

Guidelines for the Setting Up and Operation  
of **Staff Childcare Facilities** in  
**The Health Service**



# Guidelines for the Setting Up and Operation of Staff Childcare Facilities in The Health Service

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## Preface

The Health Services National Partnership Forum (HSNPF) is made up equally of union and management representatives of the Irish health services. Their role is to lead support and enable the building and deepening of Workplace Partnership throughout the health services in Ireland.

Through positive workplace partnership practice the HSNPF helps and facilitates managers, staff and trade unions within the health services to achieve continuous improvement in the delivery of the highest possible quality patient care and quality of working life for all staff.

In September 2002 the HSNPF commissioned a project to provide an overview of both national and international trends in the development of staff childcare facilities. This work provided information on the stages of development that various agencies are at in regard to establishing or operating a staff crèche facility and also the common difficulties encountered in setting up and running a staff childcare facility.

Following the completion of this comprehensive report in April 2003, the Health Services National Partnership Forum commissioned the production of these guidelines for the setting up and operation of staff childcare facilities in the health service sector.

## Section 1

# Identifying the Need for Employer-Sponsored Childcare

### 1.0 Introduction

Employers are becoming increasingly aware of the need to support the childcare responsibilities of their employees and are encouraged to do so by the many benefits derived from employer sponsored childcare initiatives. These include:

- Retention of experienced and skilled staff
- Better recruitment opportunities
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved public image
- Higher employee morale and commitment
- Tax advantages.

*(Canavan, 2000.)*

A recent survey conducted with Irish employers providing staff childcare facilities noted the following most commonly cited benefits:

- Retention of staff
- Recruitment of new staff
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced employee stress
- Parental access to children during the working day
- Reduced travel time to and from childcare facilities resulting in shorter days for children in the crèche facilities.

*(Health Services National Partnership Forum, 2003.)*

The provision of staff childcare facilities is one of a number of options available to employers who wish to help with the childcare responsibilities of their employees. It is however, an option that requires a serious commitment and may not always be the most appropriate choice of employer sponsored childcare initiative to meet staff needs. For this reason, it is important for each employer to conduct a needs assessment of the childcare responsibilities of their staff and subsequently match this to the employer's needs in order to decide on the most appropriate method of supporting staff with their childcare needs.

## 1.1 Conducting an Assessment of the Childcare Needs of Employees

There are a variety of methods of finding out the childcare needs of employees, the most common being:

1. Workplace audit.
2. Survey/Questionnaires.
3. Focus groups.
4. Use of an external childcare consultant.

### 1.1.1 Workplace Audit

A workplace audit is a useful method of gathering information about the childcare responsibilities of employees and how these responsibilities are impacting on their work. Additionally, an audit can provide some insight into how the organisation could support parents in meeting their childcare needs. The following list outlines some suggested criteria for inclusion in this type of workplace audit.

#### Audit Records to Find Any Significant Trends

- Absentee patterns – do absentee days correspond with school holidays?  
Are there any significant differences in absentee rates among those with childcare responsibilities and those without?
- Female employees – throughout the organisation or concentrated in certain sectors?
- Punctuality – do any lateness patterns correspond to “dropping off” times at childcare or school?
- Percentage of women returning after maternity leave?

#### Work-Family Commitments of Employees

- How many of your employees have childcare or other domestic responsibilities?
- What channels can employees use to raise issues around their work-family responsibilities?
- Are these channels used and if not, why not?
- What would make it easier for employees to disclose facts about their family responsibilities?
- What would make it difficult to find out about employees’ needs?

#### Organisational Policy and Practice

- What work-family policies are available to employees?
- How is information on these policies disseminated to employees?
- Are these channels used and if not, why not?
- Who is responsible for making sure that all employees know about these policies?
- Do all employees know about these policies?
- What would it take to ensure that all employees know about these policies?

- Who takes them up?
- Which are not taken up and why?
- Can you ensure that everyone who needs to take up these policies can do so?

*(Daycare Trust, 1998.)*

In addition to the above, it would also be useful to identify trends in relation to the uptake of promotional opportunities. A recent study undertaken by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU, 1999) found that 25% of female respondents stated that they had not applied for promotional opportunities because of child minding responsibilities. Moreover, of those stating they had not applied for promotional opportunities because of childminding responsibilities, 90% were female.

### 1.1.2 Staff Survey/Questionnaire

Staff questionnaires/surveys are the most popular form of employee needs assessment and can give the most accurate and complete information from which to make decisions regarding childcare needs. Advantages of this method include giving employees a sense of ownership and involvement in the decision-making process. There are also some disadvantages to the use of the survey technique, which include a poor response rate and the use of statistics that may not be truly representative of the views of all employees. To reduce the likelihood of this happening it is important to either survey all staff or to ensure a representative sample from all sections of employees. This involves ensuring a random selection of staff from all departments, levels, geographic areas, gender and age groups. It is also worth thinking about ways to increase the response rate from employees. This might include putting up posters, sending reminders or one novel way adopted recently by one of the Major Academic Teaching Hospitals in Dublin was to distribute questionnaires via email, then set up and staff stands in the canteen and main hall of the hospital during peak hours. Additionally, the working group held a raffle for completed questionnaires using spot prizes donated by local businesses. A response rate of 27% was achieved (Comerford, 2001).

It is also important when using this method that arrangements are put in place to ensure confidentiality and that staff are made aware of these.

### 1.1.3 Focus Group Discussions

An alternative to the survey method is the use of focus group discussions among staff. As with the survey method it is important to ensure that participants are representative of all employees. The use of focus groups allows structured discussions around the issues of childcare responsibilities. Such an approach does, however, require the presence of an independent, experienced facilitator who is trained in this method and the analysis of data retrieved from the discussions. The use of an independent facilitator can also increase the level of participant involvement by creating an environment in which participants feel safe in sharing information. Focus groups can also be used at the early stages of needs assessment as a way of identifying topics for inclusion in questionnaires as part of a staff survey. As with the survey method, arrangements for confidentiality need to be put in place and these communicated to staff prior to their consent to participate.



#### 1.1.4 Use of an External Childcare Consultant

Many companies find that the use of an external childcare advisor or consultant is a better alternative than trying to conduct an internal needs assessment. Childcare consultants have the relevant expertise in conducting needs assessment and can increase the chances of getting a more accurate picture of employee needs. There are a number of companies currently in Ireland who provide a consultancy service to employers, the most notable being:

Giraffe Ltd.  
Bright Horizons  
Quality Childcare

In addition to the methods outlined, considerable information can also be retrieved from other sources such as consultation groups, employee unions and exit interviews.

Regardless of the method chosen, assessment needs to include:

- The current childcare responsibilities of employees, i.e. a demographic profile of the workforce including age and gender;
- The number and age of children of employees including any children requiring special needs;
- Employees' preferences regarding childcare;
- Which employees have the most childcare need;
- How childcare responsibilities are impacting on work;
- What type of childcare arrangements currently used by employees;
- What type of employer-sponsored childcare would be most appropriate to meet the needs of employees;
- How employee childcare needs can be matched to the needs of the employer.

This information not only provides information regarding current childcare needs, but also allows the employer to make projections regarding the future childcare needs for full time/part time/after-school care.

