FPSY. The inspections were very intricate with Pobal staff checking on details such as the identity of children present, verifying attendance of children and payments from parents. The CCCs were also entitled to inspect services annually and these were in addition to the HSE regulatory compliance inspections as well as inspections by Environmental Health Officers, who accompanied HSE inspectors. The micro-management of service providers and the significant reliance on the state for funding were combining to promote a sense of on-going monitoring and control while also distracting providers with heavy administrative workloads which served to further diffuse dissent and introduce an element of fear.

To implement the FPSY, the State utilised existing providers, both private and community, to deliver services on its behalf, as the preference for tools that have a high degree of \textit{automaticity} continued but some restrictions applied as the state imposed a restriction on the income services could earn by disallowing any charge to parents. However, this policy tool was more \textit{direct} than the ECS as the State was quite directive about the type of educational service to be provided as conditions of funding included

\textsuperscript{14} Email sent from OMCYA for all CCCs on ECCE developments, 31/07/09
requirements for staff to hold minimum qualifications and to adhere to the national frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear*.

While parents could opt in or out of the scheme they could only avail of services with providers that had registered for the scheme, so **access** was determined by numbers of providers signing up for the scheme, once again a demand-side tool. As the service was free, the incentive to look for a place was very high making it a more **coercive** tool in terms of encouraging the use of formal ECEC service than the ECS.

### 8.5 Conclusion

In terms of realising rights and achieving a balance within the childcare trilemma, the policy tools were calibrated to yield most benefits for children taking up places under the FPSY, which tended to most effectively match the ECEC requirements of *stay-at-home parents*, who required less childcare hours than many working parents. For parents who needed services beyond the FPSY’s five hundred and seventy hours of free pre-school, which was most often *working parents*, they had to continue to look to the market. No other direct supports existed for working parents, other than maternity and parental leave and maternity benefit for mothers returning to the workforce after having a child. An infrastructure of ECEC facilities were developed for disadvantaged *targeted parents* with support from EU funding. In tandem and subsequently, the state developed a range of social inclusion measures which enabled targeted parents to compete to avail of a restricted number of **affordable** places under the CCSS, CETS and Early Start Programme for their children, places that were not as effectively designed to realise the **quality** objective set out in national policy.
The state’s ambivalence towards working parents may explain the resistance of the state to effectively promote the childminding tax relief which could have increased the supply of a regulated and flexible form of ECEC service provision. The state’s desire to avoid generating animosity from within the ranks of the stay-at-home parent was evident when it chose to address the childcare issue during the Celtic Tiger years with the introduction of the ECS which enabled the state to be seen to make a very generous gesture while still maintaining distance from the problem. However, the onset of the recession meant the state could no longer throw money at the problem. It used this opportunity to support an early learning agenda that was politically appealing as it enabled a shift in the policy focus to service provision for ‘children’ to benefit industry rather than dealing with the impact of service provision on parents.

The state designed the more direct and cost effective FPSY subsidy which was available to children of almost all parents, regardless of their employment status. The only restriction applied to targeted parents that needed to choose between places under the CCSS, CETS or the FPSY. It replaced the more indirect Early Childcare Supplement cash payment and signified a shift away from cash payments to funding service delivery.

Levels of automaticity were high as the FPSY utilised existing community and private service providers to deliver services and the CCCs to assist with the huge volume of administration facilitating an instant roll-out of the scheme once announced, with participation rates in 2010-2011 year in excess of 90% of all eligible children (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2011c). This very successfully addressed the provision of services element of children’s rights and the access element of the childcare trilemma.
As all services were notifed with the state and covered by the regulations, the protection element of rights was also adequately addressed.

In terms of affordability, parents had no fee to pay so the incentive, or the level of coercion, to enrol children was considerable and the budget was procedurally managed to ensure places were available for all children. Conditions of funding also attempted to address quality directly as minimum staff qualifications were outlined ensuring a higher standard of training and overall capacity than required under the regulations. This was important as all services were required to adhere to the national frameworks, Síolta and Aistear, which advocated a participatory pedagogical approach in line with children’s rights objectives. However, as outlined in the previous chapter the capacity building supports needed to roll-out Síolta and Aistear effectively were weak so despite conditions attached to funding, the actualisation of this requirement was not being supported.

However, a very serious consequence of the introduction of the FPSY and the CCSS was the realisation of a split-system in which pre-schools were characterised as an ‘early learning’ mechanism realising a Life-Long Learning objective. The commitment to continue funding the FPSY was absolute in the Programme for Government (Government of Ireland 2011). This contrasts with other policy tools which were reserved for targeted citizens where the state committed only to continue funding if resources permitted (ibid). The visibility and vulnerability of all grants and subsidies within the social inclusion category was evident as budgets were being decreased.

The community service providers (CSPs) had different issues to deal with than private providers. As CSPs were operating in areas of market failure sustainability was
difficult, if not impossible to achieve. The ongoing need for support by the state put a strain on the management of the childcare trilemma. The strategy of the state appeared to prioritise **affordability** over **quality** as it removed the restriction that had existed under the EOCP Staffing Grant to invest in qualified staff when it replaced the grant with the CCSS. The reliance on CE staff continued with the OMCYA successfully *ring-fencing* places to ensure a supply of subsidised labour, despite the potential negative impact on **quality**, thus keeping the doors of the community services open.

The budgets for Early Start, the CCSS and CETS were all closed with the consequence that overall **accessibility** was restricted. As services funded under these schemes were required only to comply with regulations, **protection** was addressed but no opportunity to realise the **participatory** element of children’s rights existed within the design of these policy tools. This was left to the discretion of service providers. The location of the Early Start Programme within the school structure restricted the impact of the national quality frameworks thus producing a design feature that reduced the opportunity for children to engage in **participatory** practices.

Overall a pattern was identifiable in which **access**, **affordability** and **quality** as well as **protection** and **participation** opportunities were more adequately addressed in the design of policy tools aimed at developing the *early learning* agenda that focused on **service provision** for children. These services predominantly tended to meet the needs of stay-at-home parents. Limited **access**, increased **affordability** (where children gained access to a subsidised place) and inadequate attention to **quality** were the dominant consequences of design features of *social inclusion measures* accessed by socially disadvantaged children. For all other parents including: those who worked; those unable to secure a place for their children under the social inclusion measures; and
stay-at-home parents who valued the experience of ECEC participation for their children and required more than the limited number of hours provided; had recourse to the market in which quality was aligned most often with the price a parent could afford to pay (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009).

Table 8.3 below provides a summary of the key policy tools reviewed to this point. While the substantive tools provide insight into the range and level of activity in the sector, the procedural tools identified indicate a strong tendency by the public service and the political interests developing policy to actively manage and choreograph policy implementation away from stated policy objectives. The actions of the state did not appear to conceptualise children before their pre-school years as a ‘collective risk and as a worthwhile public investment’ (Coakley 2011, p.2) or to realise a ‘policy shift from one that constitutionally endorsed mothers role in the home to one that advocated paid work for all adults’ (ibid, p.7).

In the following chapter a more in-depth review of the design of the two subsidy tools discussed is undertaken. It moves beyond this macro-level investigation to look in more detail at the design of both the CCSS and the FPSY in order to look past the rhetoric of the state to the realities as experienced by target populations.
Table 8.3 Policy Tools utilised by the State to realise ECEC policy goals and children’s rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nodality/Informational</th>
<th>Authority/Statutory</th>
<th>Treasure/Financial</th>
<th>Organisational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Notification: childminders can voluntary notify</td>
<td>Statutes: Childcare Acts and Childcare Regulations; Ombudsman for Children’s Act 2002</td>
<td>Operational Grants: CE Scheme; NVCC; CECDE; OCO; Staffing Grant for community providers; CETS; Early Start Programme; Parent and Toddler Groups</td>
<td>Establish new Agencies: CECDE; CCCs: OCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Frameworks: Aistear; Síolta; Childminding Guidelines;</td>
<td>Compulsory Registration: of Service providers with HSE</td>
<td>Subsidies: CCSS; FSPY;</td>
<td>Create Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Production: Children’s Strategy; Childcare Strategies; Workforce Development Plan; National Standards for Preschool Services; etc.</td>
<td>Compulsory Framework: Standardised Inspection Tool; Aistear &amp; Síolta for services funded under FPSY</td>
<td>Cash Payments: Child Benefit &amp; Early Childcare Subsidy</td>
<td>Reduce Agencies: Close down CECDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training: provided by CCCs to service providers and parents;</td>
<td>Compulsory Standards: child/staff ratios; space requirements per child in centre-based services;</td>
<td>Social Insurance: Maternity Benefit</td>
<td>Internal Restructuring: Establish Childcare Directorate; Co-locate sections from several different departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Support: CCCs provide to service providers</td>
<td>Compulsory Staff Vetting: of staff working with children</td>
<td>Tax: relief on earning: childminders; Tax credit: Home carers not working; Capital allowance: on building of childcare facilities</td>
<td>Utilise Existing Agencies: Pobal to assist with administration; NCCA to develop Aistear;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Agreement: Lisbon Strategy/Barcelona Targets as non-binding guideline</td>
<td>Inspections: of notified services by HSE</td>
<td>Reduce Budgets: CCSS; NVCC</td>
<td>Networks: OMCYA attend events and host events for those they fund. CCC’s establish networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Research: funding research that contains little criticism of the state’s actions</td>
<td>Minimum Qualifications: for staff funded under FPSY</td>
<td>Ring fence funding: FAS CE scheme places reserved for community childcare services</td>
<td>Conferences: CCCs organise for all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Provision: OMCYA provide information to CCCs, NVCC, Researchers, Service Providers, Parents, Agencies, Government, Media, UNCRC &amp; all stakeholders; CCCs provide and produce information for parents and service providers</td>
<td>International Covenant: UNCRC international law but superseded by Irish Constitution</td>
<td>Replace funding: replace staffing grant with CCS subsidy; replace ECS cash payment with FSPY subsidy</td>
<td>Implementation Group: Regulations Implementation Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive Tools</td>
<td>UNCRC Report: UNCRC used to inform future compliance needs</td>
<td>Close down tax relief: abolish capital allowance for building childcare services</td>
<td>Change nature and power of Ministry incrementally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedural Tools

Joint-funding: OMCYA co-fund conferences and events
Chapter 9: ECEC subsidy design

9.0 Introduction

Thus far chapter seven and eight have focused on categorising the key policy instruments using classifications developed by Hood (1986), Howlett (2000) and Salamon (2002). An array of substantive organisational and financial policy tools were utilised to generate considerable activity that could be promoted to outsiders as progress towards achieving national goals. Advances were made in increasing: coordination; the number of childcare places; funding for pre-school hours; as well as addressing affordability for targeted communities. Procedural tools were engaged strategically and tactically to manage public service networks (Pollitt 2009) so that dissent was minimised and power was held at the centre (Geoghegan and Powell 2009; Harvey 2009; Kirby and Murphy 2009). There was minimal use of informational tools to promote children’s rights or to advocate for the use of ECEC services other than when viewing ECEC services as educational. In line with NPM trends, authority or statutory tools were few and minimalist in focus (Peters 2005) providing basic guidance and addressing the welfare and protection of children only. Overall, levels of policy alignment (Howlett 2009), in terms of the policy tools realising the goals of policy, were low with targets too narrow to realise highly aspirational policy aims and objectives. The quality element of the childcare trilemma, the participative element of children’s rights, and the needs of working parents were the most neglected elements of overall policy goals identified to this point.
A review of policy documents reveals a picture of how a State wishes to present itself in relation to an issue. However research suggests that there are differences between what governments say and what they go on to do in terms of policy implementation (Bonoli and Powell 2004). The purpose of this chapter is to explore the theme of designs for target populations (Schneider and Ingram 1993) and the behavioural assumptions underlying the designs (ibid 1990) in more detail looking at the socio-political implications of design decision as:

_the use of each tool represents a social, political, moral, and value-laden choice to privilege particular social and political constructions of childcare. In addition ... each design institutionalizes a particular form of government service, which gives power and voice to some interests over others, resulting in a new political context for future policy debates. (Rigby, Tarrant et al. 2007, p.98).

This chapter places heavier emphasis on evaluating the impact of the state’s efforts on promoting the values and norms outlined in policy documents as well as the seven indicators of policy objectives. It presents findings and a discussion on three distinct elements. The first looked at the redesign of the ECEC social inclusion measures from the EOCP (2000-2006) _Staffing Grant_ to the NCIP (2006-2010) _CCSS_. This section relied on Schneider and Ingram’s (1990) _behavioural assumptions model_ to identify the design style selected by the state and the underlying assumptions driving that selection decision.

From there, the chapter moves on to look at the specific impacts the change from the Staffing Grant to the CCSS had on children, parents and CSPs in 2009. This was the point in which the VCO research was evaluated to test whether the findings presented in their documents could be verified through the use of a more rigorous process of
investigation, which was the ancillary research question that evolved during the course of the research project.

The final section, like the first section, had a comparative element as the CCSS was reviewed alongside the FPSY in order to examine the social construction of the target populations. This comparative analysis revealed a perpetuation of negative stereotypes and a skewed distribution of benefits and burdens. A range of techniques such as symbolic rhetoric and opaque designs were exposed as strategies that enabled the state to avoid investing in the realisation of policy goals in an equitable manner.


In this section a review of the features of design of the Staffing Grant and the CCSS using Schneider and Ingram’s (1990) behavioural assumptions of policy tools model are presented. It revealed that the aims and objectives of the Staffing Grant to develop affordable, accessible, quality childcare, as well as the conditions of funding dictated by the EU that funds were used to facilitate disadvantaged parents return to work, education or training, would have been best realised through a design that encompassed capacity building as well as learning tool features. However, the rules and regulations selected undermined the development of the required features. This apparent failure provided the rationale for the introduction of the CCSS.

