

# Addressing the Gaps between Training and Practice

## Evaluation of the South Dublin National Early Years Access Initiative





# Addressing the Gaps between Training and Practice

## Evaluation of the South Dublin National Early Years Access Initiative

Dr Mareesa O'Dwyer and Marlene McCormack  
Early Childhood Ireland and NUI Maynooth



2014

South Dublin NEYAI Consortium

---

**The authors of this report are**

Dr Mareesa O'Dwyer (Early Childhood Ireland)  
Marlene McCormack (Early Childhood Ireland)

**This evaluation report was commissioned and published by**  
South Dublin NEYAI Consortium

**Date**

2014

**How to cite this report**

O'Dwyer, M. and McCormack, M. (2014) Local Evaluation  
of the South Dublin National Early Access Initiative:  
Addressing the Gaps Between Training and Practice.  
Dublin: Early Childhood Ireland.

**Produced by**

Early Childhood Ireland  
Hainault House  
Belgard Square South  
Tallaght  
Dublin 24

Tel: +353 (0) 1 405 7100

Fax: +353 (0) 1 405 7109

Email: [info@earlychildhoodireland.ie](mailto:info@earlychildhoodireland.ie)

Web: [www.earlychildhoodireland.ie](http://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie)

**Designed by**

designfarm  
[www.designfarm.ie](http://www.designfarm.ie)

ISBN: 978-0-9566506-4-1

For rights of translation or reproduction, applications should be  
made to the South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, through the lead  
partner South Dublin County Partnership, Unit D Nangor Rd  
Business Park, New Nangor Rd, Clondalkin, Dublin 12.

# Contents

South Dublin NEYAI Chair Foreword .....	07
Acknowledgements .....	08
List of Tables.....	09
List of Figures.....	10
Acronyms .....	11
Glossary .....	12
Executive Summar .....	13

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The National Early Years Access Initiative and Evaluation.....	23
1.2 The South Dublin NEYAI Project .....	23
1.3 Overall Vision for the Project .....	24
1.4 Rationale for the Project.....	25
1.5 Policy Context.....	26
1.6 NEYAI South Dublin NEYAI Consortium .....	26
1.7 Organisation of the Report .....	26

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction.....	27
2.2 The Emergence of Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland.....	27
2.3 Quality Early Childhood Care and Education .....	28
2.4 Mentoring .....	30
2.5 Corporate Governance in The Early Year's Sector.....	32
2.6 Interagency Working.....	34

## Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design.....	36
3.2 Participants and Settings .....	37
3.3 Measurements and Procedures .....	39
3.3.1 Quantitative Measures .....	39
3.3.2 Qualitative Measures .....	40
3.3.3 Process Evaluation.....	41
3.4 Data Analysis .....	42
3.5 Ethical Considerations.....	42

## Chapter 4: The South Dublin NEYAI Interventions

4.1 Intervention Design.....	43
4.2 Theoretical Underpinnings.....	44
4.3 Intervention Components.....	44
4.3.1 Project Networks.....	45
4.3.2 Quality Mentoring .....	47
4.3.3 Parent and Child Consultation .....	51
4.3.4 Professional Development .....	52
4.3.5 Work Placement.....	53
4.3.6 Corporate Governance .....	54

## Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction.....	55
5.2 Sample Descriptives.....	55
5.3 Quantitative Findings .....	57
5.3.1 Quality within the Preschool Environment.....	57
5.3.2 Staff Experiences.....	60
5.4 Qualitative Findings .....	63
5.4.1 Managers Perspectives of the South Dublin NEYAI .....	63
5.4.2 Staff Perspectives of the South Dublin NEYAI ...	70
5.5 Process Evaluation .....	75
5.6 Corporate Governance .....	78
5.6.1 Introduction.....	78
5.6.2 Board of Management Profile .....	78
5.6.3 Commentary on Corporate Governance .....	79
5.7 Commentary on Work Placement.....	80
5.8 Conclusion .....	81

## Chapter 6: Learning for Policy and Practice

6.1 Introduction.....	82
6.2 Learning For and From.....	83
6.3 Sign-Posting for Policy .....	86

## Chapter 7: Signalling the Way Forward .....

## Chapter 8: Bibliography .....

---

# Appendices

Given the breadth of appendices and supplementary documents stemming from the South Dublin NEYAI, a website hosting these documents along with the final report is available at: [www.southdublinneyai.ie](http://www.southdublinneyai.ie)

## Appendices

### Chapter 3

- Appendix 1 Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire
- Appendix 2 Online Staff Survey
- Appendix 3 Board Descriptive Questionnaire
- Appendix 4 Schedule for Manager Interview
- Appendix 5 Schedule for Mentor Interview
- Appendix 6 Schedule for Early Years Educators Focus Groups
- Appendix 7 Process Evaluation Log Sheet

### Chapter 4

- Appendix 8 Self-assessment for Early Years Educators
- Appendix 9 Template for Service Level Agreement
- Appendix 10 Template for Service Level Action Plan
- Appendix 11 Consistent Interaction Guidelines
- Appendix 12 Template for Video Feedback
- Appendix 13 Template for Interaction Implementation Plan
- Appendix 14 Mentor Support and Development Record