## 1.2 Matching Employee and Employer Needs

Having identified the childcare needs of employees, it is useful to look at them in light of the needs of the employer so as to decide on what direction can be taken to match both sets of needs. Two key questions to address at the initial stages are:

- What are the demands of the organisation?
- What resources are available to the organisation/employer in the provision of subsidised childcare?

Demands on an organisation may strongly influence decisions regarding the introduction of childcare initiatives. Most health service employers provide a range of services to customers. These are usually reflected in strategic plans and underpinned by organisational policy. Employers may find that the realisation of goals are being influenced by human resource issues that are related to employee childcare responsibilities. These may include:

- Absentee rates.
- Sickness rates.
- Recruitment issues.
- Poor rates of return following maternity leave.
- Increased demand for reduced hours.
- Hard to fill vacancies in management positions.
- Poor staff morale.

The extent to which any or a combination of these factors are impacting on the goals or demands of the health service employer may indicate the need to address childcare issues. The response of the organisation to employee needs will also be influenced by the resources available to them in meeting these needs. Each organisation will need to look at what resources are available to them for the provision of employer-sponsored childcare, in particular funding and premises if a workplace crèche is being considered.

In addition to the above resources, the employer can investigate the availability and affordability of childcare within the surrounding community. It may be possible for the organisation to build on existing childcare provision within the community and make it more accessible to employees. This is one of a number of options explored in the next section.

## Section 2

### Employer-Sponsored Childcare – The Options

#### 2.0 Introduction

Having completed a needs assessment of both employees and employers, there are a number of options available to employers who wish to go further and implement employer-sponsored childcare initiatives. These range from providing advice and referral to the provision of childcare places on site. The choice of option will depend both on the needs of employees as identified and also on the resources and funding available to the employer. The remainder of this section outlines the various options, implications for employers and general advantages and disadvantages of each.

#### 2.1 Information and Referral

Information, advice and or referral are services that can be provided by an employer. These may be contracted or available on site. This can be an attractive option for employers who do not have the resources or need for a more direct involvement in the provision of childcare places. The service can range from providing information on local childcare providers to providing advice on childcare options and/or information on a broad range of parenting issues which may include workshops, family friendly information days, telephone help lines or websites. Some larger organisations can employ a childcare advisor/coordinator for their employees. The NHS in the UK has included childcare coordinators as part of their overall childcare package for employees.

Eircom has taken a very comprehensive approach to the issue of childcare responsibilities of employees. In addition to the provision of childcare places, the company provides an intranet information service, which provides information and advice to employees on a variety of topics related to care of dependants including childcare, eldercare and care of dependants with disabilities. With regard to childcare the service provides information on a broad range of topics that include a list of family friendly hotels and everyday parenting issue from *tantrums* to *bedwetting*. A *Parent Pack* is provided giving information on a number of areas of interest to parents and including a list of available parenting classes.

Source: Grainne O'Boyle, Equality Officer, Eircom.

There are a number of sources of information available to organisations for putting together an information pack, information days/workshops or intranet services for employees. These include:

- **Health Authorities** who since the Child Care Act 1991, are obliged to make available pre-school services in their areas.

- **County Childcare Committees** established in 2000 to advance childcare service provision in their areas. Having recently completed a census of childcare providers in each county, the childcare coordinator of each county can provide information about services in their county.
- **Barnardos National Children’s Resource Centre** who provide a specialist service on all aspects of childcare.
- **Child Minding Ireland** who provide information and advice on child minding services.
- **The National Children’s Nurseries Association** provides listings of services and other information related to childcare services.
- **IPPA – The Early Childhood Organisation** who through a branch network provide information on parent and toddler groups and out of school care.
- **St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland** who provide information on Montessori services.
- **The Childcare Bureau** situated in Dublin’s Northside, provide support to local childcare providers, employers and parents in Northeast Dublin. They can provide information on a range of childcare services in the region and one of their functions is to help employers identify and meet the childcare needs of employees.
- **Private Childcare Companies** such as those previously listed offer a range of services to employers including consultancy on a wide range of employer sponsored childcare issues.

## 2.2 Subsidising Childcare Costs

After mortgage repayments, childcare costs rate as the highest expense for working parents. A recent survey conducted by the Central Statistics Office found that childcare costs in Ireland are high and significantly more expensive in Dublin. According to the survey, the average cost per child per hour in Dublin ranged from €4.09 to €5.47 representing an average weekly cost of €159.51 to €213.33 for parents engaged in full time employment. Subsidising childcare costs is one of the options commonly chosen by employers in the UK and the US where employer-sponsored childcare is well developed. There are broadly two approaches adopted for subsidising the costs of childcare. These are:

- **Childcare Vouchers:** Childcare vouchers are given by approximately 240 companies in the UK. Under this system an allowance in the form of a voucher is paid to employees to help with the cost of childcare. Employees can choose their preferred childcare provider once they are included in the scheme. Employers decide on which employees are eligible for vouchers and may decide on the type of childcare provider they want employees to use. This option at present has not been used in Ireland. Accor Services Ltd., one of the main childcare voucher suppliers in the UK had opened an Irish subsidiary in recent years supplying luncheon vouchers to employers. However, due to the changes in benefit in kind tax, which are due to accelerate in this years budget, the company has closed its Irish subsidiary.
- **Childcare Allowance:** Similar in its approach to childcare vouchers except the allowance is paid in cash.

Subsidising childcare costs has certain advantages. It is an approach that offers flexibility to both employees and employers. Additionally, employers don't have to get involved in the day-to-day costs and running of a childcare facility. However, there is a significant disadvantage to this approach for employees in Ireland due to the tax system here.

**Contributions made by an employer for childcare provided by a third party are liable to benefit in kind tax. This means that not only does the employee pay the remainder of the childcare costs but they also pay tax on the employer's contribution.**

### **2.3 Establishing and Supporting a Child Minding Network**

This option involves the establishment and support of a group of childminders who provide childminding services to employees of the organisation. The employer invests in training, equipment and general administrative support that is provided by the network under the management of a childcare coordinator. This option as yet has not been explored in the Irish setting but is an approach used by some UK organisations such as Elida Gibbs in Leeds and Allied Dunbar (Daycare Trust, 2000). Child minding networks provide another less costly alternative to employers who wish to support the childcare needs of their employees. The networks also have the advantage of providing after-school, holiday and emergency care in addition to full time day care.

In the Irish setting, not all childminders are required to notify health boards of their existence, therefore the employer would need to seek professional advice regarding the selection criteria and eligibility for childminders involved in the scheme. Child Minding Ireland is an important source of information in this regard as this group represents and trains those involved in childcare. It is also important to involve the Health Board Pre-School Officer when setting up the scheme. As with other forms of childcare assistance, the decision to set up and support a child minding network should be informed by a comprehensive needs analysis among employees, with consideration given to the cost, legislative, quality and operational issues involved. Once in operation, a system of ongoing evaluation of the service would need to be put in place. Of note, under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006, funding will be available as support towards the development of local childcare network initiatives.

### **2.4 Consortium/Shared Crèche Facilities**

This is one approach that allows the employer have direct involvement in the provision of staff childcare places. With this model, a number of employers within the same geographic region share the costs and management of a staff childcare facility. This is an attractive option for smaller organisations because of the obvious implications for reduced costs. Issues regarding management structures do need to be explored so that clear lines of responsibility are established. Currently, in Ireland this is an option that has not been utilised to any significant extent but there is a lot of scope for its development. The provision of staff childcare facilities as a practice in Ireland is increasing and it would be a prudent move for employers to explore the possibility of entering into partnership arrangements with other agencies. Particularly within the health service sector, smaller employers could investigate the possibility of entering into a partnership arrangement with other local employers (voluntary, private, public) or indeed community facilities.