The CCSS best fitted Schneider and Ingram’s description of an incentive tool designed to induce action through the use of tangible payoffs that can take the form of positive or negative devices (1993). The assumption, therefore, was that parents eligible for the
CCSS were incentivised by the cost of the service rather than the quality, location, ethos, reputation, and so on. However, research with the sixty two parents reveals that the cost of the service was not the most significant motivator for selecting a service for their children. Parents were asked to rank in order of importance seven variables: location; cost; quality; sessions available; hours of business; reputation; and places available. As illustrated in table 9.1 below, a review of how frequently each variable was selected in either first or second place revealed that the quality of the service and the convenience of having the service located within the local community rated higher than cost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. times ranked 1st / 2nd choice</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Local / convenience</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Reputation</th>
<th>Places Available</th>
<th>Sessions Available</th>
<th>Hours of Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results suggest that the underlying behavioural assumption that social inclusion target parents were motivated primarily by finances was unfounded. The target parents were concerned first and foremost about their children’s connections to their local community and the corresponding sense of belonging as well as the quality of the child’s experience. This was revealed in more detail when when parents were asked why they choose formal regulated childcare. Fifty eight parents responded. The predominant reasons given by parents were the socialisation and development of their children (22 parents) as well as facilitating parents to work (23 parents). One of the parental comments highlighted the benefits of formalised care for her child because:

*Granny spoilt the first child. Wanted the next child to socialise with children the same age.*
9.1.1 EOCP Staffing Grant

While the principle action under the EOCP (2000-2006) was the provision of once-off capital grants to increase the number of childcare places, Staffing Grants were provided ‘to assist with the staffing costs incurred in childcare facilities which support disadvantaged parents in employment, education and training’ (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003, p.12). The objectives outlined were based on a model of Local Development that promoted self reliance through social capital development, which takes the form of ‘networks and understandings [that] engender trust and so enable people to work together’ (Keeley 2007, p.103) and human capital, which is defined by the OECD as ‘the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being’ (ibid, p.29).

The Staffing Grant was identified as a key mechanism for ‘enhancing quality’ (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007, p.vii) through the recruitment of qualified staff. CSPs were required to develop a sliding scale of fees with which to manage access for children of targeted parents. The wider objective was to ensure a high ‘level of integration/linkage of the childcare service with other compatible actions or programmes established in the locality’ (Department of Justice 2000).

The Staffing Grant appeared initially to incorporate features associated with capacity building and learning tools which should be non-paternalistic and empower action by the target group (Schneider and Ingram 1997). CSPs were trusted to assess the local need for childcare places and set the fee scale accordingly, and their boards of management (BOMs) were given discretion about who and how to hire under the grant.
However, a closer investigation revealed that these roles were undermined by a design that did not go on to build in the supports needed to empower and up-skill a sector even after it had been identified as having *capacity difficulties* by the State’s own review (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003):

... *the stakeholders involved in the development of EOCP supported projects were from diverse backgrounds, with many originating from wider community development initiatives, while others were involved with expansion of existing childcare facilities. This created capacity difficulties, as many projects lacked the childcare expertise in the former case, or the organisational skills in the latter.* (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007, p.x)

In fact, the State appeared to have opted to treat CSPs and their voluntary BOMs as *professional and knowledgeable* designing policy tools that ‘permit targets to have maximum freedom of action’ (Schneider and Ingram 1997, p.173) despite knowledge that BOMs were ill equipped to successfully accept such responsibility. Doubts as to the effectiveness of the funding began to emerge quickly and in 2003 there was a ‘transfer of funds from the staffing sub-measure to the quality sub-measure [the development of the City and County Childcare Committees]’ (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003, p.12).

Many difficulties emerged for CSPs and their BOMs. A key problem was how to develop a staffing structure with the limited resources available that could deliver quality services that were in line with best practice. The recruitment of a limited number of appropriately qualified staff under the Staffing Grant proved difficult as services were looking for Managers with professional childcare qualifications and experience but also with the capacity to assume the responsibility for: managing an often complex funding and staffing structure; a heavy administrative workload; as well
as reporting to voluntary BOM with members from diverse backgrounds, many of whom had no understanding of issues in relation to ECEC. Staff retention proved to be a problem in the sector overall as wage rates were low (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007) and conditions of work were often very challenging.

The researcher’s experience with community services suggested that many had become an integral part of wider local regeneration efforts being supported by local Area Regeneration Partnership Companies. This suggested high levels of policy alignment (Howlett 2009) through dovetailing of policy objectives between a range of local development initiative and the EOCP, which had been a key aim of the programme (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003). As the childcare problem was a new problem and the EOCP was an extension of an initial pilot phase, there was acknowledgement by the state that a ‘one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the childcare needs of different communities’ was not appropriate (Fitzpatrick Associates 2007, p.86). This statement would seem to imply the EOCP would develop learning tools that ‘encourage agents and targets to act to solve problems, but leave the strategies to the agents or targets themselves’ (Schneider and Ingram 1997, p.95).

However there were few mechanisms put in place to capture data about the success or learning from these processes. Some attempts were made at developing Social Auditing skills within the sector following the launch of FÁS’s Social Economy Programme (Fitzpatrick Associates 2001; WRC 2003) but EOCP reporting requirements did not facilitate the gathering of soft non-quantitative information. There were calls from organisations such as PLANET for ‘a definitive template of guidelines for the sector, on appropriate levels of progress to be expected, around a variety of quality indicators - including the measurement of the wider benefits to the community, structural and
organisational development, implementation of policies and procedures, parental involvement etc’ (2004). Brian Keeley, writing for the OECD’s *Insight Series*, stressed the need to measure social and human capital in order to ‘foster activities that have social and environmental but not clear, direct monetary value’ (2007, p.114).

However, a significant financial investment from the State would have been required to meet this demand. The appropriate monitoring and evaluation devices would have required innovative methods of qualitative data capture such as case-study, focus groups, interviews, and so on, or the development of resource intensive frameworks that capture both qualitative and quantitative data such as the Community Capitals framework (Emery and Flora 2006) or Social Auditing (Henriques 2001; Ebrahim 2003). Rather than an appropriately well designed and resourced Staffing Grant, the State relied on *symbolic rhetoric* (Schneider and Ingram 1993) once again, when dealing with the issues of *quality* and *empowerment of targets*, where great claims were made but no commitment followed.

### 9.1.2 Questioning the discretion of CSPs to manage access

A key feature within the design of the Staffing Grant was the use of a sliding fee structure as the mechanism for facilitating access. Within the sample of nine CSP Managers (managing ten services) interviewed for this research, seven services did not have a sliding scale but instead had a single fee for all parents. The rationale provided by Managers was that they were located in highly populated designated areas of disadvantage where most parents were in need of subsidised ECEC places for their children. They used an element of discretion to adjust fees if parents had particular financial difficulties. One notable exception was a service that was located close to an
affluent area and was able to attract a significant social mix of children and parents with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. They had a quota of places reserved for full fee paying places where the fee was set at above cost (although still competitively priced relative to private providers in the adjacent area) so that they partially subvented places for children in need of a subvented place. While this was not an uncommon arrangement in rural areas that had a greater socio-economic mix within a small area, this was unusual in a large urban area.

While a majority of the sample community childcare Managers felt a sliding scale was unnecessary, it was the overall lack of adherence to this requirement within the sector that provided the rationale for the state to review and subsequently remove the scheme. In a press release prior to the introduction of the CCSS the Minister for Children stated that ‘[t]he review has identified that the implementation of a tiered fee structure has not been universally applied in the past. To ensure fairness, tiered payments will now apply in all cases’ (2007). This claim was repeated by the Minister for Health and Children in April 2009 in a response to a Dáil question about the negative financial impact of the CCSS on some CSPs (Dáil Debates 2009b).

### 9.1.3 NCIP Community Childcare Subvention Scheme

In 2008, the CCSS was introduced offering a clear financial incentive for parents with an underlying welfare entitlement to access a place for their children. A sliding fee scale became obligatory as the subsidy amount was deducted from the estimated cost of each place. Monitoring of this requirement was high on the agenda of the OMCYA as CSPs became subject to various inspections.
As discussed in the previous chapter, the link to **quality** was severed as the grant was no longer reserved for the recruitment of qualified staff but a less obvious benefit for the State of the redesign was their ability to gain control over information on the socio-economic profile of users and the simplification of data collection. Applicants needed to provide Personal Public Service (PPS) numbers to CSPs who forwarded them to the OMCYA so they could verify entitlements. Under the Staffing Grant a time consuming *Annual Beneficiary Survey* (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2004) was conducted which asked funded CSPs to identify how many children of lone parents, travellers, and so on, were being serviced so they could be monitored under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). However, there was criticism of the state’s decision to reduce the criteria for **access** to a single dimension as it indicated a poor understanding of the complexity of the nature of social exclusion (Dublin Inner City Partnership 2008).

From the state’s perspective, the overall *management* of the scheme was improved as targeted parents were now clearly identifiable by PPS number and could be tracked and reported as disadvantaged based on their welfare status and a tiered fee structure was in place in all funded services. However, the impact on target populations was not as effective.

### 9.2 The impact of the new CCSS on target populations

Several anticipated and unanticipated effects were experienced by children, parents, service providers and the wider community as well as a range of side-effects on other national policies.
VCOs predict a range of negative impacts

The objective of the research with parents and CSPs was to provide an illustrative example of the realities as experienced by target populations of policy design decisions. While not completely representative of the national picture of community service providers (CSPs), the findings were indicative as they served to confirm or contradict the anticipated fallout from the shift to the CCSS identified within four VCO documents. The first significant finding was that the huge financial strain anticipated for CSPs resulting in wide-scale closures was not realised nationally. The prediction was based on estimates by service providers as to how many of the parents using their services prior to the CCSS would qualify once the new scheme came on stream. The anticipated closures may not have taken place because CSPs had underestimated how many of their parents were in receipt of welfare payments or because the profile of service users had changed so that they were taking in more children of qualifying parents than before. The limited research carried out for this project would suggest that both were equally likely as half of the services reported a change in user profile but half did not. However, the inclusion of this prediction was an important one for the VCOs as a review of media coverage at the time (McGreevy 2007; Sheahan 2007; Irish Independent 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d; Sligo Champion 2007a; 2007b; Sheridan 2008) revealed that the news of possible closures gained most media attention. So, strategically, in terms of managing an advocacy campaign, its inclusion was vital.

However, the VCO reports more accurately predicted an additional range of impacts including: the administrative burden for CSPs; displacement of children of working parents using the service under the Staffing Grant scheme with children of parents in receipt of welfare which led to a fear of segregation and stigmatisation amongst CSPs.
and parents; a deepening welfare trap for targeted parents; no cap on the portion of fees parents needed to pay; and the diminished attention to quality in the design of the scheme. The research conducted by the researcher was able provide more detail on these findings as well as revealing some unanticipated results too.

9.2.2 Administrative burden

A major criticism expressed by the VCOs and Managers interviewed was the lack of consultation prior to the introduction of the CCSS in 2008. Managers felt that as a result the OMCYA was muddling through (Lindblom 1959; Lindblom 1979) the policy tool design phase. This in turn contributed to a complex administrative system in which CSPs were required to deal with DCYA, DCCC, Pobal and HSE staff for different aspects of the programme. Funding programmes were also designed to meet requirements for administrative efficiency rather than the needs of children. Funding was approved each September for the year and children could not change from one scheme to the other until September unless another child had left the service and the new child could take up their place. Services funded under the CCSS were asked to calculate a contingency amount to try and address this.

Services were also experiencing huge delays in receiving funds causing high levels of stress for CSP Managers. While Managers believed these were teething problems, this proved to be untrue. The delays were still being experienced throughout 2010 and the OMCYA explained this was due to staff shortages (National Children’s Nurseries Association 2010) while in 2011 the delays were attributed to technical difficulties (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2011a). These delays made budgeting very difficult as cash flow had been impacted negatively.
However, the OMCYA maintained discretionary decision making power with individual CSP Managers negotiating funding rates and submission schedules outside the norm on a case by case basis. The overall design was opaque (Schneider and Sidney 2009) rather than transparent resulting in confusion about the actual rules as anecdotal tales of different funding rates prevailed within the sector. Within the sample of CSP Managers interviewed those with the most experience and most involved in networking activities had least fear of the process and were able to negotiate hardest to gain extra benefits for their services.

Overall, the CCSS was to impact on the role and relationship of service providers with parents. Managers revealed that when parents contacted them about a place for their children, the conversation no longer focused on the child but very quickly centred on whether parents met the criteria to qualify for a subsidy. However, CSPs went to great lengths to support parents. All of the Managers in the sample arranged meetings with individual parents to assess their entitlements and some hosted open evenings with various advisors on hand to assist parents research their entitlements to medical cards, family income supplement payments, and so on. The CSPs also translated the literature being released from OMCYA about the scheme so that it was more user friendly for parents, but ultimately, the role of the CSP staff had shifted as they became part of a process that evaluated the parents’ entitlement to a benefit administered by the state.

One CSP felt that their role has changed so considerably that they removed a sign stating their goal was to ‘provide affordable, accessible, quality childcare for local families’. The profile of their clients had changed so that they felt that they were being ghettoised and were moving towards being an intervention type service rather than a
local resource, which was still a worthy objective but was contrary to their original mission.

### 9.2.3 Displacement and segregation of children

The survey responses displayed in Tables 9.2 and 9.3 below revealed that there was a significant correlation between the marital and employment status of parents and their CCSS Band. The majority of Band A parents were single or separated parents and not participating in the workforce. In contrast Band D parents were all married or living with a partner and the majority of them were in employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Band</th>
<th>Band A</th>
<th>Band B</th>
<th>Band C</th>
<th>Band D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married/Living with partner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent/Separated</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Band</th>
<th>Band A</th>
<th>Band B</th>
<th>Band C</th>
<th>Band D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full time/part-time/seasonal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/education/Welfare</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In half of the ten services surveyed there was what practitioners described as *significant displacement* of children of local working and married parents with children of parents in receipt of welfare payments when the CCSS was introduced as Band D parent took children out of the service and Band A parents took places for their children. When parents were asked if they noticed any change in who was attending the services, 10
parents indicated that they had noticed a change and consequently there was an impact on their children using the services. Of the eight comments provided by parents, four indicated that children had left as their parents could no longer afford to send them and as a consequence children were missing their friends. One parent identified a change in behavioural issues noting an increase in the use of negative language by children that they believed were as a consequence of the changed social mix of service users. This point was also mentioned by one service provider who noted that as the profile of the children was changing they found they were dealing with an increase in behavioural difficulties with the children. This had led the CSP Manager to source additional training for staff.

A reduction in the social mix of children goes against an integrated educational approach which assists in recognising and respecting mutual interests from within the local community and the development of shared understandings through shared activities (Dewey 1916; Clancy 1995). It also fails to address the needs of children, a key objective of the National Children’s Strategy that guides the work of the OMCYA (Government of Ireland 2000a). This fuelled the concern of Managers that the segregation of children of parents in receipt of welfare payments within designated community based services could result in labelling and stigmatising children, a feature commonly associated with targeted subsidy designs (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

9.2.4 No cap on parental portion of fees

As can be seen in table 8.2 presented in the last chapter, there was a significant variance in the fee portion paid by parents within the sample. For a full time place, fees ranged
from €130\textsuperscript{15} to €197, which represented a 51% variance, while part-time places cost between €65 and €107, which was a 65% variance. The state did nothing to address this issue busying itself with a focus on sliding scales and fee structures regardless of the financial impact on parents.