### Chapter 5

- Appendix 15 Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research – Managers Interview
- Appendix 16 Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research – Staff Focus Group
- Appendix 17 Template for Individual Preschool Plans
- Appendix 18 The Irish Governance Code Organisation Types

### Supplementary Documents

- South Dublin NEYAI Consortium (2014a) Mentoring for Quality Practice in Early Years Education and Care: An Implementation Guide
- South Dublin NEYAI Consortium (2014b) Model of Workplace Learning for Early Years Educators

---

## Foreword

The primary objective for the South Dublin NEYAI Consortium has been to improve the quality of early year's settings and experiences for children and families by addressing the gaps between training and practice. The funding awarded to the South Dublin NEYAI Consortium has facilitated stakeholders at a local level in South Dublin County to test a number of approaches to supporting and extending quality practice. When a student completes a training course in any discipline, it is expected that their learning would include a level of practical competencies coupled with theoretical knowledge and understanding. However, this is not always the case in the early year's sector particularly in terms of Fetac Level 5 qualifications. For many years, those of us working in the early year's sector have seen the effects of gaps in skills that should have been developed in pre service training and practice based work experiences. Preschools also struggle to provide in-service training and professional development opportunities for staff, further widening the gap and indeed potentially harming quality provision for children and families.

This evaluation has determined that there has been a positive impact on both the professional development of early year's educators and on the quality of service delivery for children and families. The evaluation demonstrates a marked improvement in quality in all services and in all aspects of quality. Almost 90% of early year's educators involved felt that participation in the project had a positive impact on their practice and 85% felt that working with a mentor was beneficial to their development as a professional. As we inch towards a professional, empowered, degree led early years sector this project is a prime example of how early years educators can be enabled to fully engage in their own professional development and improve quality practice.

In addition to this evaluation, we have distilled the learning from this project into a 'Mentoring for Quality Practice in Early Years Education and Care: An Implementation Guide and a Model of Work Place Learning for Early Years Educators. The Mentoring Implementation Guide reflects the process and approach used in this demonstration project and highlights some of the critical success factors for any mentoring initiative which we hope will influence practitioners, services and policy makers. The Model of Workplace Learning, we expect will open the space for a discussion on how we can further improve skills and competencies through practice based training for all early years' students.

The South Dublin NEYAI Consortium also became an important space and opportunity to work more closely with the early year's services, to collaborate more effectively with key stakeholders from the sector, to support the project team and to access the knowledge and skills of the expert group. The project benefited at all levels from effective collaboration in relation to funding, expertise and building a sustainable legacy for the project. The keystone of this consortium has been trust – particularly between the members of the steering group all of whom have been open to engaging and also being challenged by the project.

We are conscious that there is still work to do in relation to maintaining and improving on the level of quality achieved but there is a strong commitment amongst the stakeholders to continue to work to sustain the legacy. Plans are already in place to continue the peer group, training is underway to develop 'in-service mentors' and further collaborative training initiatives are in planning stages. On behalf of South Dublin NEYAI Consortium thank you to everyone involved in the project – most particularly the managers, early years educators, the children and their families, the project staff Lisa and Delia ably led by Ciara, the members of the steering group, expert group, the learning community, the staff of Pobal – Bernie, Nuala and Emily, the NEYAI funders and everyone who collaborated with us in the delivery of training and supports. We'd also like to extend a special thanks to Geraldine French who provided invaluable support to the quality mentor.

Lastly the opportunity to be part of the consortium, whether it be at local or national level, has enhanced the individual capacity of the organisations involved to step outside their comfort zones and self reflect on their organisational practice. Being part of the NEYAI has afforded all of us involved in South Dublin NEYAI project the opportunity to learn, influence and lead within our sector.



**Ruth Shortall**

Chair – South Dublin NEYAI Consortium



## Acknowledgements

Early Childhood Ireland would like to thank all those who contributed to the evaluation of the South Dublin NEYAI. We would like to thank the steering group and consortium members for their active engagement and guidance throughout the planning and implementation of the evaluation. We would especially like to thank the project team; Ciara Monaghan, Lisa Kavanagh and Delia Goodman who were involved on the ground coordinating and delivering the complex components of this project. In terms of the research design and methodology, Dr. Bernie Grummell and Dr. Catriona O'Toole from NUI Maynooth have provided invaluable support and guidance for the duration of the evaluation. Finally, we reserve special thanks for the early childhood education services taking part in the project, especially the, staff, boards of management, children and families. We hope that you are very proud of the work you have contributed to this valuable programme of research.