For example, under the Civil Service Childcare Initiative, in addition to two existing crèches in Dublin, there are plans to establish 15 new childcare facilities throughout Ireland. These include crèche facilities in Athlone and Ennis with other possible locations having been identified for Sligo, Roscommon, Limerick, Dublin and Cork. Of note, health board employees are among those who would have second preference for childcare places in these facilities.

The following example illustrates the partnership approach in practice.

Waterford Childcare Ltd. is a consortium childcare facility situated in the Waterford IDA Business Park. The consortium consists of employers from four larger local organisations, a few smaller employers and the local community. The facility is managed by a board of managers and has been registered as a business with a charitable status. Currently, the premises is owned by the IDA, but it is the intention of the board of management to eventually buy it. The board employs a manager for the day-to-day running of the facility. There are 86 childcare places in the centre. The crèche caters for babies and children up to school going age.

Source: Majella Cantwell, Crèche Manager; Pat O'Leary, Board Member, Waterford Childcare Ltd.

## 2.5 Procuring Childcare Places for Staff from an Existing Private Provider

This option involves the employer entering into an arrangement with an existing private crèche facility in order to block-book places for staff. Fees may also be subsidised depending on the resources of the employer. Again this can be an attractive option for smaller organisations, who do not have the funding, resources or demand for direct provision of a staff childcare facility. The obvious disadvantage for employers and the providers with this approach is ensuring that the places are taken up. This again re-iterates the necessity to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment at the outset of any decision taken regarding choice of employer-sponsored childcare initiatives. Currently, there is little evidence of this approach being adopted by Irish employers, but the following provides an example of this approach in practice.

Having identified the demand for staff childcare places for employees, Intel Irl. entered into negotiations with the private provider Trinity Tots regarding the provision of a childcare facility. The result was the opening in 1998 of an independent childcare facility, owned by Trinity Tots and located near Intel. Intel employees use 40% of the sixty childcare places at the facility. Trinity Tots have arranged their opening hours to suit the shift patterns of these employees. The facility is self-financing and childcare places are not subsidised by the employer. Although Intel are not directly involved in the management of the crèche, there is on-going consultation regarding the childcare needs of staff.

Source: Barnardos, Quality Childcare in the Workplace (2000).

## 2.6 Holiday Playschemes/Kids Clubs/Summer Camps

School holidays can be a particularly stressful time for working parents, which in turn can affect employers if the parents are left with no alternative but to give up work during school holiday periods. Getting involved in a holiday playscheme can have considerable advantages to employers in this regard. As with other options, setting up a holiday playscheme should follow needs assessment and should involve consultation with a childcare advisor/Health Board Pre-School officer to inform requirements for setting up such a service. In Ireland there are a large number of Holiday Camps already in operation with most localities having at least one. Again, it would be prudent for employers to investigate the potential for getting involved in an existing scheme or providing funding and support to extend an existing scheme in their locality in order that children of employees could avail of places.

## 2.7 Workplace Crèches

Workplaces crèches are the most common form of employer-sponsored childcare assistance evident among Irish employers, although the overall amount of childcare assistance provided by employers in Ireland is minimal compared to our nearest neighbours in the UK. The small number of workplace crèches operating in Ireland are concentrated in the Dublin area and among public sector employers. Moreover, the expected growth in this sector would seem to be in the public sector (Ni Dhomhnaill, 2003). According to a survey undertaken by the ICTU in 1999 among their members, 30 respondents indicated that childcare arrangements were provided by their employer. Of these, 26 were in the public sector. A more recent survey of workplace crèches in Ireland, undertaken on behalf of the Health Services National Partnership Forum, (HSNPF) echoed these findings. In this latter survey, 61% of workplace crèches were provided by public sector employers; 17% by private employers; 8.7% in the voluntary sector and 13% among semi-state bodies. Health service employers feature predominantly in the provision of workplace crèches accounting for almost half of all workplace crèches in Ireland (Ni Dhomhnaill, 2003).

Choosing this option involves the employer setting up and operating a staff childcare facility either on-site or near to the workplace. The establishment of a workplace crèche may require considerable financial investment and a long-term commitment on the part of the employer. Therefore, it is vital that the need for a staff childcare facility is established beforehand. However, there are some variations in the extent to which the employer may be involved in the day-to-day operation of the centre. This can range from having direct and exclusive responsibility for the running of the centre to providing the premises but contracting the day-to-day costs and management to an independent provider. Within Ireland, most employers provide staff childcare facilities in collaboration with a private provider. In fact, only four employers in the HSNPF (2003) survey had exclusive involvement in the provision of the crèche and two of these indicated that they were exploring the possibility of tendering out the management of the crèche to a private provider. For those already collaborating with a private provider, some owned, while others leased out the premises; and most looked after the maintenance and running costs so as to allow employees avail of lower than market childcare fees.

## Examples:

### 1. Exclusive Involvement of the Employer

"Kiddies Kingdom" crèche at Crumlin hospital was established in August 1998. The hospital opted to run the crèche itself as a separate hospital department. Staff of the crèche were taken on as permanent hospital employees. The facility at this time catered for 34 children and employed 7 full time staff. Later, under the employer demonstration initiative, the hospital applied for funding in order to refurbish and extend the existing facility. At present, the crèche caters for 18 full time children and 24 part time. As the crèche is another hospital department, it has the advantage of sharing uniformity with other departments regarding policies and fire, health and safety regulations.

Source: Canavan, (2000).

### 2. Collaboration with a Private Provider

Letterkenny General Hospital has had staff childcare facilities for approximately five years. The crèche caters for 56 children and offers full time, part time and after school care. The facility is run by a private provider who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the crèche including staff employment. The premises is leased from the local health board and part subsidised by the hospital.

Source: Paddy Rooney, Asst. Manager, Letterkenny General Hospital.

### 3. Setting up a Limited Company to Establish a Workplace Crèche

Interested staff at the Mater hospital set up a limited company to establish a crèche for the children of employees. The facility is located in a building owned by the hospital across the road from the main hospital campus. The company employed a manager who has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the facility. The crèche caters for 50 children offering both full time and part time hours.

Source: Comerford (2001).



#### 4. Parents' Co-operative

Employees of RTÉ have a novel arrangement for supporting their childcare needs. This workplace crèche was originally established in 1987 through a trade union group responding to staff demand for childcare support. A committee of parents oversees the running of the facility and employs a manager to take responsibility for the day-to-day management including staffing. Parents buy shares in the crèche, which operates as a non-profit venture. The income generated from the children pays for the running costs. RTÉ also contribute to the overall costs by providing subsidies and some maintenance services.

Source: Canavan (2000); Donal O'Brianain, RTÉ.

#### The advantages of providing an on-site or near-site staff childcare facility are:

##### For employers:

- Retention of staff, particularly following maternity leave;
- Better recruitment opportunities;
- Reduced absenteeism;
- Improved public image;
- Higher employee morale and commitment.