9.2.5 Burden on working and married parents

As table 9.4 illustrates, within the research sample the children of parents in Band D who saw their fees increase experienced an average increase from €89.67 per week to €125.47. On average Band A and B experienced a significant drop in the fee they were charged. Band C saw no significant increase while Band D fee increased substantially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate of fee change categorised by CCSS Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average fee before CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average fee since CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The perception existed amongst parents and providers that local low income married and working parents were being burdened by the new scheme, while benefits accrued to single and non-working parents. Parents commented:

\textit{I feel the bands are unfair to married couples.}

\textit{Huge financial difficulty for working families.}

\textsuperscript{15}As in chapter 8, fees for Service 7 within the sample as excluded as they do not charge parents any fee relying on a parent organisation to pay the difference between the subsidy and the actual cost of the place.
No benefit to us as a family. It changes the mix of children – ghetto childcare. Unfair that even though we have similar (sometimes less) income to those on benefit (after mortgage/rent, etc.) we pay €100 more.

I can’t understand how the govt went about intro [sic] new scheme. Just because we can’t tick a box to qualify for A or B we’re exempt. Don’t consider families outgoings, how many children they have, etc.

Because I’m married I don’t qualify regardless of income.

Because I don’t think it’s fair on working mothers or fathers.

Twenty four of the parents surveyed had experienced an increase in fees, the majority of which were Band C and D parents. While parents identified cost as only one of the key indicators they use to select a childcare service for their children, eleven of these twenty four parents indicated that they would not have opted for formal regulated care in the first instance if fees had been as high when they originally enrolled their children. However, now they had experienced this type of service, eighteen would select formal regulated care again in the future. Many of the parents were finding the fee increases a struggle with twenty one noting a significant increase in stress ranking their stress levels 4 or 5 out of a possible 5. Five parents indicated that as a consequence of the increased costs they were finishing their children with the service earlier than they would have liked, one parent was reducing the hours their child was spending in the service while two parents going to cease using the service.

CSP Managers were concerned about wider repercussions as the newly burdened parents and their children had been role models who were being priced out of formal childcare. They feared that they would soon have little incentive to stay in the local area which could in turn result in ghettoisation of the entire area. Managers also noted that
many of the parents who took children out of the services were looking to informal ECEC options rather than regulated ECEC contrary to national policy aims.

#### 9.2.6 Division and distraction of parents

One of the effects that emerged that had not been referred to in the VCO reports was the level of animosity that working and married parents felt against parents qualifying for support, although it was a point that TD Ó Caoláin mentioned in the Irish Parliament, the Dáil. He stated that ‘[t]he ill-conceived scheme has created divisions between children from families who receive social welfare payments and children from families who do not’ (Dáil Debates 2009a). One CSP Manager described a meeting the service had held to inform parents about the new scheme in which a parent qualifying for the full subsidy attended but reported feeling very intimidated by the level of anger expressed by parents with no welfare entitlement who were now going to have to pay a higher fee. The parent was careful not to let other parents know she qualified for the subvention during the meeting. Similarly, a negative comment was recorded on the questionnaires completed by parents about the levels of trustworthiness and deservedness of qualifying parents:

> *Spend more of your time looking at the people who cheat the system and not the people paying taxes, etc. Very annoying.*

Similar sentiments were also expressed by one CSP Manager when showing the researcher around the service. Significantly, fourteen parents of the twenty four parents who experienced an increase in fees told other parents about what they perceived as a negative experience. A similar behavioural pattern emerged amongst parents whose fees decreased with fifteen of the twenty seven parents telling other parents about their
positive experiences thus highlighting the redistribution of resources within the community. This sub-divided local parents through accruing financial benefits to welfare recipients, and placing burdens on the other who predominantly working and married local parents. This serves to distract attention away from the State’s responsibilities to parents and children (Bunreacht na hEireann 1937; Government of Ireland 2000a) and reduces the mobilisation efforts of targets, thus ensuring communities do not organise and gain power.

In two of the ten services, parents did engage in a mobilisation exercise with the support and assistance of their CSPs. They wrote to the Minister for Children to protest about the changes and the impact it was having on them but these isolated actions proved ineffective and yielded no response thus potentially discouraging future protests. Placing burdens on less powerful groups was facilitated as there were no effective channels of consultation or influence open to these parents (Ingram and Smith 1993) while the community service providers and sectoral VCOs were simultaneously being distracted and discouraged from advocacy activities.

9.2.7 Welfare trap

Those qualifying for the new subsidy were financially better off than under the Staffing Grant with a reduction from an average cost of €63.94 amongst the surveyed group to €43.23 per week. However, while parents were financially better off they were also at greater risk of falling deeper into the welfare trap as they stood to lose more financially that they previously had. When asked if parents would consider the impact on their subsidy of taking up employment fifty parents responded. 60% of these respondents (or
thirty parents) indicated it would be a consideration. Nineteen parents stated that they would consider the financial impact, in terms of fee increases, of taking up work:

_Hindered future potential to work and make money._

_If it decreased my subvention I would not take up employment._

_Well if I went part-time I’d be entitled to help._

_I would look at the overall house budget._

_...will increase if change jobs_ [this parent was referring to a move from Community Employment to other employment types]

The tendency for persons in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment has been to manage earnings, through participation in part-time or low paid employment so that they retain their welfare payment while earning a limited income\(^{16}\). Research by Daly and Clavero (2002, p.186) reported that in the 98/99 tax year, 61% of One Parent Family Payment recipients reported earned income but ‘72% of those earning had less than €7618 (just around the threshold earnings for disregard)’. While attempts were made within the design of the scheme to diminish the welfare trap through retention of a partial subsidy for a year, it may not be sufficient to encourage parents to participate in employment or training, despite national objectives to do so (Government of Ireland 2006d).

\(^{16}\) The One Parent Family Payment is means tested but there is an ‘Earnings Disregard’ where the first €146.50 a week, or €7,618 annually, of earned income from employment is ‘disregarded’ as income.
### 9.2.8 The decreased visibility of welfare fathers.

Other behaviours were also elicited from amongst the target group that run contrary to national policies. For instance, one provider noted the decreased visibility of fathers dropping off and collecting children from the service amongst parents that qualified for a subvention. The incentive to hold onto the One Parent Family Payment has increased since the introduction of the CCSS which could be perceived to be a *reward* rather than *assistance* for parents. The Fine Gael-Labour coalition in the 2011 Programme for Government stated that ‘Our tax, social welfare and other laws should not discourage people from getting married or cohabiting. For example, single mothers lose the One Parent Family Payment if they marry. Over time, we will transform it into a family income-based payment that does not discourage marriage or work’ (Government of Ireland 2011, p.26). This builds upon the goals identified in the *Strengthening families for life: Final report of the Commission on the Family* (Government of Ireland 1998, p.147) of ‘supporting families in carrying out their functions; promoting continuity and stability in family life; and protecting and enhancing the position of children and vulnerable dependent family members’. It would appear that the behavior elicited by the CCSS design runs contrary to family policy goals.

### 9.2.9 Policy misalignment

Overall, the administrative objectives of the CCSS, to impose sliding fee scales and track payments to welfare recipients, were met and *affordability* and *accessibility* improved for qualifying parents. However, a review of the wider impact on policy goals revealed negative side-effects on a range of policy areas.
Working and married parents within designated areas of disadvantage felt burdened at the expense of other local welfare recipient parents who experience increased benefits. This led to animosity that acted to diminish social capital within the area, thus reducing the capacity of local actors to engage in any form of civic activism against the state. Increased benefits accrued to welfare recipients which may have contributed to the structural deepening of a welfare trap and discouraged family continuity and stability while the burdens placed on displaced users may have driven them to use unregulated care. Community childcare services and the children in the services may become stigmatised if services cater only for children of welfare recipients. Also, at least half the children in the sample were exposed to a less diverse and locally representative mix of children reducing the quality of the child’s experience. A comparison of the CCSS and the FPSY goes further to reveal that negative stereotyping of targeted populations may account the design decisions driving the CCSS.

9.3 The social construction of the CCSS and the FPSY target populations

In order to carry out a review and comparison of the social constructions of various target populations of the CCSS and the FPSY, the research used Schneider and Ingram’s social construction of target population’s model (1997). This model focused on classifying the advantaged, who were politically powerful and positively constructed as deserving; contenders, who were perceived to be powerful but negatively constructed as undeserving; deviants, who were deemed to be undeserving, while had little or no power; and finally dependants, who had little power to influence policy design or define problems but the construction of these groups as deserving was positive, although not complimentary (Ingram and Smith, 1993). While a focus on the dimensions of power and influence and levels of deservedness was limited and there were some deviations in
how the various target populations were perceived in Ireland relative to the US, most likely because of cultural and political structural reasons, the overall classifications were useful as it enabled the research to reveal biases that contributed to an unequal distribution of resources.

The literature of the OMCYA, produced to provide basic information on the CCSS, appeared to reveal three target groups for this social inclusion scheme (OMCYA 2008a; OMCYA 2008b; OMCYA 2008c): children who were the end users of the services provided; the qualifying parents who were incentivised to place their children in community childcare services by receiving a reduced rate fee; and the CSPs who were financially incentivised to provide services in areas of market failure. While the FPSY also targeted children, parents and service providers, the construction of these target groups as being more powerful and deserving resulted in subtle difference in design that ensured the stereotypes were perpetuated in Ireland.

9.3.1 Children as invisible or dependent

While the children of qualifying CCSS parents were a clear target as they were end users of the service, there was no rationale outlined in the scheme’s literature to explain why they should participate in ECEC services or what type of experience they could expect to have. They were invisible outside the word ‘childcare’ being included in the name of the scheme. Within the design, eligibility for access was based solely on the welfare status of parents while the needs of children were not addressed at all.

This contrasts with the treatment of children under the universal FPSY, an early learning subsidy scheme typically found to be accessed by more ‘advantaged’ groups
Eligibility focused on the child as ‘the ECCE [FPSY] is open to all children aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months on 1 September each year’ (OMCYA 2009b). The FPSY moved beyond outlining details on the mechanics of how the scheme works (which was the focus of the CCSS literature), to providing information on why the scheme could benefit children. This was a symbolic and hortatory design feature in which the state strove to align values systems of targets to ideals of the state. The state also wrote to every parent removing the distance it had maintained under the ECS as the state now had a clear commitment to the rationale behind the development of the scheme. The child remained dependant in this scenario but the aims and objectives in terms of the behaviour of children were clear:

*Participation in a pre-school programme provides children with their first formal experience of early learning, the starting-point of their educational and social development outside the home. Children who avail of pre-school are more likely to be ready for school and a formal learning and social environment.* (OMCYA 2009b)

Although the OMCYA were offering parents a limited number of free part-time pre-school hours not all parents were availing of the scheme as they had the option of sending children to school once they reached the age of four. This was a more attractive option for some working parents as schools offered longer hours thus reducing the need for paid childcare. The CSPs interviewed during this research pointed out that parents were not always aware of the specific benefits of ECEC for their children so decisions were made by parents with an information deficit that the State had not addressed.

The CSPs also identified an element of competition emerging for these four year old children in response to state funding reductions. Some local schools were actively
encouraging parents to start their children in school when aged four, although it was not mandatory to attend school until aged six, as schools struggled to maintain funding levels. The lack of policy co-ordination between the various funding streams created a situation that negatively impacted upon children as research suggested that children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit from participation in quality ECEC services (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva et al. 2007) yet these were the children most likely to miss out on the pre-school experience (Sylva, Melhuish et al. 2004). Children were dependents in this scenario with no right to access services so were reliant on the capacities of parents or guardians to do what was in their best interests.

9.3.2 Dependent and advantaged parents

When looking at the construction of parents clear differences emerged in how they were treated under the two schemes. The literature supplied to parents by the OMCYA about the FPSY clearly identified the rationale for the scheme and reiterated the benefits of participation for their children. This was in line with expectations that the types of policy tools normally reserved for more powerful and deserving groups tended to ‘emphasize capacity building, inducements, and techniques that enable the target population to learn about the results of its behaviour and take appropriate action on a voluntary basis’ (Schneider and Ingram 1993, p.339).

In an attempt to stimulate demand for the FPSY, the OMCYA engaged in outreach activities as it wrote directly to all parents in the State with children that fell within the qualifying age criteria to inform them of the scheme but also to enlist them as problem solvers. Parents were encouraged to actively recruit their current service providers into the scheme if not already participating (OMCYA 2009a), thus increasing the supply:
If your child is already attending a pre-school service ... you can ask the service provider if they plan to participate in the scheme. (OMCYA 2009b)

This contrasts with how parents were managed from a distance under the CCSS with the focus being on regulating access rather than promoting the benefits for the parent and child. The literature for the targeted parents placed huge emphasis on qualifying criteria and no efforts were made to address the rationale for using regulated ECEC options. While the CCSS was designed as a financial incentive tool, parents within the research sample ranked quality and location/convenience as more important features informing their choice than cost which demonstrated the mismatch between design focus and the value systems of target populations.

The CSP managers interviewed revealed most parents heard about the CCSS through networking with other parents. So word-of-mouth was relied upon as the principal method of enrolment. CSPs felt there was a pragmatic reason for the State’s reluctance to engage in extensive outreach efforts. As budgets were closed participant numbers were limited, resulting in a need to manage demand. With the increase in the numbers of people in receipt of welfare since the on-set of the recession in 2008, the CSPs could not cater for the numbers of qualifying children.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) contend that less powerful groups tend to be more passive recipients of services from the State and are used to admitting their dependency. CCSS parents were required to ‘present themselves’ (ibid, p.339) to service providers to access the benefit they were entitled to. The primary form of interaction with government or agencies of the welfare recipients within the sample was as ‘applicants or claimants who are applying for services to bureaucracy’ (ibid, p.342).
When parents were asked in the questionnaire how they felt about handing over personal and financial details to local CSPs to receive the CCSS subsidy rate, they overwhelmingly accepted the process. A large portion of questionnaire respondents were single parents who were probably quite familiar with the ritual of *presenting themselves* and, as Soss (1999) revealed, can feel the need to be deferential to workers and fit into the image of the *deserving poor*. Perhaps then, as predicted by Schneider and Ingram (2005), negative stereotypes were being reinforced inadvertently by target groups themselves and over time they had come to accept that ‘the maldistribution of resources is simply the way things are or that the entitled are truly more deserving than they are’ (p.8). Of the welfare recipients, all of whom had experienced significant fee decreases, only one parent surveyed gave an overall positive comment that:

*It’s been a huge benefit*

This may indicate a level of passivity amongst qualifying parents, who have been conditioned to accept more support, despite the fact that many of them were managing to pay the fees before the subvention. Alternatively, it may because they do not want to draw attention to the benefits in case they were withdrawn from them too.