**Mareesa O'Dwyer & Marlene McCormack**  
South Dublin NEYAI Local Evaluation Team





## List of Tables

	Title	Page
<b>Table 1</b>	Evaluation Milestones and Timeline	<b>15</b>
<b>Table 2</b>	Recommendations stemming from the evaluation of the South Dublin NEYAI	<b>21</b>
<b>Table 3</b>	Aspects Characterising Competent Governance of Early Childhood Care and Education Systems	<b>33</b>
<b>Table 4</b>	Target Areas for Environments, Activities and Programme Structure	<b>49</b>
<b>Table 5</b>	Sample Descriptives	<b>56</b>
<b>Table 6</b>	Description of ECERS Rating Scale	<b>57</b>
<b>Table 7</b>	Average Mean and Standard Deviations from ECERS Observations	<b>57</b>
<b>Table 8</b>	Average Mean and Standard Deviations from ITERS Observations	<b>59</b>
<b>Table 9</b>	Thematic Analysis: Managers Overall Thoughts on South Dublin NEYAI	<b>65</b>
<b>Table 10</b>	Thematic Analysis: Beneficial Elements of South Dublin NEYAI	<b>66</b>
<b>Table 11</b>	Thematic Analysis: Challenging Elements of the South Dublin NEYAI	<b>67</b>
<b>Table 12</b>	Thematic Analysis: Observed Changes in Staff	<b>68</b>
<b>Table 13</b>	Thematic Analysis: Sustainability of the South Dublin NEYAI	<b>69</b>
<b>Table 14</b>	Thematic Analysis: Staff' Fondest Memory of South Dublin NEYAI	<b>71</b>
<b>Table 15</b>	Thematic Analysis: Impact of the Programme on the Staff within the Workplace	<b>72</b>
<b>Table 16</b>	Thematic Analysis: Impact of the Programme on the Staff outside the Workplace	<b>73</b>
<b>Table 17</b>	Thematic Analysis: Additional Training Perceived by Staff as Necessary	<b>74</b>
<b>Table 18</b>	Thematic Analysis: How to Embed Learning Throughout Whole Service	<b>75</b>
<b>Table 19</b>	Intervention Reach	<b>76</b>
<b>Table 20</b>	Board Descriptives	<b>79</b>

## List of Figures

	Title	Page
<b>Figure 1</b>	Graphical Illustration of the South Dublin NEYAI Consortium	<b>25</b>
<b>Figure 2</b>	Timeline for Data Collection	<b>36</b>
<b>Figure 3</b>	Overview of Methodological Approach	<b>37</b>
<b>Figure 4</b>	Infographic: Demographic Statistics for Preschool Locations	<b>38</b>
<b>Figure 5</b>	Geographical Location of 8 Preschools	<b>38</b>
<b>Figure 6</b>	Six Components of the South Dublin NEYAI Intervention	<b>43</b>
<b>Figure 7</b>	Graphical depiction of the South Dublin NEYAI Intervention	<b>44</b>
<b>Figure 8</b>	Key Traits of the Quality Mentor	<b>47</b>
<b>Figure 9</b>	Deliverables of the Mentoring Component	<b>51</b>
<b>Figure 10</b>	ECERS Scores across Time-points	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 11</b>	ECERS Change Scores across Time-points	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 12</b>	ITERS Scores across Time-points	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 13</b>	ITERS Change Scores across Time-points	<b>60</b>
<b>Figure 14</b>	Effect of Programme on Staff Practice	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 15</b>	Initial thoughts upon hearing of Programme	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 16</b>	Staff Levels of Satisfaction for Training and Activities Received	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 17</b>	Staff Perceived Impact of Working alongside a Mentor	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 18</b>	The Impact of Professional Practice Engagement on Current Practice Trends	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 19</b>	Key Ingredients for Long-term Impact Following the Implementation of a Quality Improvement Intervention in Preschools	<b>89</b>

## Acronyms

<b>B.Ed</b>	Bachelor of Education
<b>CCS</b>	Community Childcare Subvention
<b>CE</b>	Community Employment
<b>CETS</b>	Childcare Education Training Support
<b>CDI</b>	Childhood Development Initiative
<b>CECDE</b>	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
<b>COREQ</b>	Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
<b>CPD</b>	Continued Professional Development
<b>CPLN</b>	Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan, Newcastle Area Partnership
<b>DCYA</b>	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>DWCLS</b>	Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd.
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECERS</b>	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales
<b>ECI</b>	Early Childhood Ireland
<b>EPPE</b>	Effective Provision of Preschool Education
<b>EPPNI</b>	Effective Provision of Preschool Education Northern Ireland
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>FETAC</b>	Further Education and Training Awards Council
<b>IPPA</b>	Irish Preschool Play Association
<b>ITERS</b>	Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scales
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NCNA</b>	National Children's Nursery Association
<b>NEYAI</b>	National Early Years Access Initiative
<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>NVCO</b>	National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<b>SDCCC</b>	South Dublin County Childcare Committee
<b>SDCP</b>	South Dublin County Partnership
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>VEC</b>	Vocational Education Committee
<b>YCVN</b>	Young Children's Voices Network