##### For employees:

- Reduced travel time to and from crèche on the way to and from work;
- Shorter day for children in the crèche facility due to the reduction in travel time;
- Nursing mothers can visit their babies during the day;
- Parents can visit their children during the working day;
- Shorter periods of absence from children;
- Reduced stress;
- In some cases, lower childcare fees.

#### Disadvantages associated with the provision of staff childcare facilities include:

##### For employers:

- Cost;
- Day-to-day management can be a time consuming activity;
- Exclusive and direct provision may leave the employer open to complaints and dissatisfaction, which may in turn interfere with employer/employee relations.

**For employees:**

- Low take up rates may have financial implications for employers. Of note, where the ICTU (1999) survey identified the availability of employer sponsored childcare arrangements to 30 respondents, only 5 of these respondents were availing of workplace childcare arrangements. Reasons given for not availing of these arrangements were:
  - Facilities booked out.
  - Age of children exceeded the age group catered for at the facility.
  - Crèche facility too far from school.
  - Crèche facility too far from home.
- Distance from home may prevent children making friends in their own locality;
- Parents may still have to make arrangements for school collection;
- Workplace crèche may not cater for flexi-time employees or job-sharers;
- Some parents may prefer to separate work from family life.

**2.7.1 A Step-by Step Approach to the Establishment of Staff Childcare Facilities**

- Set up Committee inclusive of representatives from management, employees and trade unions (partnership model);
- A project manager may be employed to oversee the project;
- Involvement of a childcare advisor at the initial stages is prudent;
- Assessment of the childcare responsibilities and needs of staff conducted;
- All options, as outlined, for the provision of childcare support considered in relation to the findings of needs assessment;
- Review of childcare facilities already established in the locality including the possibility of shared facilities;
- Consultation with other hospitals/organisations providing childcare assistance;
- Conduct site visits;
- Based on the findings, feasibility studies are conducted to include the following issues:
  - Location of crèche facility
  - existing premises
  - new building
  - planning permission
  - costs
  - site service (electricity, water etc.)
  - health and safety issues with any proposed site/premises;

- Committee formulates operational procedures for the facility including number of places (full time, part time, after-school care); age range of children; staffing ratios and educational requirements; insurance; policies, procedures and quality standards;
- Particular attention given to legislative requirements for the establishment of a childcare facility, which involves consultation with a childcare advisor/health board Pre-School Officer;
- Involvement of an architect to provide advice on the design and/or building of the facility;
- Committee invites tenders from building contractors;
- Building/renovation work carried out;
- Manager for the facility recruited who in turn consults with the committee regarding the recruitment of other childcare staff;
- Premises is decorated, furnished and equipped in consultation with the manager/childcare advisor;
- Childcare staff recruited;
- Pre-opening inspection carried out by the Health Board Pre-School Officer;
- Employees informed of enrolment dates;
- Facility opens;
- Periodic evaluation of the facility conducted through employee surveys and quality audits.

## Section 3

### Funding Childcare Support to Employees

#### 3.0 Introduction

Establishing a quality workplace crèche can be an expensive venture for employers. However, there are some opportunities for funding assistance from various organisations, providing certain criteria are met. While most of this funding applies to the actual set-up costs, the initial stages of undertaking a research project to identify childcare needs and subsequent feasibility studies can also require funding. The following chapter outlines the various types of funding available to employers from the initial research stages of the project to the realisation of a staff childcare facility for the children of employees.

#### 3.1 Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

Under the National Development Plan 2000-2006, funding of 250 million pounds was allocated to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, which was launched by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in April 1998. The programme aims to improve the quality of childcare in Ireland; increase the number of childcare facilities and places and promote a coordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services in Ireland. The purpose of the funding was to provide capital and staffing grants to support the development of quality childcare services. There are three main types of funding:

- Capital funding to establish, renovate and/or upgrade childcare facilities for Community/Not for Profit groups/Consortia.
- Staffing grants to support staffing costs for Community/Not for Profit Groups/Consortia.
- Capital grants to build, renovate or upgrade crèche facilities for self employed childcare providers catering for no more than 20 children.

Other funding will also become available for local childcare networks, local childcare training models and innovative projects.

While funding from the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme has not specifically targeted employers, it would seem possible that funding opportunities exist for employers in the following ways:

- Develop partnerships with private providers or community childcare services.
- Develop links/partnerships with childminder networks that provide training and support to local childminders.
- The Employer Demonstration Initiative.

### 3.2 Employer Demonstration Initiative

The Employer Demonstration Initiative is one of the initiatives developed under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006. The purpose of the initiative is to stimulate employer interest and involvement in supporting childcare facilities through supporting a limited number of employer-led childcare project, in the hope that these would demonstrate to employers the benefits of involvement in childcare initiatives (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2001).

This initiative received funding from the European Regional Development Fund and is delivered through the collaboration of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with ADM and IBEC. Eight projects participated in this initiative, only one of which is private. The remainder of the projects involve the public sector, partnership Companies or ADM Funded Community Groups. Four of the projects were located in Dublin with one each in Galway, Kerry, Limerick and Offaly (Employment Equality Agency, 2000).

The following is a brief overview of the eight projects:

Source: Dept. of Justice Equality and Law Reform (2000). Information Guidelines and Application for Funding for Employment Demonstration Childcare Initiative.

#### Childcare Community Business Ltd., Ballyfermot, Dublin

The childcare community business was opened in January 2000. The project consists of the development of a full day care *Community Childcare Business* which caters for 35 children through a pre-school and after-school service. The centre was created through the refurbishment of premises that were previously used as shops. The centre is owned by the Community Childcare Business which has charitable status. The centre offers full day care, sessional care and limited after-schools services. There is limited employer involvement in the project.

#### Aer Rianta

Funding was granted to enable Aer Rianta to add to their existing childcare facility by adding out of school services to children aged 4-12 years in the local community. The original crèche facility was opened in 1984.

#### **Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children**

The *Kiddies Kingdom Crèche* was opened in August 1998 and funding was sought to extend and refurbish the existing facility. Currently, the crèche provides 42 pre-school childcare places.

#### **Galway City Partnership/Nortell**

A full day care facility became available to the employees of Nortell at the beginning of 2000. The centre is managed by Galway City Partnership in conjunction with an employee forum (Canavan, 2000).

#### **Fujisawa Ireland/South Kerry Partnership Ltd**

The impetus for this project came from employees of Fujisawa and other local companies. A management group was set up comprised of employers, employees, the Southern Health Board and the Irish Pre-school Playgroup. Funding was received to carry out feasibility work for a childcare centre in Killorglin. However, as the project progressed, some of the original employers had to pull out and the project did not progress any further.

#### **Esat Digifone, Esat Telecom and IBEC**

The project sought the provision of a childcare service via a private provider who purchased the building. However, planning permission was refused.

#### **Limerick University**

The project was to create a childcare facility on campus, which would also be available to staff of local employers as well as the staff and students of the University. The centre is currently operating for staff and students.