Overall the CCSS typifies a subsidy design aimed at *dependent* target groups in which a key feature was ‘labelling and stigmatizing recipients’ (Schneider and Ingram 1993, p.339). This was particularly relevant as research had shown that childcare choices that segregate ‘generate and maintain class divisions and work to reproduce differential educational opportunities’ (Vincent and Ball 2006, p.63).
9.3.3 Dependent service providers treated as contenders

The construction of children and parents highlighted in the sections above concur with many of the findings in the US however, some non-stereotypical constructions emerged in how the childcare service providers were treated in both schemes. A review of the service providers operating in Dublin indicated that there was a high reliance on small owner operated services, a trend most likely mirrored across the state, with few corporate chains operating. It would be expected that these often locally run services would be perceived positively yet following the roll-out of the FPSY a negative perception surfaced amongst parents where providers were being addressed as contenders who were not perceived to be deserving, a construction typically associated with big businesses in the US (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

This perception was evident in on-line debates in relation to the FPSY. The following quote from www.boards.ie highlighted how some parents felt about service providers:

    When the montessori decided to run the scheme offered by the government, they knew what they were getting in to, and now it seems like the parents are the "soft touch" as [they] want more money, to cover staff holidays. (CEng 2010)

Service providers expressed frustration and anger at being treated as contenders as demonstrated by comments from National Association of Private Childcare Providers (NPCP), an organisation that emerged organically in direct response to the introduction of the FPSY, on www.mychildcare.ie website:

    Since this [FPSY] was announced the scheme has been wrought (sic) with ongoing issues. The scheme was introduced with absolutely no consultation with private childcare providers which has resulted in an unviable scheme leaving many providers facing financial crisis or worse, closure. The OMCYA have
chopped and changed the scheme leaving many providers angry and frustrated and parents confused and in the dark. (Smyth 2009)

Negative statements made about CSPs were included in a letter to parents from the OMCYA that reinforced the negative construction. It stated:

If you qualify for either scheme but believe that your childcare service is not passing on the full subvention to you, or is charging for non-optional fees as part of an ECCE [FPSY] place, you should contact your local County Childcare Committee. (OMCYA 2010a - original emphasis)

Interesting, this line was included in a letter for parent utilising community services only not parents using private services. The advantaged parents accessing private services were not encouraged to inform on service providers but were given the more positive role of recruiting services into the FPSY (OMCYA 2009b).

The sense of frustration experienced by service providers was compounded by their level of financial dependence on the State and the rules of both subsidies that resulted in a restriction on the income they could generate. Research carried out on behalf of DCCC with fifteen of the 254 private providers in the city, revealed:

... many of the Private Providers felt as though their independence (and job satisfaction) had been taken away by the introduction of the ECCE [FPSY] scheme. ... [However, they] did agree that the scheme had provided a measure of financial stability at a time of falling child numbers and variability in requirements of parental childcare needs. (Partas 2011)

This demonstrated the dilemma facing all services providers as their dependency and lack of mobilisation had left them powerless.
The management tactic of the OMCYA follows an international trend in which ‘power is being expanded and blunted at the same time’ as service providers increasingly become involved with the provision of and contracting for services but are excluded from the decision making process ‘offering them responsibility without [adequate] resources and power’ (Craig, Mayo et al. 2000, p.329). What was unusual in the Irish scenario was that it applied to private as well as community service providers, although to slightly varying degrees.

9.3.4 The continued use of symbolic rhetoric and opaque design

The technique of opaque design was utilised extensively. For example, it was announced that a higher capitation rate was available to services under the FPSY if staff with qualifications at degree level were employed. However, service providers were to encounter problems and mixed messages about how this was to operate. Three years into the scheme DCCC were still posting clarifications on their website:

While the position regarding the higher capitation rate is relatively straightforward in the case of services which are purely Sessional, the position can be less clear where providers operate full daycare services as well as sessional ones. This is because of the sanction provided to DCYA by the Department of Finance, which states that the higher capitation rate is not applicable to full daycare places. (Dublin City Childcare Committee 2011b)

The subtly of design was only noticed by those engaging with the funding element of the scheme and not visible to those outside the implementation experience. The rules enabled the state to manage the fund to demonstrate that it clearly supported and favoured services that provide 38 week sessional pre-school services delivered in line with the school calendar year. Other services that provide full-time services that most likely met the needs of working parents were subject to scrutiny and at all times had to
keep the children and staff funded under the FPSY separated from other sessions and services (ibid). It also demonstrated the reach and influence of the Department of Finance on the design of ECEC schemes.

9.4 Conclusion

Overall what emerged from this review and evaluation of the Staffing Grant, the CCSS and the FPSY policy tools was a limited design vision that emphasised financial incentives and an almost overtly negative social construction of social inclusion policy targets. This contrasted with a range of capacity building and symbolic and hortatory design features for more positively constructed advantaged populations who were by definition more politically powerful.

The original EOCP staffing grant aimed to realise ambitious goals and objectives pertaining to empowerment in line with a range of local development initiatives supported by EU funding at the time that aimed to generate human and social capital through employment and local regeneration. The design features should have been ‘shaped in ways that encourage[d] feedback … [increasing] the likelihood that social mobilisation [would] occur to demand policy change’ (Schneider and Ingram 2005, p.13). Likewise, policy targets would have been viewed positively as capable of problem solving and adequate resources and systems should have been in place to realise healthy policy outcomes.

However, the reality was that the state paid only superficial attention to the design features that could have best realised stated policy goals. Some efforts were made in the design of the staffing grant to maximise integration of the ECEC developments with
wider social inclusion initiatives and enabling services to develop fee policies to best address local needs but the supports necessary to empower stakeholders address capacity deficiencies that had been identified were not put in place. The result was that this social inclusion mechanism was vulnerable to redesign as it was seen to be failing in addressing basic requirements in relation to the adoption of sliding fee scales to facilitate access to services.

The redesign took place under the NCIP (2007-2010), a programme that relied exclusively on exchequer funding. The objective that had been promoted by the EU of facilitating parents to enter employment, education or training slipped off the agenda as the newly introduced CCSS enabled the OMCYA to gain more control over decisions being made on the ground about who could access services and what they would pay. It removed discretionary and developmental design features and instead focused on: increased administration and control; a more limited definition of disadvantage; the use of symbolic rhetoric to continue to espouse a commitment to tackling social exclusion while committing limited resources to address the problem; and, an opaque design with complex administrative processes that minimised mobilisation and distanced the state from the disadvantaged target populations and moved it closer to advantaged targets, while simultaneously bringing power back into the centre.

A closer review of the impact of this design change to CCSS revealed a range of negative effects including:

- the revised administrative requirements that demanded parents present themselves as an applicant for a welfare benefit to CSPs rather than as a parent accessing a place for their child with a local subsidised service;
• segregation and possible ghettoisation within the sample;
• no cap on the fee portion that CCSS parents paid;
• evidence of significant variances in fees being charged within the sample, the variance based in large part on levels of dependency on trainee CE staff;
• locally, a division between parents as resentment was expressed by working and married parents that were losing subsidised places as the cost of a childcare place soared for them while those in receipt of welfare payments were experiencing significant reductions in the cost of places;
• the disempowerment and distraction of target populations from the role of the state;
• the deepened welfare trap for welfare-dependant parents;
• a mismatch between the values of the state and parents with a focus on financial incentives rather than elements important to parents such as the quality of service.
• decreased visibility of fathers during children’s participation in ECEC subsidised under the social inclusion measure; and,
• the increased amounts of time spent by CSP Managers managing the increased administrative burden that was exacerbated by OMCYA/DCYA delays in processing data and making payments due to staffing and technical difficulties.

The VCO reports that were prepared prior to the introduction of the CCSS had effectively anticipated the impacts as felt by target populations, despite the general lack of resources and a more flexible approach to methodological issues than were required for the PhD process. While their prediction that services would close down as a result
of the introduction of the CCSS was not realised, it had attracted much media attention so served to advance the lobbying efforts of the groups although this did not result in the recommended modifications to the CCSS being made prior to its introduction.

A close review of the impacts revealed a range of negative side-effects on other national policies due to the overall uncoordinated nature of policy development in Ireland. In particular, the welfare trap discouraged employment; parents taking children out of regulated community childcare services were reporting to CSPs that they were relying on unregulated childcare; fathers appeared to be driven underground in relation to involvement with their children’s ECEC services; and there appeared to be some evidence of the ghettoisation and stigmatisation of community services. These all run contrary to national policies in relation to employment, families, social inclusion as well as other elements of childcare policy.

As depicted in figure 9.1 below, when using Schneider and Ingram’s (1993) model of social construction of target populations, a comparison of the CCSS and the FPSY revealed that the CCSS fitted a pattern that appeared to be common within neo-liberal states in which social inclusion target parents were constructed negatively as dependents with little capacity to solve their own problems. Children of CCSS parents appeared to be dependents and virtually invisible as none of the design features addressed their needs other than by being covered by minimalist statutory regulations that focus on the welfare and protection of children. The CSPs were viewed almost as contenders but as they had little or no power to affect change or influence the political process, they could be described as moving towards a deviant status based on their treatment by the OMCYA/DCYA. As disadvantaged parents could opt for the CCSS which offered a greater range of hours for children for many years rather than the FPSY, which offered
limited sessional hours for ten months (or in some instances were choosing to send children to school earlier as schools engaged in more active recruitment of very young children in order to ensure adequate enrolment numbers) the FPSY predominantly serviced the needs of advantaged parents. As such, these parents were treated as responsible problem solvers and their children, while still dependant, were highly visible within the design of the scheme. The opportunity to realise participatory rights was highest within this policy tool design as a condition of funding was that staff need to be qualified. However the requirement to adhere to the national frameworks was not realised as inadequate supports were provided with little incentive for the state to do so in the future as advantaged parents were in large part unaware of the significance of this requirement on the children’s experiences within ECEC services.

Figure 9.1 Mapping the social construction of ECEC policy tool target populations

In periods of economic depression or recession, there is no room to make everyone deserving so incentives are strong to perpetuate the degenerative political model that
exists in Ireland. However, while social constructions are often long lasting and
difficult to change, they are contestable. The conclusions and recommendations within
this research will focus on this amongst other issues.
Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

10.0 Introduction

This chapter draws together the findings and discussions presented in the previous three chapters and makes recommendations for change. Seven indicators reflecting a socio-culturally informed vision of ECEC experience were tracked through the research. **Access**, **affordability** and **quality** were selected as the three elements of the Childcare Trilemma along with **coordination**. These four elements were also identified as key areas by the OECD (2002, 2006). The remaining indicators represent a broad understanding of children’s rights as having three distinct elements: **protection; service provision; and participation** (Alderson 2004). In addition, values and principles relating to justice, democracy and equity emanating from policy documents were also tracked to determine whether they were positively impacted through implementation design decisions.

The research addressed the research question, *what impact does policy tool design have on realising national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children in Ireland?* An array of policy tools classified under the four headings identified in Hood’s (1986) basic tool-kit of government actions - **informational, statutory, financial, and organisational** - were evaluated in order to determine how **effectively** the state had realised policy goals, including the values and norms contained in policy documents, to address all seven indicators.

All policy tools were evaluated at a macro level to give a broad understanding of the range of policy tools selected, the purpose of their design, and their cumulative impact.
Each category of policy tool was further classified as either **substantive** or **procedural** (Howlett 2000). This provided insight into the type of tools being used to distribute resources and promote developments in the sector as well as the less visible techniques used to manage the process. Given the prominence and importance of the financial policy tools, they were also evaluated to consider how **direct**, **visible** and **coercive** they were and their levels of **automaticity** which determined levels of dependence on existing structures (Salomon 2002). These four dimensions enabled an evaluation of how **distanced** the state wished to remain from a problem, the **vulnerability** of the budget, levels of **commitment** to changing behaviours, and levels of **reliance** on third party actors. This was complemented with a micro-level investigation that considered how policy targets were impacted by the design of ECEC subsidies, revealing the underlying **behavioural assumptions** (Schneider and Ingram 1990) and **social constructions** (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 2005) of policy targets informing policy tool design decisions. This phase of the evaluation reviewed whether inequities and biases were reinforced or challenged through the design of ECEC policy tools.

The conclusions presented in this chapter reveal that significant levels of activity were identified in all areas except in the development of statutory policy tools, which is in line with expectations in a regime that had adopted the features associated with **New Public Management** (NPM) (Hood 1991). The **informational policy tools** were characterised by high levels of **report generation** which ‘captured’ aspirational policy objectives and **contained** alternative ideological positions. However, a more limited and pragmatic set of operational targets were outlined by the state when policy became translated into the various *Programme for Government* documents (Government of Ireland 2000b; 2007b; 2009; 2011) reflecting the values of the civil servants.
implementing policy rather than the concerns with equality, equity and rights incorporated in the documents. The result was high levels of policy misalignment (Howlett 2009) in which the potential to realise the much quoted and promoted policy goals was diluted.

The focus of the limited regulatory policy tools was confined to the protection and welfare of children (O’Kane 2004, Schonfeld 2007) with a more voluntarist approach taken to implementation of policy in relation to provision and participatory rights. This combined with the unenforceability of the international policy tools in the form of the UNCRC and the Lisbon targets to provide a limited and weak regulatory platform.

The majority of financial policy tools have been developed since 2000 into a comprehensive set of funding programmes that successfully utilised third parties to increase provision and access and impact upon affordability for parents of pre-school children and a limited number of social inclusion targets. However, it also actualised a split-system in which early learning was prioritised over childcare (OECD 2001). While both were managed by the DCYA, children age four and over attending school fell under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills meaning many children had to make a transition between three distinct ECEC experiences, childcare, early-learning, and compulsory schooling. The design of the policy tools also revealed that the quality element of the childcare trilemma received least attention. The tendency within neo-liberal states to design policy tools that reinforce negative social constructions and stereotypes (Schneider and Ingram 2007) appeared to carry through in Ireland. This resulted in a perpetuation of the inequitable distribution of resources in the state.
Finally, as expected when adopting a networked approach to governance, the management and development of organisational policy tools was a priority enabling the state to showcase the development of a comprehensive set of substantive structures focusing on children. However, procedurally the design of these, as well as the financial policy tools, combined to allow the state to tightly manage and control the levels of advocacy and possible dissent allowing the state to maintain an inequality of conditions (Lynch 2010). The focus on administration rather than innovation has meant that overall coordination efforts remained weak. Overall, the findings presented a picture of an unacceptable level of policy realisation for a range of policy targets including women, children, targets of social inclusion measures and working parents.