## Glossary

<b>Aistear</b>	Aistear is the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for Ireland. Aistear is for all children from birth to six years
<b>Community Employment Scheme</b>	CE schemes are designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities
<b>Corporate Governance</b>	Corporate governance refers to the system of structures, rights, duties, and obligations by which corporations are directed and controlled
<b>Early Years Educator</b>	The title of the professional who works within a preschool setting. Other terms are also used to describe this role e.g. early years professional, practitioner, preschool teacher, childcare worker and childcare professional. No consensus exists on the terminology of this role
<b>Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme</b>	Also referred to as the free preschool year. This scheme started in 2010. All children aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months on 1 <sup>st</sup> September are entitled to the free preschool care for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, over 38 weeks. This is a free benefit available to all children
<b>Early Childhood Ireland</b>	The largest and most representative early childhood membership organisation in Ireland. A registered charity, they provide a broad range of training, mentoring, information and advocacy supports to better shape the systems, policies and practices that impact on the lives of young children. They are committed to improving outcomes for children through their work with members, early childhood educators, policy makers, parents and children.
<b>Intervention</b>	A programme or series of programmes aimed at bringing about change in a particular area
<b>Mentor</b>	A mentor is a respected and competent person who provides support, counsel, reinforcement, coaching, and a constructive example to assist someone else as they develop in their work
<b>National Early Years Access Initiative</b>	NEYAI was been a four-year initiative (2010-2014) which was set up to find ways of improving services for children aged 0-6 years by evaluating the innovative work of its 11 NEYAI projects in over 130 early childhood care and education settings
<b>Pobal</b>	Pobal established in 1992 is a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status that manages various funding programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU
<b>Preschool</b>	The physical environment which provides early childhood care and education. Other terms are used to describe this place e.g. service, childcare centre and early year's settings. The naming of this place varies from setting to setting
<b>Preschoolers</b>	Refers to children approximately 3 years to 5 years of age
<b>Síolta</b>	Síolta is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland
<b>South Dublin County Childcare Committee</b>	Strategically co-ordinates the sustainable development of an accessible and holistic, quality childcare infrastructure in South County Dublin
<b>South Dublin County Partnership</b>	Local development company operating in South Dublin
<b>Stakeholder</b>	An individual or group with an interest in the success of an organisation in delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of the organisation's services
<b>Toddlers</b>	Refers to children approximately 2 years to 3 years of age
<b>Wobblers</b>	Refers to children approximately 12 months to 2 years of age



# Executive Summary

## Background

In May 2012, Early Childhood Ireland, the largest and most representative early year's membership organisation in Ireland, was commissioned by the South Dublin NEYAI consortium to undertake an evaluation of the South Dublin NEYAI. Early Childhood Ireland represents 3,330 childcare facilities across Ireland. This report presents the findings of the research that was undertaken between May 2012 and April 2014.

The South Dublin NEYAI entitled 'Addressing the Gaps between Training and Practice' is one of 11 projects supported by Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills (Early Years Policy Unit), and Pobal who manage the initiative. The NEYAI aimed to improve quality and practice within early year's settings for children (0-6 years) and their families living in disadvantaged areas. The South Dublin NEYAI aimed to explore a sustainable model that addressed the gaps between training and practice. At the core of the programme is the expectation that local, statutory, voluntary and community organisations will work together at various levels to support the development, implementation and evaluation of the programme.

The establishment of Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd. in January 2010 was the stimulus for the South Dublin NEYAI. It identified the need to improve quality standards within community preschools and recognised the gaps and challenges that presented in transferring childcare knowledge and training into practice. Exploratory research undertaken prior to the evaluation highlighted significant shortfalls in practice across preschools despite 64% of staff within the targeted preschools having a minimum FETAC Level 5 qualification. Given the strong evidence that exists to support the relationship between staff training, high

quality preschool provision and positive child outcomes the concept of the South Dublin NEYAI was developed.

The overall South Dublin NEYAI project implementation plan targeted six key components, all of which related to improving the quality of practice in the participating preschools. It is important to note that the mentoring component of the intervention was the cornerstone of the South Dublin NEYAI and it was during the implementation of the mentoring component that most of the resources were allocated. All of these components received different weighting in terms of the allocation of resources. Additionally, not all of these components were evaluated to the same level. The six components of the South Dublin NEYAI were:

1. **Project Networks** were groups of key stakeholders which met on a regular basis throughout the project duration. These groups (a consortium, a steering group, a peer group and an expert group) supported the development of a locally based learning and co-operative infrastructure with a shared vision for high quality early childhood care and education
2. **Mentoring** was the foundation of the South Dublin NEYAI. The mentor provided onsite support for early years educators using a variety of techniques including observation, role-modelling, videoing of practice and feedback, group and one-to-one training
3. **Parent and Child Consultation** utilised various approaches which supported preschools in developing their engagement with families
4. **Professional Development** supported preschools in devising a continuing professional development policy statement and professional development portfolio
5. **Work Placement** proposed a model of workplace learning for a structured work placement model and

provided a variety of training to key staff within the project

**6. Corporate Governance** set out to review the boards of management and highlight the principles of corporate governance, raising awareness of board functionality

Lead by the South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, a project team including a Project Co-ordinator, a Quality Mentor and a Development Officer were tasked with driving and supporting the development and implementation of the six intervention components. These three staff were managed by South Dublin County Partnership, the lead agency involved in the programme.

One unique element of the South Dublin NEYAI was the level of interagency working and collaboration that has underpinned the development and implementation of the programme. This is evident in the Project Network

component which incorporates the various working groups which manage and support the project. A collaborative relationship exists between numerous agencies who have all contributed at different stages of the project.

### Methodology

Eight services including 5 boards of management, 7 preschool managers, 88 early year's' educators and 347 children (mean age [sd] 4.2 ± 0.4) and their families agreed to participate in the programme. The evaluation was conducted over 2 years (May 2012 - April 2014) and data was collected at three time-points during this time making this research project quasi-experimental in design. These time points are referred to as baseline, mid-test and follow-up throughout the report. At mid-test, one preschool withdrew from the process for reasons outside of the project. The seven remaining preschools completed the full programme and contributed to the evaluation.