### Midland Health Board/Mountmellick Development Association Mountmellick Childcare Plan 2000-2006

The Mountmellick Development Association was established in 1982 to create employment and development opportunities for the town of Mountmellick and its environs. One of the key issues of interest was the need for locally-based affordable childcare, and following a commitment of funding from the Department of Justice Equality and Reform, the MDA were able to make a joint submission with the Midland Health Board for a Community Childcare Centre. The submission was made following an in-depth needs analysis of childcare provision in Mountmellick and the development of a strategic childcare plan from 2000-2006. The primary objectives of the plan were to:

1. Support the holistic development of the child and ensure quality care at all times.
2. Ensure adequate, affordable, accessible provision of quality childcare for the community.
3. Promote a child-friendly ethos in the Mountmellick area.

Key Actions proposed under the strategy were:

- Appoint a Childcare Development Officer
- Establish a Mountmellick Childcare Forum
- Establish a Community Childcare Centre.
- Childcare Information, Advisory Services
- Community Playground
- Child-friendly areas
- Childcare and related training
- Support for private childcare provision
- Parent Support Programme

Following contact from staff at St. Vincent's Hospital about the lack of childcare places, the MDA joined with the Midland Health Board to apply for funding for a 55 place childcare facility to cater for the needs of the employees at St. Vincent's Hospital and the wider community. The hospital had a total of 141 employees, of whom 111 were female. A steering committee comprising of representatives from the Midland Health Board, the MDA, employees of St. Vincent's Hospital and Laois County Council was set up to manage the project. An estimate of costs for the project from 1998-1999 was broken down as follows:

- Construction of premises: 90,000
- Purchase of equipment/materials: 20,000
- Other: 6,000

A total grant of 100,000 was sought from ADM. (*Figures in Irish Punts*) (40).

Source: Mountmellick Development Association (August 2000).

### 3.3 Tax Incentives

Budget 2000 provided tax incentives to employers to encourage their participation in provision of staff childcare facilities. These include benefit-in-kind exemptions to employees on childcare provided by their employers and 100% capital allowance on expenditure incurred on the construction, refurbishment or conversion of a childcare facility. The provision of free or subsidised childcare facilities by employers is exempt from a benefit-in-kind charge on employees conditional on satisfying the following criteria:

- “The employer must make a premises available or
- In a partnership venture, be directly involved in both the management and financing of the childcare facility.
- The premises must meet the required standards as stipulated under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child Care (Pre-School Services) regulations 1996 and 1997.

This exemption does not apply if the employer simply pays or subsidises an employee’s childcare costs for an independent crèche or nursery” (Dept. of Justice, Equality and Reform: 14, 2001).

Changes to the capital allowances in Budget 2000 mean that employers providing a staff childcare facility can now avail of 100% capital allowance within the first year on costs related to the construction, refurbishment or conversion of a childcare facility incurred since the 1st December 1999. The rates of capital allowances for qualifying premises are:

- 100% in the first year, or
- 15% per annum for years 1-6; and
- 10% for year 7.

To qualify for capital allowance, the facility must meet the requirements and standards set out in the childcare legislation and must be used as a childcare facility for 10 years.



## Section 4

### Legislative Requirements for Staff Childcare Facilities

#### 4.0 Introduction

The setting up and operation of a staff childcare facility incorporates legislation from a broad range of topics specific to different aspects of the service. Together, they provide a very comprehensive legal framework for employers embarking on the provision of staff childcare facilities. Many of these areas of legislation will already be familiar to employers, particularly those covering health and safety at work; employment law; fire regulations; legislation covering record keeping and confidentiality and so on. For this reason, legislation as it relates specifically to the provision of childcare places is outlined in this chapter. However, reference is made to other areas of legislation as appropriate throughout both this chapter and the next chapter dealing with quality standards and monitoring of childcare facilities.

#### 4.1 The Childcare Act, 1991 and Pre-School Regulations, 1996 and 1997

The Childcare Act, 1991 was enacted in order to provide legislation pertaining to those under 18 years of age including early childhood. Regulations relating to Part VII of the Act came into operation on 31st December 1996 entitled "Supervision of Pre-School Services". Amendments to these regulations were also introduced in 1997. At the time of writing this report, these regulations are under review. The following pertinent definitions are provided in the Pre-School Regulations:

- **Pre-School Child** – "a child who has not attained the age of six years and is not attending a national school or a school providing an educational programme similar to a national school"
- **Pre-School Service** – "any pre-school, play group, day nursery, crèche, day care or other similar service which caters for pre-school children, including those grant-aided by health boards"
- **Drop-in-centre** – "a premises in which a pre-school service is used exclusively on an intermittent basis".

*(Pre-School Regulations, Section 49.)*

The Pre-School Regulations set out minimum standards relating to:

- Premises and facilities.
- Health and safety.
- Toys and equipment.
- Space per child.
- Staffing levels.
- Number of children catered for.
- Records.

Health Boards have responsibility for enforcing the regulations and for the provision of support to pre-school facilities. In order to fulfill their role, health boards are required to carry out intermittent inspections of all pre-school services covered by these regulations. In turn, the regulations place the following responsibilities on providers of pre-school services:

- All persons providing a pre-school service must notify their health board.
- All those proposing to provide a pre-school service must give notice in writing accompanied by the required fee within six months of operation.
- All persons operating a pre-school service must, within 28 days, notify in writing the health board of any changes in the particulars contained in the notice given by that person to the health board.
- A person who ceases to carry on a pre-school service must notify the relevant health board within 14 days of the cessation of the service.
- The Act requires that all pre-school services have a copy of the Regulations, Explanatory Guide and Part VII of the Childcare Act available for inspection on the premises. Copies of these are available from Government Publications at the address given below.

Breach of these regulations carries penalties including fines, imprisonment or closing down of a facility. An *Explanatory Guide to the Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection* was issued in 1997 and is available from Government Publications Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

There are certain services exempt from these regulations. These are:

- The care of any pre-school child by a relative or by the spouse of a relative.
- Childminders taking care of pre-school children of the same family and no other children except their own.
- Childminders taking care of not more than three pre-school children of different families apart from their own pre-school children.

## 4.2 Child Protection

The issue of child protection has received considerable attention in recent years. In 1999, the Department of Health and Children published *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. It is mandatory for any service catering for children to obtain a summary of these guidelines (Barnardos, 2003). The guidelines pertain to the identification and reporting procedures involved in suspected child abuse. Additionally, the guidelines serve to improve the professional practice of all agencies that provide services to children and families. Child protection policies in any pre-school services should reflect these guidelines. Further information on the implementation of these guidelines can be obtained from Children First Information and Advice persons located at the relevant health board. These guidelines can be used in conjunction with *Our Duty to Care: The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People* issued in 2002 by the Department of Health and Children.

This document is intended for all staff, both statutory and voluntary who are involved in caring for children. The document outlines fundamental principles for all organisations providing services for children.

Under the Child Care Act, 1991, health boards have the legal responsibility for the investigation of all suspected cases of child abuse. All concerns regarding suspected cases of child abuse should be reported to the relevant health board or where there is a serious concern about the welfare of a child and the relevant health board personnel are not available, the gardaí can be informed. All organisations providing childcare services should be familiar with the guidelines and principles for the protection and welfare of children outlined in both of these documents.