Following on from the conclusions, a set of recommendations are presented that address the question - *what actions can be taken to increase the effectiveness of ECEC policy design decisions in Ireland to realise national ECEC policy goals that recognises the rights of children?*

The first of three sections begins with a focus on the need for the further development and public debate of key conceptual issues that remain unaddressed in an Irish context. While the negative social constructions of targets of policy social policy can be addressed by the wider community and voluntary sector, three concepts specific to the ECEC sector in Ireland are identified that need further exploration. They focus on the development of an understanding of rights beyond a legalistic interpretation; a discourse about the normative pedagogical age at which education and care is shared between the State and parents; and the advancement of a pedagogical rather than a curriculum based approach to ECEC experiences. This form of debate is imperative in generating awareness about the current values informing policy tool design decisions in ECEC and
in trying to develop an explicit understanding of the values that are normatively acceptable in an Irish context.

The second set of recommendations focus on the need for structural change to tackle the *split-system* and create a stronger sectoral identity and space for debate. Actions are identified under five headings: reduced financial dependence on the DCYA; refuting a *service delivery role* for advocacy organisations; increasing the channels available for advocacy and learning; the integration of policy functions; and a shift from market approach to a partnership approach.

Finally, at a micro level, recommendations are made in relation to the design of ECEC policy tools in Ireland so that they are adjusted to realise the goals captured in key policy documents rather than a covert set of values advanced by a *Patriarchical state* (O’Connor 2008) that prioritises the needs of advantaged parents and the economy over those of children, women and social inclusion targets. Recommendations are classified under three categories that begin with recommendations for immediate change, followed by recommendations for change in the medium term, and finally long-term recommendations that should move the state towards the provision of affordable high quality childcare in which children are recognised and respected as competent agents and valuable citizens.

### 10.1 Informational policy tools

The informational tools of the state are the communicative tools that aim to assist the various stakeholders within a networked governance structure work effectively together. The information generated expresses the overall aims, objectives and aspirations of
policy and the planned implementation. As expected within a networked environment, there has been a significant amount of activity in this area, particularly in the area of report production. These substantive (Howlett 2000) policy tools reflect a commendable degree of activity in generating policy documents, national frameworks, guidelines, standards, development plans, and so on. A key benefit for the state of the extensive activity in this area is that it serves to advance the promotional techniques adopted by the state when presenting information to key institutions such as the UN (Kiersey and Hayes 2010) and the OECD.

However, procedurally (Howlett 2000) many key policy documents have remained informational in character with few systems being put in place to compel or monitor implementation that realises the stated policy objectives. The documents have very successfully captured discourses emanating from the human capital approach as outlined in key documents such as Towards 2016 (Government of Ireland 2006d), which focuses on the provision of childcare to facilitate employment and tackle social exclusion, as well as a more child-focused rationales contained in the National Children’s Strategy (2000) where ‘children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own’ (4) and the National Childcare Strategy (Government of Ireland 1999), where the ‘rights of children to equality of care and education’ (p.v) are recognised. However, this evaluation of policy tool design reveals little adherence to the aspirational aims, objectives or recommendations contained within the key policy documents of the state when designing the tools of implementation.

Documents developed by VCOs raising concerns about the design of ECEC subsidy tools in 2008 had little impact despite their presentation of research that demonstrates
the unequal burdening and stigmatisation of vulnerable social inclusion target populations. These findings support observations that partnership approaches, including consultation mechanisms, have been used by policy insiders to capture consensus and contain dissent (Kirby 2002a; Quinn 2007; Quinn 2008).

Other documents, such as Síolta (CDCDE 2006), the national quality framework, Aistear (NCCA 2009), the national early childhood curriculum framework, the Workforce Development Plan (OMCYA 2010c), National Standards for Pre-school Services (Child Care Regulations Implementation Group 2010b), and The Agenda for Children’s Services: A Policy Handbook (OMC 2007), provide some guidance and insight into the realisation of the participative element of children’s rights. They contain references to children as competent agents and a broad policy focus is identified, reflecting a rights rationale (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training 2009) that considers the full range of issues affecting children such as poverty, health and welfare. The considerable levels of discretion built into the implementation procedures and the voluntarist nature of monitoring procedures, however, render them ineffective with few deadlines or targets set for realising goals.

The state has also invested in generating much needed data in the area of ECEC such as the Growing Up in Ireland (Williams, Greene et al. 2009) longitudinal study, State of the Nation’s Children (OMC 2006; OMCYA 2008e; 2010b) biennial reports, and sponsorship of several academic studies and postgraduate research projects. However the state’s direct control over the allocation of funding can be depicted as a technique for maintaining control over outcomes. Summaries of academic research funded by the DCYA are presented on their website signalling their close association with the work, a move that may decrease the likelihood that researchers will be overly critical of the
state, particularly in such a small State and sector in which most actors are known to each other.

Symbolically, there has been great significance attached to ratifying the UNCRC and signing up to the Lisbon targets but once again, their influence has been blunted. The failure to make constitutional adjustments to convert the UNCRC into hard law has meant the UNCRC serves only as an informational and moral guide for the sector. Similarly, a lack of sufficient data to report on Lisbon targets, and the voluntarist nature of the Lisbon Agreement’s Open Method of Co-ordination (O’Donnell and Moss 2005) combine to ensure these tools remain informational rather than authoritative resources of the state. However, while the international covenants continued to be considered soft law (Greene and Kerrins 2008), the design of the UNCRC’s consultative mechanism provided an avenue for advocacy for VCOs. Their consultative mechanisms moved beyond symbolic (Keenan 2007) and enabled VCOs to make submissions that were considered as a counter to the State’s promotional reports, helping to draw attention to the negative impacts and side-effects of policy implementation decisions on policy targets.

The state has relied on third parties such as VCOs and childcare service providers to communicate with parents and other stakeholders within the sector enabling the State to distance itself from the ECEC, particularly when presented as a mechanism to facilitate parental employment or training. This objective informed the original design of dedicated ECEC funding programmes as it was a condition of the EU’s match funding. However, there was evidence that the state distanced itself from this objective of ECEC following the end of the EU funding contribution to ECEC programmes in 2007.
However change characterised by increased directness (Salamon 2002) emerged in 2009 as the state funded the provision of pre-school services. The state actively came to the fore contacting parents directly by letter to clearly communicate a positive message about the values of ECEC when conceived of as an early learning activity. The enthusiastic promotion of the FPSY revealed that the state accepted some responsibility for children’s early learning prior to starting school, revealing a pedagogical age of between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months for a limited number of hours. This move by the state in which it actively and openly supported early education but continued to distance itself from other ECEC experiences outside the home has a particular significance when it has been revealed that such features of policy tool design have an impact on setting norms in society (Rigby 2007; Rigby, Tarrant et al. 2007).

10.2 Statutory policy tools

In line with NPM trends, Ireland’s reliance on statutory instruments in the area of ECEC has been minimalist with the focus limited to the welfare and protection of children, through the specification of child-staff ratios, space requirements, record-keeping, and so on (O’Kane 2004, Moloney 2010). Also, the design of rules and regulations in relation to notification requirements, and their extensive voluntary nature for services has meant that the majority of children were not covered by the regulations due to high levels of reliance on home-based services in the form of childminders who remain largely outside the regulatory frame.

The resultant systems developed by the agencies responsible for monitoring adherence were highly complex with childcare service providers subject to inspections and visits by a variety of different agencies each year while being referred to a range of policy
documents, frameworks and guidelines. Some of the NVCC member groups were funded by the state to provide informational workshops and training to assist service providers interpret the information and implement guidelines as well as charting a route through the complexities of the requirements under several different inspections. This attention to practical difficulties served to distract the NVCC and service providers away from the developmental issues facing the sector. Little room existed for debate or discussion about conceptual issues in relation to children and childhood, women’s role in society and the overall value of care.

A lack of investment in and commitment to implementation was evidenced by a lack of financial support for service providers to put into practice the key concepts captured in *Aistear* and *Síolta*. In addition, it would appear that these concepts were not absorbed by the key public servants responsible for implementation as reflected in the literature of the FPSY which focuses on developing future workers rather than promoting the socio-cultural view of children contained in *Aistear* (2009) and *Síolta* (2006). This reflects the strong influence of a Euro-American, middle class global childhood (Cannella 2002; James and James 2004) that emanates from the State’s economic policies (Kirby and Murphy 2008, Murphy 2009). The inspection tool developed by the HSE was also designed to more strongly reflect a traditional curriculum approach that embraced a focus on developmental outcomes and goals. It was designed using a positivist methodology in which a series of tick boxes were used. Within this system administration and compilation of results appeared to be prioritised over a pedagogical perspective based on a socio-cultural view of children in which complexity and difference are embraced. The inspectors, who acted as street level bureaucrats involved in interpreting the implementation of policy, appeared to continue to rely on a limited
understanding of quality focusing on standardised measuring instruments, common amongst Anglo-American state (NESSE 2009). There was little evidence within the design of quality monitoring mechanisms in Ireland of a closer alignment to states influenced by a children’s rights approach in which the evaluative criteria recognised the complex interactive nature of culturally defined ECEC quality standards.

10.3 Financial policy tools

The state has invested over €1 billion in ECEC since the late 1990s. It successfully facilitated an increase in 40,000 ECEC places under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP 2000-2006) and set targets for a further 50,000 under the subsequent National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) (OMCYA 2011a). It also secured a participation rate of almost 90% of eligible children in the FPSY within the 4,300 participating services (both community and private) where children receive free access to ECEC services run by qualified staff for a limited number of hours (ibid).

Over the years, the emphasis shifted from increasing supply under the EOCP, a tactic more commonly associated with social democratic states, to responding to demand under the NCIP, a strategy more in line with neo-liberal approaches to ECEC development (OECD 2006). This shift in emphasis correlated with the state’s reduced financial reliance on EU funding during the NCIP years from 2007 onwards.

The state’s traditional reliance on cash benefits rather than services was challenged following the onset of the recession with the state opting, in 2009, to introduce the FPSY subsidy to ECEC providers in place of the Early Childhood Supplement (ECS) cash payment to parents, which resulted in significant savings for the state. The design
of the scheme was such that conditions of funding focused on staff qualifications and some level of adherence to the national frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear*. This was a direct (Salamon 2002) and positive move as it addressed the needs of children for quality services, at least on paper. However, the lack of attention paid to the inclusion of capacity building supports, such as training opportunities, for service providers in the design of the programme has meant that a commitment to adherence to the national frameworks was aspirational only. Attention to this less visible criterion for funding, which impacts most directly on the children in services, takes the form of pilot initiatives and workshops.

The NCIP years from 2007 onwards, were marked by a rationalising of funding mechanisms. The Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) scheme was developed by the OMCYA to replace allowances that were paid to trainees on state funded schemes administered by both FÁS and the VEC. In addition, the HSE and the Department of Social Protection were withdrawing financial support from services that were designed as intervention services and CSPs were directed to avail of the CCSS as the revised eligibility criteria meant that service users were likely to be that same target group.

With no direct state provision, the financial policy tools could be described as having high levels of automaticity (Salamon 2002) as the DCYA relied on the private sector to provide the free pre-school hours with an educational focus and some of the places under the CETS. Simultaneously CSPs were supported in a more limited childcare capacity to operate services that support targeted populations through the CCSS and CETS while also being eligible for the FPSY, although a higher quality criteria applied
to the service provided to children under this scheme relative to children funded under the CCSS and CETS although all located in the same facility.

While parents were not compelled to avail of the state supports the high levels of financial support available under the FPSY, the CCSS and CETS acted as a coercive (Salamon 2002) incentive for parents to participate in the schemes. However, there are no services or supports designed to specifically to meet the needs of working parents, outside social insurance entitlements and statutory leave entitlements. This raises the question of the state’s real commitment to supporting the education and care of children outside the home beyond a very limited focus on disadvantage or pre-school hours. The states reluctance to support ECEC development outside this limited view was illustrated by the OMCYA’s refusal to permit DCCC to use existing childminding equipment grants to deliver enterprise support services to thousands of childminders to assist them availing of tax relief mechanisms. The inclusion of these capacity building design features could have impacted very positively on access and affordability for working parents at no additional cost to the state.

What would appear to be a deliberate decision not to actively support services for working parents, coupled with the significant reliance families have on the Child Benefit cash payment which some argue actually discourages participation in workforce (Lewis 2006), suggests that policy tools were calibrated and designed to incorporate features of a patriarchal state (O’Connor 2008). Despite the rhetoric about the state’s commitment to women’s participation in the workforce and the introduction of equality and maternity related legislation that was required by the EU, the discretionary decisions by the state in relation to the development of a range of ECEC support suggest that little has changed ideologically in how women’s role in society was viewed by
policy insiders since the report of the First Commission on the Status of Women (1972). This report suggests that children, at least up to the age of three years, should be cared for by the mother in the home. This is supported by a pedagogical view contained within the male breadwinner model that attachment with mothers is critical in the early years (Van Dongen 2009) thus ECEC in this scenario is conceived of as a last resort for those who are compelled or chose to work.

The FPSY was a highly visible (Salamon 2002) and politically valuable policy tool that assisted in promoting a positive picture of progress in the state. The major drawback, however, was that the design of the FPSY, when evaluated against the CCSS, revealed the actualisation of the split-system in which a higher value was placed on early learning over childcare. The FPSY had some characteristics of a capacity tool and a symbolic and hortatory tool (Schneider and Ingram 1990). Overall, appropriate resources were allocated to the scheme and information was provided to parents to assist them make the decision to enrol their children but the information was also designed to align the value systems of parents and the state in a belief that participation in the pre-school service would positively benefit children and the economy.

The CCSS in contrast was designed as a more limited incentive tools (Schneider and Ingram 1990) that did not move beyond a financial inducement to encourage participation. There was no attempt to explain why participation would be beneficial to children. The disparity between the schemes continued as the CCSS and CETS social inclusion measures had closed budgets (Purcal and Fisher 2006) meaning the number of places available was restricted with an inadequate number of places available for all eligible. The FPSY did not suffer the same limitations as the budget for the FPSY has continued up until 2012 to be sufficient to provide places for all eligible children, even
as extensive austerity cuts were applied elsewhere. This inequity in design signifies an underlying negative construction of disadvantaged target populations relative to the more politically powerful *advantaged* (Schneider and Ingram 2007) populations that were serviced by the FPSY.

Investment in social inclusion measures would appear to be under threat as rhetoric in the most recent programme for government report *Government for National Recovery 2011-2016*, (Government of Ireland 2011) indicates that the state’s continued support is contingent upon adequate funding being available, a challenge given the level of austerity measures the state has committed itself to. While the visibility and vulnerability of the social inclusion budget item are evident, any significant reduction of the overall rate of investment could potentially result in the wide scale closure of the purpose built facilities across the state that the EU has partially funded. Politically, this would reflect badly on the state, and as such offers some level of protection to the continuation of some form of social inclusion funding for ECEC in the short to medium-term. While the level of funding is clearly an issue of importance to the sector, it is the range of negative impacts on *dependant* targets of these measures that is of serious concern.