The evaluation approach focused on the following broad areas of investigation:

1. Conducting a profile analysis of the preschools involved in the programme
2. Conducting an investigation of the impact of the South Dublin NEYAI on managers, early year's educators and on the quality of preschool provision in the 8 preschools
3. Conducting a process evaluation investigating the utilisation, fidelity and organisation of the interventions
4. Investigating corporate governance structures within the boards of management

The table below summarises the key research tasks related to the areas of investigation that were undertaken and the time at which they occurred.

## The South Dublin NEYAI Intervention

As described above there were six components incorporated into the overall South Dublin NEYAI. The components of the programme were rolled out over three phases namely, the pre-development phase; a period of time where the project staff built relationships with the project participants and embedded a delivery plan, the implementation phase; the main action phase where project staff rolled out activities and inputs to those involved in specific intervention components and lastly, the sustainability phase; this phase of the project aimed to recap the learning from the pre-development and implementation phase and put in place plans to continue the work post-project.

Each of the intervention components were theoretically underpinned by a number of frameworks, principles and programmes including Aistear, the Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009), Síolta, the

**Table 1** Evaluation Milestones and Timeline

Evaluation Milestones	Timeline
Profiling of the characteristics of the preschools and early years educators (3 waves of data collection)	May 2012 - April 2014
Quality assessments within the preschools (3 waves of data collection)	May 2012 - April 2014
Process evaluation of the delivery of intervention components (on-going)	March 2013 - April 2014
Interviews with preschool managers (1 wave of data collection)	April 2013
Focus groups with boards of management (1 wave of data collection)	April – July 2013
Online survey for early years educators (1 wave of data collection)	March 2014
Focus groups with early years educators (1 wave of data collection)	April 2014
Focus group and interview with project team (1 wave of data collection)	April 2014



Irish National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006), the Early Childhood Environment Rating Handbook (Cryer et al., 2003), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Handbook (Cryer et al., 2004) and the Hanen Programme for speech and language development (Baxendale and Hesketh, 2003). As well as being underpinned by these theoretical frameworks, principles and resources, the baseline evaluation findings also supported the identification of areas of practice in need of development. Lastly, the development of the intervention was guided by an expert group.

## Key findings

### *Preschool Characteristics*

- In the 8 geographical areas where the preschools were located the Haase and Pratschke scores for relative deprivation ranged from -11.6 to -20.1, classifying the areas as disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. Furthermore, the number of lone parents ranged from 18.2% to 81.3%, the unemployment rate ranged from 21.9% to 68.3%, significantly higher than the national average of 11.8% (May 2014) while the percentage of those with a third level qualification ranged from 5.9% to 21.7%
- There were no significant changes in terms of the profile of the sample from baseline to mid-test, from mid-test to follow-up or from baseline to follow-up. However, some changes did occur; a decrease in staff numbers from 88 at baseline to 75 at mid-test and an increase in children from 347 at baseline to 411 at mid-test. There was also a drop in Community Employment staff from 34 at baseline to 25 at mid-test
- A Level 5 qualification was the dominant qualification obtained by staff working within the preschools, with 56.8%, 64.0% and 65.7% having achieved a Level 5 at baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively. These findings align with the National NEYAI dataset where the data was collected at approximately the same time as the baseline data collection for the local level evaluation. In terms of a Level 7/8 qualification, 6.8%, 9.3% and 5.7% had successfully achieved this level of qualification at baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively
- Approximately one-fifth of the staff did not hold a formal qualification in early childhood care and

education (21.6%, 18.7% and 22.9% for baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively)

- The number of children diagnosed with additional needs represented 2.0%, 2.0% and 3.0% of the whole sample at baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively. Anecdotal evidence provided by managers and staff from all of the preschools suggested that they suspected more children had additional needs but had not yet received their assessment of need and therefore were classified as undiagnosed
- All preschools self-reported providing a play-based curriculum and one preschool had received Síolta validation prior to the project commencing

### *The Impact of the South Dublin NEYAI on the Quality of Preschool Provision*

- Overall, the results revealed that the multi-component intervention provided statistically significant benefits in the infant, toddler and preschool rooms
- The intervention had no negative effect on any element of the preschool environment as measured by ECERS. There was a significant effect for a time across all of the 7 subscales with the largest effect size observed in the subscale interactions. This finding was also reflected within the staff survey and staff focus groups
- The intervention had no negative effect on any element of the infant and toddler environment as measured by ITERS. Similar to the ECERS scores, there was a significant effect for time across all of the 7 subscales, with the largest effect size also observed in the subscale interactions
- Caution must be observed when interpreting the results from the ITERS observations as only three preschools contributed to these scores. However, the scores largely mirror the scores from the ECERS observations, suggesting that trends in quality track from infants and toddler rooms into preschool rooms

### *Impact of South Dublin NEYAI on the Early Years Educators*

- The results from the online survey suggest that the early year's educators had a positive experience of the programme, with 89% of staff reporting that participating in the South Dublin NEYAI had a

positive impact on practice – this also mirrors the results from the ITERS and ECERS observations. Of interest was the finding around the staff level of nervousness before the programme commenced, with 67% of staff reporting they felt nervous upon hearing about the programme. This justifies the energies invested during the pre-development phase of the programme; specifically the building of relationships with preschools and staff and embedding the implementation and evaluation plans within all preschools. The main findings from the online survey are outlined in the box below.