### 4.3 Employment Legislation

All health service employers will be familiar with the legislation and regulations governing the employment of staff. The extent of their involvement in this capacity will depend on the chosen option for the provision of childcare assistance to employees. However, any staff childcare facility that is employing staff would need to be aware of the relevant legislation. Barnardos (2003) outlines the following legislation as relevant to all those involved in personnel practice in early years services:

- Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Act, 1973-1991
- Unfair Dismissals Act, 1997-1993
- Terms of Employment (Information) Act, 1994
- National Minimum Wage Act, 2000
- Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, Section III
- Statutory Calculation of Annual Leave Entitlements
- Pro-Rata Entitlement
- Public Holidays
- Payment for Public Holidays
- Absences from Work
- Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997 (Rest Periods)
- Maternity Leave Act, 1994
- Adoptive Leave Act, 1995
- Health and Safety Benefit
- Parental Leave Act, 1998
- Force Majeure Leave
- Employment Equality Act, 1998
- Juries Act, 1976
- Carers Act, 2001
- Protection of Employees (Part Time Work) Act, 2001.

## 4.4 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety Authority, established under the Safety, Health and Work Act (1989) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Regulations, 1993 asserts that employers are primarily responsible for creating a safe and healthy workplace. The act places responsibility on both employers and employees in the assurance of a safe and healthy environment for work. The Health and Safety Authority have produced *A Short Guide to Health and Safety Law* which provides an overview of health and safety legislation in the workplace. Additionally, there are requirements for the production of a safety statement; accident reporting and the monitoring of health and safety at work through safety audits. All safety statements must include:

- The identification of all workplace hazards
- Control measures taken to reduce the risk of each hazard identified
- Resources allocated by the employer to improve safety management
- Record of the consultation process with employees
- The names and positions of those responsible for safety
- The co-operation necessary from employees
- Detailed health and safety information available to employees.

Moreover, under the Pre-School Regulations, 1996 *"a person carrying on a pre-school service shall take all reasonable measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of pre-school children attending the service"*. In particular, the regulations make specific requirements regarding fire safety.

### 4.4.1 Fire Safety

With regard to fire safety, the Pre-School Regulations, 1996 assert that:

- Adequate arrangements be in place for extinguishing fires, giving warnings and evacuation of pre-school children from the premises.
- Adequate arrangements be in place for the maintenance and use of firefighting equipment.
- Adequate arrangements be in place for staff and children to know fire and evacuation procedures.
- Bedding and internal furnishings have appropriate fire retardant properties and low toxicity levels when on fire.
- Heating emitting surfaces are adequately guarded or thermostatically controlled so as to ensure surface temperatures are safe.

Further fire safety information, particularly the development of a *Fire Safety Programme* to ensure best practice for fire safety in pre-school services is provided in *Fire Safety in Pre-Schools: A Guide to Fire Safety in Premises Used for Pre-School Services, 1999*. This document, produced by the Department of the Environment is available from Government Publications.

## 4.5 Environmental Regulations

Planning permission is required for all commercial operations under the Local Government Planning and Development Acts, 1963-1999. Employers planning to build, extend or reconstruct buildings should contact their local authority for guidance. Moreover, planning permission is required for the change of usage of an existing premise. All alterations to a nursery premises must comply with the regulations stipulated by the Building Control Act, 1990 (National Children's Nurseries NCNA, 2000). It is also important to include both the Environmental Health Officer and the Fire Safety Officer at the planning stages for any building.

### 4.5.1 Premises and Facilities

The Pre-School Regulations 1996 and 1997 identify the following requirements for all pre-school services regarding the premises and facilities:

- Premises should be bright, with plenty of natural light
- Premises should be well ventilated
- Premises should be structurally sound and in good repair
- Premises should be clean and hygienic
- Premises should be warm, comfortable and suitable for the age group being cared for
- Furniture and equipment should be well maintained and in a safe condition
- Work and play surfaces must be of non-toxic material and be kept clean and safe at all times
- There should be an adequate number of toilets for children and staff which are kept clean
- There should be an adequate number of wash hand basins with hot and cold water and drying facilities
- There should be a separate appropriate and safe nappy changing area
- Electrical appliances including sockets should be safely protected
- Patio doors/low window areas should be protected
- There needs to be thermostatically controlled hot water
- Cupboard locks should be in place
- There should be a fully equipped first aid kit with at least one member of staff qualified in first aid
- Outdoor play spaces must be accessible only by the children cared for and authorised adults/carers and
- Outdoor areas must be spacious enough for active play
- The outdoor area must be safely enclosed
- The outdoor area should have a combination of hard and soft play areas
- Unsafe outdoor areas should be made inaccessible to children, e.g. climbable walls; steps; railings and so on

- Outdoor areas must be secure so that children cannot leave without adult supervision
- Adequate precautions for slippery conditions during the winter should be taken
- Sand pits should contain only washed sand and should be covered when not in use
- Sheds/stores should be secured to prevent unsupervised access by children
- Slides and climbing equipment should be securely fixed on grass or impact absorbing materials. Impact absorbing surfaces should extend 1.75m beyond the extremities of stationary equipment and 1.75m beyond the maximum travel distance of, for example see-saws
- Swings for young children should have adequate restraints with swing seats made of rubber.
- Ponds, pits and other hazards in the outdoor play area must be fenced and ponds should be covered with rigid mesh grille.

(Barnardos, 2000 and 2003; NCNA, 2000; Pre-School Regulations 1996 and 1997.)

The Environmental Health Officers Association have produced a document called *Environmental Health Standards for Full Time Pre-School Services* which should be read by all those providing pre-school services.

#### 4.5.2 Space Requirements

The minimum space requirements for **full day care** services are:

Age of child	Floor area per child
0-1 year	3.7 sq. metres
1-2 years	2.8 sq. metres
2-6 years	2.32 sq. metres

The minimum space requirements for **sessional care** are;

Age of child	Floor area per child
0-6 years	2 sq. metres

Hallways, kitchen, bathroom, lobbies and other circulation areas are not included in this calculation.

(NCNA, 2000.)

### 4.5.3 Kitchen and Food Arrangements

The crèche facility should have a separate kitchen area. Food may be cooked on the premises or children may bring their own packed lunches including pre-cooked meals that require re-heating. Where food is supplied by the crèche provider, the food must be either prepared on the premises or obtained from a supplier whose premises has been registered with the relevant health board. Additionally:

- The kitchen area must be kept clean with proper washing up and sterilising equipment as well as adequate hand washing facilities.
- Adequate and suitable facilities for the storage, preparation, cooking and serving of food should be available as well as adequate and suitable eating utensils.
- All waste/refuse must be stored hygienically and disposed of frequently and hygienically and in a manner so as not to cause a nuisance.
- Special care and attention should be given to the sterilisation of infant feeding equipment and the preparation of infant formula foods and bottles. Ideally, a separate area within the kitchen should be designated for this purpose.
- Varied and nutritious meals should be encouraged with menus and meals prepared for those with special dietary needs.
- Menus should be planned and displayed for all to see.
- All staff should be familiar with the principles of good food hygiene and take special precaution to avoid the risk of cross contamination.
- Clear procedures should be drawn up for the preparation and handling of food including maintenance and storage.
- Kitchen appliances should be made safe and inaccessible to children.
- The kitchen area should be of an adequate size to reflect the number and needs of the children cared for and fully equipped to cater for a full complement of children.

(Barnardos, 2000, 2003; NCNA, 2000; Pre-School Regulations, 1996 and 1997.)