The design of the CCSS negatively impacted upon *quality* for all children as the recruitment of qualified staff was no longer a condition of funding as it was with its predecessor, the EOCP Staffing Grant. However, the places were made more affordable for parents in receipt of welfare payments but the services were at risk of being ghettoised as evidence existed within the sample surveyed that an increasing number of children from homes dependent on welfare were enrolling in community childcare services. Also, the capacity building role the services had played in the wider local
development of areas was reduced as the changed criteria for accessing the CCSS meant services were no longer actively supporting parents to return to work, education or training as subsidised places are only available to children of parents in receipt of welfare payments.

The use of symbolic rhetoric (Schneider and Ingram 1997) was a tactic used extensively by the state when designing policy tools for social inclusion targets. The claims of quality provision were mentioned in much of the literature but with no requirement to have any qualified staff working with children accessing community services, a high level of reliance on untrained part-time staff accessed through the Community Employment (CE) active labour market programme throughout the sector (O’Donoghue-Hynes and Hayes 2011), and requirements only to comply with minimalist legislation focusing on protection and welfare issues meant these claims were misleading. The same was true of the claims within CCSS literature to facilitate parents’ participation in work, education or training. As parents leaving the welfare system would lose their entitlement to a subsidised childcare place for their children, parents within the sample surveyed explained they were caught in a welfare trap.

This contrasted with the design of policy tools that benefit more advantaged target populations who access the FPSY as adequate resources were provided to support claims made by the state about quality provision with a requirement to have qualified staff working with children funded under the scheme. Subsidy rates also increased as staffing qualifications increased.

In line with Ireland’s frequent classification as a neo-liberal (Hantrais 2004, Scruggs and Allan 2006b) or competitive state (Ó Riain 2004; Kirby 2006; Kirby and Murphy
2008) a market approach to delivery of services was relied upon, however, the design of the subsidies developed under the NCIP included features that facilitated high levels of state intervention by that state in the operations of the ECEC services. Income was capped for services in receipt of FPSY subsidies while all service providers receiving subsidies were required to submit their fees policy for approval to CCCs and Pobal. The state went as far as micro-managing business operations as frequent inspections were undertaken by different agencies to monitor income, verify the identity of children the subsidy was being paid for, as well as a limited attention to quality issues.

The lack of co-ordination of policies overall led to a number of negative side-effects resulting from the CCSS design. The CCSS evaluation revealed negative impacts on family policy as the rules of the scheme acted as a deterrent to the overt involvement of fathers in children’s interactions with ECEC services and married parents were less likely to qualify for a subsidised place in a community service, potentially discouraging parents with young children getting married. The welfare trap also acted as a disincentive to taking up employment while the contribution community services have made to local regeneration efforts diminished.

A range of design features contained within the NCIP subsidies served to perpetuate negative social constructions of disadvantaged targets as dependent (Schneider and Ingram 1997) with impediments to escaping the poverty trap following retrograde design changes introduced under the NCIP. This contrasts with more advantaged parents who typically took up FPSY places for their children. The FPSY was designed with sufficient capacity building features and information was provided directly to parents in an attempt to align the value systems of the policy targets with the state’s visible commitment to early education for pre-school children. Within this context,
children were constructed as dependent on their parents and as future workers for industry. Service providers for both schemes complained of a construction that emerged of them as being somehow undeserving, being treated with suspicion as though contenders (Schneider and Ingram 1997) and having unilateral decision in relation to income generation activities being imposed upon them (Partas 2011).

10.4 Organisational policy tools

Given Ireland’s competencies in partnership arrangements and traditional aversion to direct service delivery (Adshead 2008b), a high level of activity took place under this heading. The state effectively used existing structures and agencies in addition to establishing new structures. On paper there appears to have been significant inroads made into improving co-ordination in relation to children with innovative procedural techniques such as co-location used to bring sections from different government departments together in one location. The state incrementally expanded the remit, authority and influence of a children’s ministry, which signalled an increased commitment to children’s issues. In line with a life-cycle approach to policy development being adopted by the state (National Economic and Social Council 2005), structures were well defined and more comprehensive in the childhood phase than amongst the other life-cycle phases (Carney, Dundon et al. 2011).

A closer review of the key structures in place also reveals a lot of symbolic implementation (Matland 1995) strategies being used in which efforts were made to be seen to solve the problems of access, affordability and quality for parents, rights for children and coordination at a policy level. The children’s Ministry evolved from being a Minister of State in 1994 to become a special Minister of State invited to attend
cabinet meetings with no voting rights in 2005, before becoming a full cabinet Ministry position in 2011. Up until 2011, the position had no effective power. However, the Minister’s initial performance indicated a continuation of strategies used by predecessors as the Minister oversaw her first budget in December 2011 giving her full support to a redesign of the FPSY so that quality was adversely affected as child-staff ratios were altered and subsidy rates reduced and an increasingly targeted approach for the CCSS resulted in subsidies for parents with welfare payments that were not means tested being reduced.

However, the primary function of procedural mechanisms for organisational and financial policy tools were to very proactively and often covertly manage and control power and dissent within the sector (Ó Broin 2009b). The service providers and the NVCC had high levels of financial dependence on the state and reductions to funding, closure of agencies as well as redefining roles all featured throughout the study resulting in the disempowerment of stakeholders that would normally have been expected to play a strong advocacy role in the sector. The state would appear to have actively promoted a model of social partnership and local development that favoured negotiation over conflict (Geoghegan and Powell 2009, Baker 2009), although these processes has been characterised as methods of containment (Murphy 2002, Quinn 2008, Ó Broin 2009a,) rather than an empowerment mechanisms which was confined in the most part to ECEC policy development rather than implementation.

The state also distracted service providers and the NVCC through shifting their focus away from capacity building and advocacy by delegating huge administrative responsibilities to childcare service providers, both private and community, Pobal, the CCCs and the NVCC. In addition, they changed the criteria for Board of Management
membership for the CCCs and Pobal so they no longer reflected a model of social partnership but instead focused on the *operational* skills of members, ensuring *capture* at staffing and board level, once again reflecting the values of the public service rather than the social partners.

This *co-opting* (Harvey 2009; Murphy 2009; Ó Broin 2009a) technique and *managerialist* (Hardiman and MacCárthaigh 2008; Harvey 2009) focus was used tactically even with organisations that were not dependant on state funding. The state actively moved to partner projects with Atlantic Philanthropies, an independent organisation with an objective of increasing the profile of children’s issues on the national agenda. This arrangement offered the state the opportunity to influence outcomes and enabled it to build up relationships and monitor the actions of Atlantic Philanthropies.

The rationalising within the sector in the form of the IPPA and NCNA merger to create Early Childhood Ireland offers a potential opportunity for the sector to strengthen the advocacy and representative capacity within the sector. However, the needs of service providers to address *practical* and pressing issues in relation to administration, inspections and funding have magnified dramatically since the increased dependence of providers on the FPSY, CETS and the CCSS thus posing a challenge for the NVCC to keep a focus on the child, quality of provision and developing a strong sectoral identity.

Within the wider community and voluntary sector, there were a range of initiatives emerging to address the advocacy deficit and increase citizen participation, such as *Claiming our Future*, the *Advocacy Initiative* and the proposal for a series of Presidential Seminars. Within the ECEC sector, Atlantic Philanthropies funded *Start*
Strong one of the few VCOs in the sector that was independent of state funding. So additional channels existed through which change could be achieved.

Overall coordination is poor as decisions around co-location aimed at increased integration appear to have been made for pragmatic reasons rather than on a real conviction or belief in the benefits of ECEC for all children. The procedural tactics of the state need to be exposed as unacceptable and responsible for creating conditions where a definition of equality is reduced to an anti-poverty stance rather than a genuine aim to enable equal standards of living (Baker 2009; Lynch 2010).

10.5 Recommendations

Amongst all welfare regimes ECEC policy is driven to the fore of the political agenda as the demand for services increase with the demise of the twentieth century male breadwinner model (Lewis 2001, Dahlberg and Moss 2005, Van Dongen 2009). The social democratic states have responded by ensuring extensive public provision of services as ECEC is viewed as a public good that serves to advance democratic solidarity amongst parents and children (Meyers and Gornick 2003). The conservative and neo-liberal regime have avoided involvement in what has been constructed as a private family matter, although there are some notable exceptions (ibid). Ireland, like many states has realised a split-system in which childcare for the under threes is funded only as an intervention (OECD 2001, 2006) although a review of the design of the CCSS gives no clarity as to the objectives of this approach in Ireland. The child is not prioritised as little attention to quality or the child’s experience are emphasised and parents need to remain on welfare, rather than be in employment, to qualify for a place for their child. However, the investment in pre-school early learning brings Ireland in
line with most European states (Scheiwe and Willekens 2009). The recommendations for change being made are opportune as the DCYA is a new structure with policy tools in place for only a few years so that trajectory of the policy path (Pierson 2000) could be changed relatively easily while the scope also exists to create an awareness amongst the general population about the full potential of ECEC services to yield a range of more positive and socially just outcomes for society as well as the economy (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001, Dahlberg and Moss 2005).

A range of recommendations are made that, in line with the breadth of the review conducted, span from the macro to the micro level. First, the need for debate and discussion to explore the values that should be informing the design of policy tools design in relation to rights, equality and the status of care is presented. From there, the need for systemic change is highlighted to enable and empower advocacy within the sector and improve overall coordination efforts. Finally, specific recommendations are made as to how the existing ECEC policy tools could be reconfigured to more effectively realise the goals of national policy that advocate for the development of affordable, accessible, quality ECEC services for all that embrace a progressive understanding of children as rights holders and citizens.

10.5.1 Conceptual development

‘Society is still deeply unequal today. To make such a change ... would require such a change in consciousness as would be deeply challenging to many of the assumptions which are central to Irish society’. (Higgins 2011)

‘Irish political culture promotes a non-ideological approach to political debate where political decisions about redistribution are reduced to technical statistical debates and where the dominant macro discourse revolves around competitiveness and employment growth’ (Kirby and Murphy 2009, p.157)
As the two quotes indicate, significant change is required to create the space needed to explore alternative ideologies to those the focusing on the development of a *Competitive State* (Kirby and Murphy 2008). The values currently being promoted and supported through the design of ECEC policy tools do not correlate with the stated commitments to equality or rights. The normative values being promoted through policy tool design at present include:

- a view of women primarily as care-givers for children outside of the pre-school and school hours;
- a view of children as dependent and the responsibility of the family;
- an acceptance by the state of *shared responsibility* for children that is confined to an *early learning* experience for children or as an *childcare intervention* service to support targeted parents;
- an understanding of rights for children as focusing on protection and limited service provision;
- a focus on children as *future workers* when participating in state supported early learning experiences;
- a construction of social inclusion policy targets, and all ECEC service providers, as less deserving than more *advantaged* groups in society; and
- a traditionalist, socially conservative approach to social policy that seeks to minimise and deflect conflict.

In terms of moving towards greater equality of condition (Baker 2009), more than ever, in light of the austerity measures that are planned for the state in the coming years, there is a need to challenge the current construction of *‘who is deserving in society?’*. Given
the overall lack of opportunities to voice dissent within the state there is a need to create new and more visible spaces in which negative and limiting social constructions of children, women and socially disadvantaged citizens can be tackled. There are a series of existing initiatives that can be used to promote alternative constructions that contribute towards realising ‘substantial equality of resources … aimed at satisfying needs, and enabling roughly equal standards of living’ (ibid 2009, p.59). These include a series of public debates, such as the series of Presidential Seminars being proposed by President, Michael D. Higgins, the national public meeting being held by the Claiming our Future movement and the establishment of the Advocacy Initiative in 2012 to enhance the dissemination of information and advocacy skills of VCOs.

There is also a need to challenge the tendency towards consensus building that has emerged through the dominance of processes such as Social Partnership and the strategy of the state to suppress debate or challenge by policy targets. Diverse views should be accommodated within a more open and transparent process of policy implementation.

In particular, there are three specific concepts that need to be explored and developed nationally via extensive debate and discussion in order to expand the current understanding of rights in an ECEC context: (i) children’s rights; (ii) a culturally appropriate pedagogical age; and (iii) a pedagogical approach to ECEC provision.

(i) **Children’s Rights**

The concept of rights should to be based on a concept of citizenship rather than an ability to participate in the workforce. The debate needs to be expanded to shift beyond the narrow legalistic position where protection and provision of services to children at
risk are the primary focus. In this scenario, the state and family continue to compete for the child with increased power accumulating to the state to step in and provide alternative services when the family fails in order to protect the child. Within this narrow interpretation, there is little space to explore, endorse and support the participative capacity of children to be included in decisions affecting them. Children remain dependent and invisible. While current mobilising efforts of VCOs to have the referendum on Children’s Rights passed, there is a need to expand the linkages between VCOs, policy makers and academics in Ireland (Urban 2006).

**Call to action:**

- As suggested by Gallagher (2007) ‘academics in particular have it seems to me substantial ethical obligation to participate in relevant public debate, not just as citizens but as custodians of particular expertise’ (p.5) and as such need to extend efforts to get research findings into a more public domain. In particular, the findings from **Dublin Institute of Technology**’s research project *ECEC in Ireland: Towards a Rights Based Policy Approach*, of which this thesis forms a pillar, need to be proactively disseminated within the sector.

**(ii) Pedagogical Age**

A fundamental question that needs to be explored is: *what critical pedagogical age is culturally appropriate for Ireland?* This is an emotive issue with little general understanding of the concept amongst most stakeholders. There is also no clear vision of the role of ECEC or its potential so responses solicited at this point in time would only reflect a view on the age of participation within the current split system and a
limited understanding of the role of ECEC in the life of children, their families and society in general.

**Call to action:**

- The space needs to be created to generate a comprehensive vision of ECEC as contributing to the enhancement of democratic practice and citizenship so that current economic-centred rationales can be challenged.
- Further research should be carried out in this area to articulate the current understanding of the role of ECEC and the critical pedagogical age based on this vision. Work should then advance with sample (representative) groups of parents to explore whether their view on the critical pedagogical age changes based on a revised understanding of ECEC as a democratic project.

**(iii) Pedagogical Approach**

The advancement of children’s rights is hampered significantly by the lack of understanding amongst all stakeholders about the relevance of and need for a pedagogical rather than curriculum based approach. A critical mass needs to build up and be driven by parents to ensure that the demand for a pedagogical approach which embraces a broad socio-cultural understanding of children exists. It is difficult for VCOs such as the Early Childhood Ireland to advance a concept that is not fully grasped. The introduction of the FPSY has highlighted school-readiness but little discussion has taken place in the public domain as to its meaning.

**Call to action:**
• Legislative change is needed so that all staff working with children up to the age of six, regardless of setting, and all inspection staff have a qualification in early childhood education and care and must undertake continuous professional development.