- 89% of staff stated that participation in the programme had a positive impact on their practice
- 67% of staff reported that they were 'nervous' when they first heard about the programme
- 76% of staff rated the training and activities they participated in as 'very good' or 'excellent'

- 85% of staff reported that working with a mentor was beneficial to their development as an early years educator
- 67% of staff reported that engaging in professional development helped them keep up to date with current practice trends.

Focus groups were conducted with staff to further explore their experiences of the South Dublin NEYAI. The main findings from the staff focus groups were:

- All staff related their fondest memory of the programme to working with the mentor, this theme was particularly strong for the interactions training the staff received when they used the video within their rooms. This was a unique finding as staff reported feeling anxious and nervous about having their practice videoed but once they received feedback from the mentor they felt relieved, assured and confident



- In line with the results from the ECERS, ITERS and the staff survey, the results from the focus group affirms that the programme positively impacted the staff who participated in it. Staff reported that the impact the programme had on them was two-fold; firstly, the programme had a direct impact on them as professionals and secondly, as a result of participating in the programme there was an indirect impact on the children in their care
- All staff felt that they would benefit from more support and more training. The most frequently mentioned support by staff was the continuation of on-site mentoring within their preschools. **Staff felt very strongly that a mentor within their preschool to reinforce learning, maintain focus, set goals, challenge practice and provide support is necessary to maintain a high quality preschool environment**
- Three main modes of information feedback were identified; informally within room, on a one-to-one basis and as a whole group. The findings suggest **that the most effective ways to translate the learning were on a one-to-one basis or as a whole group (depending on what suited the preschool)**, however this involved non-contact time. Managers highlighted that this is often difficult to organise due to ratio requirements. Staff reported that they felt they had an opportunity to really understand the topic and ask questions if feedback was given outside of the room.

#### *Impact of South Dublin NEYAI on the Preschool Manager*

- All managers felt that at the time of interview, the programme was going well within their preschools, expressing that the additional support of a mentor was a valuable asset to their preschool environment. Managers felt that the presence of a mentor offered reassurance and confidence among staff
- The mentor was one element of the overall programme that all managers felt was the most beneficial. This can be explained due to the large weighting the mentoring component received in the overall programme. Managers (n=5) also commented on how non-contact time for staff had been beneficial for the preschool. This essential time was facilitated by the preschool manager and required a lot of organisation on behalf of the manager, but once plans were in place, this time offered an excellent opportunity for the staff to engage meaningfully with the mentor

- The main challenge that the managers faced related to the concept of managing change within the preschool. Change occurred in all preschools quite early on and in the beginning was quite intense. This change involved changes to the physical environment, changes to the curriculum as well as the physical presence of a mentor within the preschool. All managers noted that the change was welcome, however it was important that time was allocated accordingly to allow the mentor's messages sink in
- All of the observed changes in staff as witnessed by the manager were positive and included increased motivation, increased empowerment, more reflective practitioners, an increase in confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem – their belief in themselves to do their job better which resulted in a happier workforce
- The managers interviews took place at mid-test and at this time they (n=6) felt that they weren't yet ready to think about sustainability, for the programme to end and for the preschools to 'go it alone'. This reiterates the point that time is essential to allow those participating in the programme find their place and enter into a space which facilitates change

#### *Process evaluation investigating the Utilisation, Fidelity and Organisation on the intervention*

The RE-AIM framework (Glasgow et al. 1999) guided the reporting of the process evaluation findings in relation to four of the six components namely; learning networks, quality mentoring, professional development and parent and child consultation. RE-AIM is an acronym that focuses attention on five key domains related to successful impact, specifically: Reach; Effectiveness; Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance.

- In terms of the overall reach of the programme, all sessions were excellently attended by those who they targeted with >82% attendance recorded at all sessions
- The quality mentoring component was heavily weighted in terms of dosage with an average of 11.8 sessions per month being implemented, accounting for Summer, Christmas and Easter breaks
- Process evaluation logs in relation to the project networks component suggested that managers felt the peer group meetings maintained their focus on the delivery of the programme and were also

useful in terms of the discussion of ongoing issues, concerns or for information sharing. This forum also proved effective in building relationships between preschools, resulting in increased communication between some managers whose preschools are located in close proximity to each other

- During the initial phases of the project, the adoption of the mentoring programme varied from preschool to preschool, with some preschools embracing the presence of a quality mentor while some took a bit longer to become accustomed to the new changes. Within the process evaluation log, the mentor reported that time was a critical factor during the implementation of the programme, as was the mentor's sensitivity to the staff, ensuring that she always worked alongside the preschool staff at a level that they were comfortable with
- The professional development component of the intervention did not reach all preschools participating in the programme as some

preschools felt that they were already engaging in work related to professional development internally. The process evaluation reports suggested that the meetings generated an equal amount of positive feelings and mixed feelings. Managers reported a lack of money to fund training for their staff as problematic. Additionally, staff who engaged with the professional development component felt that an increased workload and pressure as a result of compiling a professional development portfolio presented an issue for them

- The parent and child consultation component of the intervention was piloted within 2 preschools, therefore the reach was very limited, questioning its overall impact on programme effectiveness. However, from the process evaluation logs completed by the project staff implementing the activities, it was reported that the parent and child consultation was very well received by the managers, staff and children and families who participated in it. Great





flexibility was required on the part of the delivery staff during the implementation of activities given that the majority of the work was alongside the child and a child led approach was always adopted. It was reported that the children very much enjoyed participating in this element of the programme, in particular the use of the camera when adopting the Mosaic Approach.