## 4.6 Staffing Requirements

Section 3 of *Our Duty to Care*, 2002 asserts that safe practice regarding child protection starts with safe recruitment practices on the part of the employer including thorough selection procedures; assessing the suitability of the applicant from a broad perspective taking cognisance of all relevant matters; taking all reasonable precautions to eliminate those not suitable for work with children and providing adequate training.

Recruitment policies and procedures should take cognisance of equal opportunities legislation, the *National Childcare Strategy 2000*, which advocates children having contact with both men and women in child care services and the application procedures outlined in *Our Duty to Care*, 2002.

Minimum staffing requirements stipulated by the Pre-School Regulations 1996, (Article VII) outline the following staff/child ratios:

Service	Age	Adult/Child ratio
<i>Full Day Care</i>	0-1 year	1:3
	1-3 year	1:6
	3-6 year	1:8
<i>Sessional</i>	0-6 year	1:10
<i>Drop-in-Centre</i>	1-6 year	1:8
	< 12 months	1:3
<i>After School</i>	4-6 year	1:8
	6-8 year	1:10

The NCNA (2000) recommends a ratio of 1:8 for all after school children in line with common European Practice.

#### 4.6.1 Outings

Children who attend a pre-school service may only be collected by a parent or authorised person named on the register. For the purpose of activities outside of the crèche facility, as in the case of an outing, consent from parents must be sought and a consent form signed. Vehicle safety and insurance regulations must be adhered to including the use of seat belts. Adult/child ratios must also be adhered to.

#### 4.6.2 Staff Qualifications

Although the Pre-School Regulations, 1996 do not stipulate mandatory qualifications for staff working with pre-school children, they do assert that staff should be adults who are competent with appropriate experience in caring for children and/or an appropriate qualification in childcare. Barnardos (2003) recommend that in the interests of best practice, all early childhood practitioners should be trained and qualified. Additionally, they assert that all practitioners should have attended a full time or equivalent childcare course of at least two years duration with supervised placements in a setting independent of the educational college. The OMNA project currently being undertaken by the National Coordinating Childcare Committee will be developing a framework for the qualifications and training in early childhood education. In the meantime, Barnardos (2003:52) advocate the following list of qualifications:

- BA in Childhood Studies. UCC/NUI
- BA in Childhood Studies, Carlow Institute of Technology
- BA in Early Childhood and Education, DIT
- BA and National Diploma in Applied Social Studies in Social Care, Regional Institutes of Technology
- National Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education, DIT



- Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) 3-6 Diploma Programme; 6-12 Diploma Programme
- BA in Humanistic Montessori Education, St. Nicholas Montessori College
- Diploma in Nursery Nursing (NNEB)
- Childcare with Montessori Education Module FETAC (NCVA level II)
- The Care of the Special Child FETAC
- FÁS Childcare 2 Programme
- Irish Pre-School and Playgroups Association FETAC (NCVA level II)
- Diploma in Nursery Management, UCD
- Registered Childminders Certificate Course, Waterford Institute of Technology
- Special Needs Classroom Assistant, The School of Practical Childcare, Froebel College Award
- FETAC (NCVA level 3 Supervision in Childcare) award.

#### 4.6.3 Insurance

Under the *Pre-School Regulations*, 1996, every child must have insurance cover with a recommended minimum of €2,539,476. Additional cover for outings can be obtained. Barnardos (2003) recommend the following insurance:

- Employer's liability including provision for volunteers and students
- Public liability
- Motor insurance for vehicles used in the service
- Fire and theft.

#### 4.7 Record Keeping

Part IV of the *Pre-School Regulations* 1996, requires that pre-school services keep records on the following:

- Register of all children attending the service including name and date of birth, commencement date and finishing date of attending the service
- Details of parents including name, address, contact telephone number, authorisation for collection of the child
- Health details including any illness, disability or allergy suffered by the child; special care or attention needs; the name and contact number of the child's GP and a record of immunisations received by the child
- Personnel including staff details (name, position, qualification of all staff; staff rosters; staff/child ratios) medicines and accidents, fire procedures
- Operational details including daily attendance record for each child; details of the maximum number of children catered for and staff/child ratios; type of care programme provided; facilities; opening hours and fees.

It is recommended that a separate area for administration be kept for records and all record management must comply with the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 and the Data Protection Act, 1988.

## Section 5

### Quality and Standards for Staff Childcare Facilities

#### 5.0 Introduction

While the achievement of best practice in childcare service provision should be the aspiration of all service providers, at research level in Ireland, the issue of quality in childcare provision has received relatively little attention (Kiernan, 2003). There are however a number of initiatives underway, which will have a significant impact on the development of best practice guidelines for service providers and a number of existing quality programmes and standards that have been produced by interested organisations. Some of these draw on research conducted in other countries and are a useful source of information for the pursuit of quality childcare provision among service providers.

#### 5.1 Current Developments

It is important to highlight the fact that the previous chapter outlined what are considered minimum requirements set down by law and various policy initiatives in the child care sector. However, the issue of quality childcare has a far broader reach. The White Paper on Early Childhood Education *Ready to Learn* was published by the National Forum on Early Childhood Education. *Ready to Learn* (2002) acknowledged the fact that while the quantitative standards laid down in the Pre-School regulations are crucial factors in the provision of quality child care, they do however, tell only half the story. This document offers a more comprehensive view of quality childcare embedded in the following definition:

*"In seeking to measure quality, it is not sufficient to focus on static, tangible variables such as space, ratio and toilets at the expense of more dynamic, intangible aspects of quality such as interaction between adults and children and the development appropriateness of activities and expectations. While it may be a difficult task to legislate for or assess such quality criteria, they must be discussed and debated if effective early education, that will impact positively on the later educational experiences of children, is to be provided"*

(Hayes, 1995.)

The White Paper identifies the following factors, which are not currently covered by the Pre-School regulations, but which influence the quality of care provision:

- Curriculum and methodology
- Staff qualifications
- Training and retention
- The extent to which parents are involved
- The nature of the setting (non-physical aspects)

In recognition of the dynamic nature of quality, the White Paper proposed the development of a Quality in Education (QE) award, which will make recommendations for best practice in the early childcare sector. These standards will be specific to educational standards concerning curriculum, methodologies, staff qualifications and training. The standards will be developed by the Early Childhood Education Agency (ECEA) in tandem with the Department of Education and Science. Issues regarding the qualifications and training of staff will be dealt with under the existing framework of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. Of note, all service providers in receipt of state funding will be expected to comply with these standards. As previously alluded to The Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Sector (2002), known as the OMNA project is currently a work in progress, but to date the project has identified career ladders for staff training and development in addition to practitioner titles and job descriptions for those working in childcare facilities. An outline of these is available in *Supporting Quality: guidelines for best practice in early childhood services*, Barnardos, 2003.

Additionally, the White Paper proposed the funding of a research and development programme for early childhood education.

Following the recommendations made in the White Paper, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was launched in October 2002. The CECDE has four main functions regarding children from birth to 6 years of age. These are:

1. To develop quality standards in relation to all aspects of early childhood education and development.
2. To develop a support framework to facilitate compliance with these standards among service providers.
3. To co-ordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and special needs groups.
4. To undertake and/or commission research and development through which best practice in curriculum, teaching methodology and parental involvement may be implemented and evaluated.