• The DCYA should engage in information dissemination activities to inform parents about the value of a pedagogical approach for young children.

10.5.2 Structural change

The key focus within this area is in creating a space for advocacy. The procedural tactics used to mute, distract and control advocacy efforts need to be challenged. Structural change is also required to address the problems of a split-system. The White Paper, Supporting Voluntary Activity (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs 2000), is a key policy document that supports and justifies why these changes need to take place. There are five specific issues that must be addressed: the VCOs’ lack of financial independence; the imposition of a service provision role on VCOs and service providers; the limited channels through which advocacy can be advanced; the lack of integration of ECEC policy functions; and, the negative impact on quality of a market approach.

(i) Reduced financial dependence on the DCYA

As Ireland has a low level of dependence on philanthropic initiatives and income generating membership based organisations, the state occupies a position of power as the primary funder of VCOs in the sector.
The sector would benefit from a shift in the overall sectoral funding mix to reduce dependance on state funding and increase levels of philanthropic as well as membership fee and service income.

(ii) Refuting a service delivery role for advocacy organisations

The organisations within the NVCC as well as advocacy organisations within the wider community and voluntary sector have a role to play refuting the role being imposed upon them.

Call to action:

- To facilitate this, the state needs to sanction and encourage an allocation of annual budgets to VCOs to networking activities. This networking needs to extend to increase linkages with and a reliance on academic research to support and endorse the efforts of the VCOs. Given the rationalist discourse that the state relies on, the sector needs to become well versed in supporting their claims with evidence generated through a strong social scientific approach.

(iii) Increasing the channels available for advocacy and learning

VCO organisations have a key role to play in collectively as well as individually increasing their advocacy activity in a co-ordinated manner as does the trade union movement, while the opportunity to increase the involvement of private service providers and parents has been untapped to date. The passing of the referendum on the rights of the child is due to be passed in autumn 2012 and should strengthen the position
of advocates, however, this is just a starting point as many complementary actions are needed.

**Call to action:**

- The CCCs should increase their involvement with private providers and facilitate their input into feedback to the DCYA on the impact of policy tool design decisions. Private providers are equally challenged by the actions of the state but they have little experience in collective action. Efforts to involve them in consultations have proved difficult (Partas 2011) so more innovative methods need to be developed by VCOs to engage them in the process of change.

- **Trade unions** should expand the current focus on supporting childcare workers and the provision of childcare in general beyond its current *community* focus. A sectoral identity that includes employees of both community and private services would move closer to addressing the split-system as has been the strategy in New Zealand. This would add to the critical mass and assist in advancing the professional identity of the pedagogue as opposed to the educator.

**Integration of policy functions**

Change needs to be made to address the split-system of service provision for young children outside the compulsory school system, despite staff responsible for both being co-located. The initial focus needs to be to move past the gesture of co-location towards real integration within the system based on a strong commitment to recognition of a unitary system. Following the reduction in fragmentation within the sector, efforts need
to move on to manage a more fluid transition between ECEC and compulsory educational experiences.

Call to action:

- As New Zealand has demonstrated, a single sectoral identity has been critical in generating political bargaining power to attract funding to the sector. The **DCYA** need to work with the **Department of Education and Skills** to develop a workplan on how to actively integrate *Síolta* and *Aistear* into teacher training for primary school teachers. Efforts also need to be made to increase the linkages between early years professionals and teachers in order to reduce transitions for children and further develop a communal identify.

*(v) Shift from a market approach to a partnership approach*

As advocated in New Zealand (May and Mitchell 2009) the state needs to adopt a more pro-active role in addressing the **quality** aspect of ECEC service provision as a market approach responds only to the needs of consumers. As parents are not often best placed to understand the full implications of ECEC experiences on children, the state needs to provide guidance and leadership to parents in relation to what is in the best interests of children.

Call to action:

- The **DCYA** needs to replace the current inspection tool. Consideration should be given to the adaptation of the *Process oriented Self-evaluation Instrument for*
Care settings (PSIC) used in Belgium as it uses ‘well-being’ and ‘involvement’ as critical indicators of quality. These indicators align well to the principles outlined in both Siolta and Aistear.

- Further research should be undertaken to explore the reasons for the OMCYA/DCYA’s decision to deliberately involve themselves with business operations of service providers through placing restrictions on income generation. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether, in a patriarchal state which places low value on care and women’s involvement in economic activity, the large number of female owner operator services that exist in Ireland and the low levels of corporatisation have in some way facilitated this unusual decision, which runs contrary to the state’s neo-liberal tendencies.

10.5.3 Changes in design of financial policy tools

The objective is to address issues relating to access, affordability, quality and integration of the split-system. The actions proposed should ensure more ECEC experiences are covered by legislation and a greater sense of sectoral identity emerges amongst all service providers through an extended range of capacity building activities. Funding needs to increase to provide more services for children and the criteria for accessing services needs to focus on children’s requirements rather than the welfare status of the parent, with the aim that the system can be adjusted to move towards universal access to quality ECEC experiences. As the ultimate vision is for a dramatic change in how funding is constructed, phased recommendations are made over the short, medium and long term.

Call to action:
With immediate effect the following should be undertaken:

- The **Minister for Children** should lobby to have savings made from any future reductions to Child Benefit to be *ring-fenced* so that it can be put into increasing the provision and quality of ECEC services.

- The **DCYA** need to strengthen the legislative remit and authority and reduce its reliance on voluntary notification. Current legislation should be changed so that all ECEC services including *childminders* and *after-school services* are required to be notified or licensed with the state.

- The **DCYA** should also extend the regulations to include requirements for all staff to have minimum professional qualifications and to engage in on-going professional development. This would go some way towards addressing the hierarchy within the split system, assist in gaining professional recognition for the sector and normatively recognise the value of all ECEC experiences.

- The **DCYA** need move away from the use of limited incentive tools that focus only on financial incentives to encourage the development of capacity and symbolic and hortatory tools. This requires investment in less visible supports for the development of capacity and generating awareness.

- The **DCYA** needs to change conditions of the current childminding grant to enable the CCCs to utilise the funding for capacity building supports rather than capital items. Enterprise support in the form of assistance with accounting, tax, and insurance issues is needed for services moving from the informal to the formal economy.
• Further research should be undertaken by the Pobal and the CCCs to identify which children are not availing of the FPSY and why. The role of policy tool design needs to be considered in the review.

• Research should be undertaken to identify examples of how ECEC services are used by parents in Ireland. Anecdotal evidence suggests that children may make transitions between many ECEC experiences in their early years. The implication of this need to be explored, patterns mapped and the influence of policy tool design on parental decisions identified.

In the medium term the focus needs to be expanded to the following:

• The DCYA should extend the FPSY to two years for all children to support parents more and provide children with the opportunity to benefit from additional quality ECEC experiences.

• The DCYA needs to revise the criteria for the CCSS and the CETS so that funding is conditional on having qualified staff in place and adherence to Síolta and Aistear, as is the case with the FPSY.

• The DCYA need to increase funding levels for the CCSS to reduce the level of dependence on CE part-time trainees working with children in community services in order to improve quality.

• The Department of Education and Skills need to change the compulsory school starting age so that children have the opportunity to participate in a pedagogical experience for at least two years before moving on to engage in a stronger curriculum based experience.
• The DCYA should collect data about the profile of parents and children accessing services so that the department can monitor the impact of its funding on social inclusion targets.

In the long term, the following should be addressed:

• The DCYA should abolish the FPSY and the CCSS and a new per capita ECEC subsidy should be paid to service providers, similar to those paid to schools, that takes into consideration the age profile of places available; the level of disadvantage in the area; the number of qualified staff needed; and it should also be conditional on the adoption of Síolta and Aistear and continuous professional development of staff. This would assist in minimising transitions that are disruptive to children and improve coordination.

• The DCYA should allow community service providers, with Boards of Management that have a diverse membership reflecting the needs of the area, the discretion to determine the appropriate admission policy for more heavily subsidised community services, as was the case with the ECOP Staffing Grant. Typically, access was granted based on the residency of the child within the local designated area of disadvantage or membership of a designated target population, such as traveller, disability, and so on. This facilitates the development of services in which the socio-economic mix of children should more closely reflect the general profile of the area, which ultimately may be more beneficial to children while avoiding the stigmatising effects of the more targeted approach.
10.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis reviewed and evaluated the extensive policy area of ECEC so that at one level it could identify the broad brush strokes that characterise how the state translates policy into action as well as exploring the specifics of policy tool design to reveal the underlying assumptions and the actual impacts experienced by ECEC policy targets. The evidence presented paints a picture of a political regime and public service with poor commitments to participative methods who manage implementation to realise a limited, conservative, patriarchal interpretation of the stated policy objectives contained within the state’s policy documents in relation to children’s rights and ECEC.

The ideology that acts as the strongest impediment to the realisation of children’s rights in the context of well co-ordinated quality ECEC services is best captured by the description of Ireland as a Patriarchal State in which ECEC policy implementation and tool design combine to perpetuate a construction of children and women as dependents. Despite the rhetorical commitments to equality, rights and children, systems, structures and policy tools conspire to support a norm in which children are considered to be best supported by parents until they participate in limited part-time opportunities in early learning and education after the age of three. Those choosing to live a life outside this norm are left to look to the market to address their ECEC needs or suffer the stigmatisation of being trapped into dependency on state support.

There is little indication through the design of policy tools that ECEC, beyond a limited early educational interpretation, is conceived of as a positive experience that benefits children. The scope to extend a positive view of ECEC to include its potential as a democratic project that can be used to address social justice issues and increase
democratic practice is very limited without a dramatic shift in consciousness at multiple levels in society. However, with the right supports, commitment and leadership it is possible to achieve.

This research was carried out to identify (i) the impact policy tool design has had on realising national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children in Ireland, and (ii) actions that can be taken to increase the effectiveness of ECEC policy design decision in Ireland to realise national ECEC policy goals that recognise the rights of children. The study has clearly demonstrated how a focus on policy tool design offers an opportunity to identify spaces within the policy process in which a variety of changes can be made. Such changes can collectively begin the process of developing universally affordable, accessible and quality ECEC services informed by a socio-cultural understanding of children and childhood. This research will inform and support those interested in change to progress and improve the ECEC sector in Ireland. In addition it illustrates how this can be done incrementally at multiple levels.

These recommendations, if implemented, could also lead the way towards the development of a form of ECEC in Ireland to counter a limited neo-liberal view of ECEC as meeting the needs of the economy by creating the ‘future solution to our current problems’. ECEC can be reconstructed through more innovative thinking and practice to become sites of democratic practice in which children as citizens participate in both private and public spheres thus playing their role in addressing the more important global problems of democracy, equality and justice both now and into the future.
This thesis is a first step in a critical analysis of policy design and implementation in the field of early childhood education and care in Ireland. As minimal research has taken place to date, the work was broad and descriptive in nature in order to adequately provide the contextual evidence for this new exploration. As a consequence there was limited opportunity to explore in great detail all the elements of this policy story. However, this foray into the unchartered territories of such an active and rich policy area paves the way for more research in the future.

It provides the contextual arena for a deeper investigation into how to redress the imbalances uncovered and provides a platform for other sectoral researchers to identify whether similar degenerative policy design decisions are impacting upon their sectors. For practical reasons, this research was limited to tracking seven indicators of national policy objectives, protection, provision, participation, access, affordability, quality and coordination as well determining the impact on the values of equality, democracy and justice which were articulated in policy documents. However, there are a range of other indicators and themes impacting upon both policy and practice that warrant closer investigation. A deeper understanding of the policy decision making process would be beneficial as would a more detailed investigation of quality indicators, coordination efforts and the effective use of data to better inform policy, to name but a few. It is the researcher’s hope that this thesis can act as a stimulus for more critical analysis in the area and together these works will act as a catalyst for deep and meaningful change.
Bibliography


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Dublin City Childcare Committee (2006). Childcare Services Audit and Needs Analysis - Dublin City Area. Dublin, Dublin City Childcare Committee Ltd.


Appendix A: Sample of Thematic Analysis Reports

Themes emerging about impact of CCSS from review of VCO Documents to be explored further with parents and service providers

1. Segregation:
   a. Non-national community often not eligible (DICP)(DCCC);
   b. Welfare entitlement and income level the only criteria, no focus on special interest groups, e.g., travellers, special needs, ethnic minorities (ICPN) (planet)(DCCC) (DICP)
   c. Reduces the Social Mix of children from the local community (DCCC) (planet);
      i. Especially in rural areas (planet);
   d. Possible stigmatisation of children (ICPN)(planet).

2. Some services will receive less financial support under the new scheme
   a. May need to cease operation – despite being funded with EOCP capital to construct the buildings (planet) (DCCC) (DICP)

3. Lack of consultation:
   a. OMC asserts the CCSS has been informed by the Value for Money Review of the EOCP (but very selective in choosing which recommendations to use) (ICPN);
   b. New definitions and categories of childcare introduced ignoring the categories used under EOCP. Some Services have adjusted hours to suit funding. (DCCC);

4. Administrative Complexity:
   a. Service providers required to collect welfare/income information from parents; (ICPN) (DCCC)
   b. Several steps involved in assessing parents for qualification with provider used as the mediator of the communications. (DCCC)(DICP)

5. Lack of certainty about funding for Service Providers from year to year
   a. Makes it difficult to budget (planet) (DCCC) (DICP)
   b. Reduced sense of job security as planning is difficult and funding fluctuates in direct correlation to the number of parents qualifying under the various bands. This changes constantly. (ICPN) (DICP)

6. No increase in the number of places:
   a. Existing clients leaving as fees unaffordable (band C & D) being replaced by new eligible parents = no increase in places, just swapping of parents. (ICPN)
   b. Some facilities may have to close if not enough qualifying parents take up places – rural issue (planet);
   c. Parents that leave the service may turn to unregulated childcare (planet)

7. No cap on the fee parents have to pay
   a. Cost of a place varies between facilities based on their staffing costs (which can vary depending on how many qualified staff they have) (ICPN)

8. Funding not subject to any quality conditions
   a. No conditions attached to training of staff or implementing Síolta (planet)

9. Welfare Trap:
   a. Can’t afford to earn more as will lose the band A/B subvention rate (planet) (DCCC) (DICP).

10. Providers have no discretion to set fees to match the actual needs of service users (DCCC) (DICP)
Appendix B: Parental Questionnaire and Consent Form

PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

DIT CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH [CSER]
SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF THE CHILDCARE SUBVENTION SCHEME ON PARENTS

General Information for interviewee

As you are aware, there was a change to how childcare places were funded last year, and you will have experienced a change in the fee you pay for your childcare place. This was due to the introduction of a new funding mechanism called the “Community Childcare Subvention Scheme”.