## 5.2 Existing Quality Programmes for Early Child Care Services

A number of umbrella organisations in Ireland have put together quality programmes that can provide guidance on best practice for those health service employers embarking on the development of staff childcare facilities. These are:

- **The National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA)**  
The NCNA have produced guidelines for nursery and crèche operators. These guidelines are very comprehensive and allude to statutory regulations as well as drawing on sources from other childcare agencies outside of Ireland. Information can be accessed from their website at [www.ncna.net](http://www.ncna.net) or at The National Children's Nurseries Association, Carmichael House, Nth. Brunswick St., Dublin 7.  
Phone: 01 4601138.

- **The Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN)**

The BCCN aims to promote good practice in sessional pre-school services within the Border Counties and Co. Meath. Through the BCCN Quality Assurance Programme, the organisation will acknowledge and endorse high quality leading to accreditation.

The aims of the programme are:

- To promote good management practice and high standards of care and education within pre-school services
- Develop, encourage and maintain good practice in services for the benefit of children, their family units and communities.
- Identify and give credit to good practice within early childhood care and education services.
- Identify areas of need within the services.
- Develop and support services to pre-school groups delivering education and care in collaboration with staff from childcare services and BCCN.

Information on this programme can be accessed at the BCCN website [www.bccn.ie/quality.htm](http://www.bccn.ie/quality.htm) or at The BCCN Quality Office, Derryherriff, Creeslough, Co. Donegal.

Phone: 074 38916.

- **IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation**

The IPPA has spent the last six years taking steps towards the development of a Quality Improvement Programme for its members. To date the group has produced the IPPA Code of Standards (1991), Policy Guidelines (1997) and the Border Counties High/Scope programme for edu care services. The organisation has developed a system of in-service education, on-site support visits and self-evaluation mechanisms. The Quality Improvement Programme is based on an action research model and through its research has devised a quality indicators evaluation tool that enable the provider assess quality from a number of different dimensions. The emphasis in the programme is the development of a "Quality Cycle" as an ongoing quality improvement tool in each of the services. Further information can be accessed at their website [www.ippa.ie/programme.htm](http://www.ippa.ie/programme.htm) or from Carmel Brennan, Assistant Director, Quality, IPPA Training, Unit 4, Broomhill Business Complex, Broomhill Rd., Tallaght, Dublin 24.

Phone: 01 4630010.

- **Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre**

Barnardos have recently published the second issue of their best practice guidelines in early childhood services. This document entitled *Supporting Quality: guidelines for best practice in early childhood services* is a must read for anyone in the childcare service provision sector. The organisation also uses the High/Scope framework as a model of intervention and provides a detailed explanation of the model in practice. There are 182 pages of detailed information on all aspects of quality childcare provision, including best practice guidelines for pre-school services and a list of useful resources. The document supplies information that is evidence drawn from a variety of sources and gives a very clear outline of the legislative and policy frameworks for quality childcare provision in Ireland. The document and other information can be downloaded from their website at [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie) or contact Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8. Phone: 01 4549699.

### 5.3 Summary

The provision of a quality child care service requires each service provider to set out a mission statement on the vision of the service, augmented by policies, procedures and quality standards that are informed by the best available evidence and requirements as stipulated by legislation and policy formation. Quality improvement is a continuous process requiring the systematic appraisal of the service from the professional, management and users' perspective. Each service should have processes in place for the intermittent evaluation and monitoring of the service in line with identified standards. This is an area in which there are significant developments currently underway. Each service provider should keep abreast of the developments at statutory level and in the intervening time use all resources identified to develop high standards of practice in the current service.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: References

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## Appendix 2: Useful Contacts

### **Barnardos' National Children's**

#### **Resource Centre**

Head Office  
Christchurch Sq.  
Dublin 8

Tel: 01 4549699  
[www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

### **Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform**

Equal Opportunities Childcare Section  
Mespil Rd.  
Dublin 2

LoCall 1890 20 90 30  
[www.irlgov.ie/justice](http://www.irlgov.ie/justice)

### **Giraffe Childcare and Early Learning Centres**

Head Office  
19 Elgin Rd.  
Ballsbridge  
Dublin 4

Tel: 01 660 0280  
[www.giraffe.ie](http://www.giraffe.ie)

### **Irish Business and Employers Confederation**

84 Lower Baggot St.  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 6601011  
[www.ibec.ie](http://www.ibec.ie)

### **Bright Horizons Family Solutions**

Head Office  
The College Bus Park  
Blanchardstown

Tel: 01 8853945  
[www.brighthorizons.com](http://www.brighthorizons.com)

### **Quality Childcare Ltd.**

3 Woodlands  
Rathfarnham Castle  
Dublin 14

Tel: 01 4991994  
[www.qualitychildcare.ie](http://www.qualitychildcare.ie)

### **NHS Childcare Toolkit**

Department of Health  
PO Box 777  
London SE1 6XH

Tel: 00 44 8701 555455  
[www.doh.gov.uk/childcaretoolkit/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/childcaretoolkit/index.htm)

### **Border Counties Childcare Network Ltd.**

The Diamond Centre  
Co. Monaghan

Tel: 047 72469  
[www.bccn.ie](http://www.bccn.ie)

### **Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education**

St. Patrick's College  
Drumcondra  
Dublin 9

Tel: 01 8842000  
Email: [info@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:info@spd.dcu.ie)

### **Childminding Ireland**

Wicklow Enterprise Pk.  
The Murrough  
Wicklow Town

Tel: 0404 64007/8  
[www.childminding-irl.com](http://www.childminding-irl.com)

### **Employment Equality Agency**

36 Uppr. Mount St.  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 6624577

**Equality Authority**

2 Clonmel Place  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 4173333  
[www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

**Health and Safety Authority**

10 Hogan Place  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 6620400  
[www.has.ie](http://www.has.ie)

**Area Development Management**

Holbrook House  
Holles St.  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 2400700  
[www.adm.ie](http://www.adm.ie)

**National Children's Nurseries Association**

Carmichael House  
Nth. Brunswick St.  
Dublin 7

Tel: 01 4601138  
[www.ncna.net](http://www.ncna.net)

**IPPA – The Early Childhood Organisation**

Unit 4, Broomhill Business Complex  
Broomhill Rd.  
Tallaght  
Dublin 24

Tel: 01 4630010  
[www.ippa.ie](http://www.ippa.ie)

**St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland**

16 Adelaide St.  
Dun Laoghaire  
Co. Dublin

Tel: 01 2806064

**Government Publications Office**

Sun Alliance House  
Molesworth St.  
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 6793515

**High/Scope Ireland**

c/o NIPPA  
6c Wildflower Way  
Apollo Rd.  
Belfast, BT12 6TA

Tel: 028 90 662825

**High/Scope Ireland**

9 Larkfield Ave.  
Dublin 6W

Tel: 01 4923711

**Environmental Protection Agency**

Dublin Regional Inspectorate  
St. Martin's House  
Waterloo Rd  
Dublin 4

Tel: 01 6674474  
[www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)

**OMNA Project**

c/o Centre for Social and Educational Research  
Dublin Institute of Technology – DIT  
Fitzwilliam House  
30 Uppr. Pembroke St.  
Dublin 2

Tel: 4023000







The background is a solid blue color. On the left side, there are several white, curved lines that resemble a stylized 'S' or a series of overlapping curves. On the right side, there are also white curved lines, but they are more sparse and appear to be part of a larger graphic element that is partially cut off.

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**Working Together for a Better Health Service**