The aim of this research is to look at what kind of impact the change in funding is having on you and your child/children.

This questionnaire will be completed by the interviewer and should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You will be asked to sign a consent form confirming that you agree to participate in this research. The overall combined results of the surveys will be published but details on individuals will be kept confidential and will not be available to anyone other than the research team.

Thank you

Bernie O’Donoghue

DIT, Centre for Social and Educational Research

086 8150916

bernie.odonoghue@dit.ie
CONSENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Name: Bernie O’Donoghue</th>
<th>Title: Ms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty/School/Department:</strong> Faculty of Applied Arts, School of Social Sciences &amp; Law, Centre for Social and Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title of Study:</strong> Survey on the Impact of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme on Parents</td>
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**To be completed by the interviewee:**

3.1 Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? YES/NO
3.2 Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? YES/NO
3.3 Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? YES/NO
3.4 Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?
   - at any time
   - without giving a reason for withdrawing
   - without affecting your future relationship with the Institute YES/NO
3.5 Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published? (individual details will not be published and are only available to members of the research team) YES/NO
3.6 Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher? YES/NO

Signed_____________________________________ Date __________________

Name in Block Letters __________________________________________________________

Signature of Researcher ________________________________ Date _________________
## PART 1: SERVICE PROVIDER DETAILS *(TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO INTERVIEW)*

1. Name of Childcare Services:

2. Centre Number: (1 – 10) *to be completed by researcher*

3. Dublin City Administrative Area: *to be completed by researcher*
   - a. North Central
   - b. North West
   - c. Central
   - d. South East
   - e. South Central

4. No of Full Time Equivalent places:

5. Type of Sessions available:
   - a. Full day (5 hrs+);
   - b. Part-time (3.5 +);
   - c. Shorter Hours (2.15 +);
   - d. Half Session (less 2.15)
PART 2: PARENT BIOGRAPHY

1. Name:

2. Age Group:
   ___ 50+

3. Marital Status: (circle one)
   a. Married
   b. Living with partners
   c. Single Parent
   d. Separated
   e. Widowed
   f. Other ____________________(give details)

4. Welfare/Employment Status
   (circle all appropriate)
   a. Employed f/t
   b. Employed p/t
   c. Temporary/Seasonal
   d. Training / Education (FÁS Sponsored Scheme: CE/JI)
   e. One Family Allowance
   f. Job Seekers/UB/UA/Disability
   g. FIS
   h. Medical Card
   i. GP card
   j. Seeking Asylum
   k. Other ____________________(give details)

5. Occupation:

   ____________________________

6. Welfare/Employment Status of
   PARTNER
   (circle all appropriate)
   a. Employed f/t
   b. Employed p/t
   c. Temporary/Seasonal
   d. Training / Education (FÁS Sponsored Scheme: CE/JI)
   e. One Family Allowance
   f. Job Seekers/UB/UA/Disability
   g. FIS
   h. Medical Card
   i. GP card
   j. Seeking Asylum
   k. Other ____________________(give details)
7. Occupation of **Partner**: __________________________________________

8. Your Relationship to the child/children using the service:

9. How many children do you have and what age are they: *(enter age beside each child)*
   
   1_______ 2_______ 3_______ 4_______ 5_______ 6_______ 7____
   __8____

**PART 3: SERVICE UTILISATION**

1. Number of Children currently attending the service now:

2. Number of Children used the service previously (and have moved on now):

3. Reason for Choosing this service *(circle yes or no)*
   - a. Local-Convenience *Yes/No*
   - b. Cost / Price of Fees *Yes/No*
   - c. Quality Service *Yes/No*
   - d. Type of Sessions Available *Yes/No*
   - e. Hours of Business *Yes/No*
   - f. Reputation *Yes/No*
   - g. Had places Available *Yes/No*
   - h. Other (give details)

4. Type of Session being used (complete for each child)

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<th>Child</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<td>Part-time (3.5 +);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shorter Hours (2.15 +);</td>
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<td>Half Session (less 2.15)</td>
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5. How long have you been using this service (in months):

6. Why did you choose to use a childcare centre for your child/children?
7. Do you combine your formal childcare with any other form of childcare? (circle yes or no)
   a. Paid Yes/No
   If yes, what type of childcare
   ________________________________
   b. Unpaid Yes/No
   If yes, what type of childcare
   ________________________________

PART 4: FUNDING YOUR CHILDCARE COSTS

1. What CCSS band are you on? (circle appropriate) A; B; C; D; Not Sure

2. What is your current fee per week? (for each child) €

   Child 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Weekly fee €

3. What was your fee last year (before the CCSS)?

   Child 1 2 3 4 5 6
   Previous Weekly Fee €

4. Do you receive any other financial support?
   a. FÁS
   b. VEC
   c. OTHER ________________________________ (give details)

5. Do you put your Child Benefit or Early Years Payment (ECS) away specifically to cover childcare costs?
   a. Yes/No
**PART 5: APPLYING FOR THE NEW FUNDING**

1. What was your experience of having to apply for the CCSS? (circle most appropriate)
   a. Was Clear Information Provided? Yes/No
   b. How long was the process of applying? *(indicate on a scale of 1 to 5)*
      (Very long & Slow) 1 2 3 4 5 (very prompt)
   c. How much support was needed from staff *(indicate on a scale of 1 to 5)*
      (A lot) 1 2 3 4 5 (None)
   d. How Stressful did you find the process *(indicate on a scale of 1 to 5)*
      (Very Stressful) 1 2 3 4 5 (Not Stressful)

2. Did you mind having to apply for the CCSS? Yes/No
   a. If yes, why?

**PART 6: IMPACT OF THE NEW FUNDING**

1. Has there been any change in who now uses the service? Yes/No
2. Is the change having an impact on the children? Yes/No
   (Record general comments)

3. Would you know if you were going to shift between bands? Yes/No
4. Do you understand how your fee is calculated? Yes/No
5. When looking at employment options for yourself or your spouse, would you consider whether it would impact upon a move between bands? Yes/No
   a. If yes, why?
      Give details
6. Do your current childcare arrangements facilitate you pursuing your preferred employment/care options? Yes/No
7. Did your previous childcare arrangements (prior to CCSS) facilitate you pursuing your preferred employment/care options? Yes/No
   a. If no,
      explain__________________________________________________________
      _______________________________________________________________

If fees are costing more since CCSS please complete question 1 to 4, if playing LESS please complete question 5 & 6:

IF MORE

1. What impact has the increase in fees had on you and/or your family?
   a. Stress
      (Reduced Stress) 1  2  3  4  5 (Increased Stress)
   b. Have you had to reduce in spending elsewhere?
      _____________________________________________________________

2. What actions have you taken since the INCREASE in fees?
   a. Left the Services? Yes/No
   b. Reduced your hours using the service? Yes/No
   c. Child leaving to go elsewhere earlier than anticipated, e.g., school? Yes/No
   d. Ceased using the service? Yes/No
   e. Advised others in similar position about the cost of formal childcare? Yes/No
   f. OTHER?

3. Will you choose formal childcare in the future (if applicable)? Yes/No
4. Would you have chosen formal childcare if the fees were at the current rate? Yes/No

IF LESS:

5. What impact has the reduction in fees had on you and/or your family?
   a. Stress
      (Reduced Stress) 1  2  3  4  5 (Increased Stress)
   b. Has it enabled you to spend on other critical things?
      _____________________________________________________________
6. Have you made any changes to your childcare arrangements as a result of the REDUCTION in fees?
   c. Increased your use of the service? Yes/No
   d. Enrolled additional children? Yes/No
   e. Advised other parents with similar entitlements to enrol their children? Yes/No
   f. Plan to keep children in the service for a long period than originally anticipated? Yes/No
   g. OTHER?

THANK YOU – Is there anything further you would like to add?
Appendix C: Sample Feedback Report from Interview with CSP Manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service:</th>
<th>*****</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Area:</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee:</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>01/04/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prior to CCSS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Since CCSS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Part/time</td>
<td>€60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>€40</td>
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Process of Informing Parents:

The service composed a letter based on the OMC letter and met with individual parents to explain the new scheme. Gave them a copy of the OMC letter for reference but didn’t use it as the primary information source for parents as it was very complex and dense in format. The service then met with each parent to calculate which Band they would be on and assisted them filling in the form. Assisted and encouraged parents to apply for GP and medical cards with one parent qualifying for a GP card they didn’t know they were eligible for. One parent qualified for FIS but this may have been as a result in a change of personal circumstance, the provider isn’t sure.

Key Issues Arising since CCSS introduced:

- Overall, the client profile hasn’t altered much with one Band D parent leaving and two parents not starting a sibling as planned as it was too expensive. These parents were disappointed but animosity between Band A and Band D parents isn’t an issue for the service. This is because the service caters for mostly Band A parents, with only one parent being Band B.
- The ***** area has an above average number of lone parents – as identified in the DCCC city audit, and this is reflected in the parents using the service.
- Fees are collected privately so that parents are not aware of which Band others are on.
- However, funding under the subvention is inadequate for the service at this point in time. The number of children qualifying under the CCSS has increased since the initial application was made last September for three reasons: 1. As the service caters for different age groups they
have to leave spaces in the older rooms to accommodate children as they get older and move through the rooms. Otherwise by the summer time the baby room would be full of toddlers instead of babies. 2. This adds to the fact that September does not reflect the numbers we would have at this later time of the year but the September numbers were what the application was based on. 3. Also, the service was able to temporarily expand the capacity of the services, an event it had not anticipated.

The OMCYA gave guidance on calculating a contingency figure in their initial application in September to cover unforeseen circumstances but it would have been difficult to plan for all the unforeseen events that have arisen.

- The service was unaware prior to the introduction of the scheme of how little opportunity there would be to make adjustments mid-year so didn’t realise how important planning for the contingency was. There wasn’t enough information or consultation prior to the scheme being introduced.

- The initial application was submitted in September ’08 and an initial provisional payment was allocated to all groups, prior to the final confirmation about whether they were approved for the full amount they applied for. As of April ’09 they still have not received an indication of the final amount they have been approved for.

- However, the service is planning to appeal their allocation on the grounds that the numbers have increased so substantially. They are in the usual position of having to appeal an amount that is unknown to them.

- The Manager believed the current system appears to be designed so that any costs associated with unexpected changes need to be absorbed by parental fees but adjustment to fees is something the service provider wishes to avoid if possible.

- There appears to be some inconsistencies in relation to how the scheme is managed. The Manager has made several phone calls to OMCYA staff to clarify the eligibility criteria under Band C. The service was advised that sibling discount would not qualify as an eligible criterion. However, the service has since learned that other services had identified sibling discount as a criteria for eligibility in their submissions and they have not been notified that this does not qualify, although this may still happen but the Manager feels it’s unlikely.

- The service negotiated with the OMCYA to have special arrangements made to enable them to make one single submission although they have more than one location on the ground that they are managed by one Board of
Management. The OMCYA agreed to allow the service to file one submission for all services which has been a very important concession for the service as they wish to charge the same fee in each location even though the costs differ in each. The OMCYA have allowed the service to average out costs which enables them to continue to use services with large numbers of children, partially subsidise other services that have low numbers. This system was design to meet an important need in the community.

- The service is now in negotiation with the OMCYA to see if they can make one return, rather than separate end of year returns for each location as this would pose difficulties administratively as central costs would need to be allocated out across several services.

- There are a number of practical difficulties in completing the application process due to bad design. 1. Each parent must complete a form and the details are entered by the Manager on-line and the originals are then posted to the OMCYA (in a stamped address envelop that is supplied – although it is too small for the number of forms the centre has). 2. In the guidelines for completing the application form it specifies that parents who qualified as Band A in the last application and whose circumstances have changed will change to a Band B even if they should be a C or D as they are gradually withdrawn from the programme. However, there is nowhere on the form the enter the Band of the parent so the providers just writes it on the front of the form then posts it in and hopes the OMCYA pick it up.

- The parent application form also asks parents being paid by FÁS for training, or attending VEC or secondary school to get the forms stamped by the relevant body to verify this. However, parents have reported back to the service provider that FÁS personnel had no idea what to do with the form when they presented it. Staff are ringing around trying to get information on what to do with the form. There appears to be a lack of communication between the agencies and the OMCYA about their role in assisting parents get approval for the CCSS.

- While the service still operate a ‘community ethos’ where all in the community are welcome, (they do not go out to deliberately target Band A parents) the fact that there are some parents selecting themselves out because the service is too expensive is a concern as the actions of the parents may affect the community ethos.

- When people make enquiries, the focus has shifted from what the service offers the children to a complex conversation about what the parent will pay based on
their personal entitlements and welfare status. This is because ‘how much will it cost’? is always one of the first questions. The important conversation about what the service offers children is hijacked by immediate discussions about entitlements.

E-mail:
1/4/09 Bernie O'Donoghue" < > wrote:
> Hi ****,
> I've attached a summary of our discussions today. Would you mind
> taking a look at it and feel free to make any editorial changes at
> all, especially if they more accurately capture what you were trying
> to get across to me.
>
Email response:
Sent: Thursday, April 02, 2009 11:04 AM
To: Bernie O'Donoghue
Subject: Re: Summary of interview

Hi Bernie

Just a few small changes:
There were 2 parents who decided not to send siblings as they were Band D and so was too expensive.

You mentioned that our service was mostly Band A and B but we only have one Band B

On the contingency, there is guidance about it but the contingency put in place was not enough to cover significant increases.

The community ethos can be affected but we are not targeting qualifying parents, all our welcome, it is the parents themselves that might opt out due to costs.

One last thing I forgot to mention yesterday, as we cater for different age groups we have to leave spaces in the older rooms to accommodate children as they get older and move through the rooms. Otherwise by the summer time our baby room would be full of toddlers instead of babies. This adds to the fact that September does not reflect the numbers we would have at this time of the year.
Appendix D: Letter Confirming Ethical Clearance

14th October 2009

Bernie O’Donoghue
29 Foxfield Avenue
Raheny
Dublin 5

Re: Assessment of your application for ethical clearance

Dear Bernie,

Thank you for submitting an Application for Ethical Clearance for your PhD project “Documenting a process for developing framework for a rights based approach to the development of Social Policy for Early Childhood Care and Education” received on 12th February 2009.

The DIT Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval to your project by Chairperson’s action on 13th February 2009.

This information was relayed to your supervisor at the time.

Kind regards,

Raffaele Salvatore
Graduate Research School Office
List of Publications


\[17\] The 2011 Journal of Poverty and Social Justice Best Newcomer prize has been awarded to Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes. This prize is awarded annually to the best paper by a previously unpublished author to encourage early-career researchers. “http://policypress.cmail4.com/t/ViewEmail/r/A274CE183D9F9D9B/9D83363E19748DC3D3AB5F5EEC5F0895