### *Corporate Governance*

The investigation into the structures of corporate governance was guided by the 5 Principles of the Irish Governance Code; leading the organisation, exercising control over the organisation, being transparent and accountable, working effectively and behaving with integrity (Certain and Kahn, 2002). The chair of each board also completed a board of management descriptive questionnaire which provided a profile of each board of management.

### *Board Characteristics*

- There was little variation among the numbers of board members and the frequency of when they convened
- The skill set on the boards was also typical of voluntary boards. Reassuringly, every board had an early year's expert ensuring that quality within the preschool remained on the board's agenda
- All boards had a finance sub-committee while 1 board had a staff support and fundraising sub-committee
- Two of the boards reported having a board manual, while the remaining two reported being in the process of finalising their board manual.

### *Leading the organisation*

- All boards had an agreed vision, purpose and values ensuring that they remained relevant to their work. Boards who had their own manual outlined this information within their manual, whereas other boards outlined this information on their website.

### *Exercising control over the organisation*

- All boards had identified and complied with the relevant legal and regulatory requirements, as it related to them and the preschool which they governed. In terms of financial and management control, most boards ensured that there were appropriate internal financial and management controls.

### *Being transparent and accountable*

- Not all boards had an agreed spokesperson, however those who didn't were in the process of appointing one
- A number of boards did not make publically available their annual report, nor did all of the boards involve their beneficiaries (e.g. parents) in decision making
- All boards had successfully identified stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in the work of the preschool. It was clear that there were strategic plans in place to build and maintain links with stakeholders who will embed, promote and support the preschool services within their communities
- Maintaining regular and effective communication with stakeholders was a challenge faced by all boards, mainly due to other work commitments and time constraints

### *Working effectively*

- Individual board members, committees, staff and volunteers understood their role, legal duties, and delegated responsibility for decision-making
- In a number of boards a clear division of responsibilities between the chairperson and the preschool manager were not clear
- Due to time constraints, boards struggled to conduct yearly board reviews to ensure that there was a suitable board recruitment and retirement process in place.

### *Behaving with integrity*

- All boards functioned in an honest, fair and independent manner
- It was evident that each chairperson led the board in developing an ethical culture in line with the values of the preschools
- Each board understood the importance of declaring and managing conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalties, however not all boards had an operational code of conduct or a policy outlining how to manage conflicts of loyalty and conflicts of interest
- Lastly, it was strongly observed that all boards were interested in protecting and promoting the reputation of their preschools.

## Key Recommendations

The table below outlines the key recommendations stemming from the evaluation of the South Dublin NEYAI

**Table 2** Recommendations

Theme	Key Recommendations
<b>Recommendation:</b>  Mentoring as a vehicle for improving practice	<p>This project has demonstrated that mentoring works, that it is an intensive intervention, but that it is empowering, that it makes a difference to the quality of practice and provision and augurs well as a mechanism to bring about sustainable change. Lessons learned around strategies for engaging services, meeting services where they are at, making time available for each of the processes, building capacity and drawing on different methodologies all have relevance for the development of the new National Quality Support Service. The knowledge and experience of the mentor is important; a minimum requirement of a Level 8 primary degree in Early Years Care and Education complemented by at least 4 years' experience working in the sector was defined as essential criteria during the recruitment process for the mentor.</p>
<b>Recommendation:</b>  Professional Development as a means to creating reflective educators	<p>The continuing professional development of early year's educators is the key to creating a culture of reflective practice and sustaining change. An opportunity now exists to develop a national framework for professional development – a planned system of professional development that is effective and efficient, that is responsive and consistent, that ensures and monitors the quality of training delivered and which draws on a range of methodologies to meet the needs of diverse adult learners. This study strongly endorses calls that already exist in the sector for CPD days for early year's educators on a service wide basis. Findings from this study, that have relevance for policy signal the value of learning communities where professionals (including educators) can engage, learn and support.</p>
<b>Recommendation:</b>  Multi-disciplinary approach to meet the needs of children, families and educators	<p>This project has evidenced the benefits of collaboration and interagency working to address the complex needs of early year's educators and services in community based settings.</p> <p>A strength of the project has been the capacity to harness and target scarce resources to identified actions at specific points in time. This learning highlights the opportunity that exists with the initiation of the National Quality Support Service to build a competent system, one that meets the myriad needs of educators, children and services and which can only happen effectively when a multi-disciplinary lens and multi-disciplinary supports are readily available.</p>
<b>Recommendation:</b> Monitoring and Evaluation	<p>To further explore the long-term effect of the programme, it is recommended that the preschools and participants are followed up to investigate any long-term benefits of the programme.</p> <p>Adopt a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) design comparing intervention preschools to a group of matched control preschools to measure the isolated impact of the South Dublin NEYAI.</p>

## Conclusion

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that the South Dublin NEYAI: Addressing Gaps in Training and Practice, a multi-component intervention, is effective

in improving the provision of early years care and education in existing preschools in South Dublin. The programme which has been implemented is effective and transferable, but needs significant resources and ample time for changes to embed.







# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 The National Early Years Access Initiative and Evaluation

The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) aims to improve the quality of and outcome for services in the early year's sector. It is a three year initiative (2011-2014) which was officially launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in June 2011. The national programme is a collaboration between Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills (Early Years Policy Unit), and Pobal who manage the initiative. There are 11 demonstration projects across Ireland that make up the NEYAI, each project has a different focus but essentially are all striving for the same outcome; to improve the quality and co-ordination of local services to young children and families. Each demonstration project is made up of a consortium comprising of a lead organisation and at least two other relevant stakeholders.

At a national level, the initiative is concerned with establishing an evidence base contributing to improvements in practice and influencing policy changes with regard to improved learning, education and well-being outcomes for children and their families. At a local level, the initiative is concerned with building the delivery capacity of local projects, strengthening the quality and impact of each of the 11 demonstration projects while simultaneously contributing to the learning of the initiative as a whole.

## 1.2 The South Dublin NEYAI Project

South Dublin NEYAI asserts that better outcomes for children, their families and the community, can as a whole can be secured through the delivery of high quality early years services. The key to delivering on this vision is through the up-skilling of the workforce. The South Dublin NEYAI project aimed to improve outcomes for children and communities through the development of an innovative and sustainable model that addressed the gaps between training and practice.

This project initially included eight community based preschools, four of which were located in the Tallaght area and four were located in the Clondalkin area. 88 staff and 440 children and their families participated in the project. The project involved the establishment and maintenance of formal and informal partnerships and collaborations across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

The objectives described in the project application and action plan were to:

- Support the development of locally based, sustainable, learning and co-operative infrastructures with a shared focus on quality early years practice
- Develop and test a work placement model for new entrants to the early years workforce
- Build on quality standards of practice and governance for participating preschools
- Deliver an effective, efficiently run project operating to best practice guidelines

This ambitious project conceptualised change and quality from a whole service perspective. Delivering on these project aims and objectives was through a range of interrelated actions that focused on supporting the capacity and improving the quality of practice in the 8 preschools involved in the project. **The cornerstone of the project work was to establish and implement an intensive mentoring support role within each of the preschool services, which set out to develop the professional skills and competencies of the workforce and in turn improve the quality of provision and practice in the settings.**

Other actions developed by and implemented through the project supported a range of services in developing a tool kit for continuing professional development (CPD), and others engaged in workplace mentor training through a Specialist Advanced Diploma in Teaching, Training and Assessing Learning. Training needs emerged for managers and early year's

educators in the services through the process of mentoring, and appropriate training supports were leveraged through the consortium over the life of the project. Recognising the interconnected nature of all stakeholders in community settings, services were supported to engage more deeply with parents through the piloting of evidence based programmes 'Lets Listen' Resource and 'Mosaic Approach' in two of the preschool services. A peer support network for the managers of the participating preschool services provided a structured, facilitated space for learning, dialogue and reviewing practice. Finally, a review of the board structures across the early years services involved in the project was undertaken using the Governance Code framework. This is further explained in Chapter 4.

### 1.3 Overall Vision for the Project

The overall vision of the project identified that better outcomes for children, their families and the community as a whole could be secured through the delivery of high quality preschool provision. The key to achieving the vision was through professionally developing and supporting the workforce.

The vision, with all its' elements, is underpinned by national and international research. Nationally, the Workforce Development Plan endorses the belief that 'the skills and qualifications of adults working with young children is a critical factor in determining the quality of young children's early experiences (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). Internationally, there is broad consensus that high quality early childhood care and education improves child outcomes, and equally that low or mediocre quality may harm children and that the competences and qualifications of the workforce are strong predictors of quality in settings (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, Sylva et al., 2004). Research suggests that the benefits of high quality provision during the early years are particularly salient for children who live in disadvantaged families (Hayes, 2007, Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

In particular, the project envisioned that the needs of children and families from areas of disadvantage would be addressed through preschool services that were accessible, sustainable, professional and would be connected to the broader community through sturdy interagency links.

Strong collaborations are a hallmark of this project, which span statutory and voluntary agencies, services, communities and consortia in the South Dublin area. The South Dublin NEYAI consortium developed in two ways. Initially, there was an organic development of stakeholders who expressed interest in the development of Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Company Ltd. This was a newly formed company in 2010, which was to take a role in managing 4 separate sites in 2011. This new model for running community child care services gathered interest amongst various stakeholders. The need for a quality role within this newly formed company was identified and coincided with the call for NEYAI expressions of interest. It was agreed through the South Dublin County Children's Services Committee to strengthen the application by inviting participation from a minimum of 4 services in Tallaght. This marked the first county wide funding application driven through the South Dublin Children's Services Committee.

The second stage of consortium development was planned and involved various engagement strategies. As some areas in Tallaght had benefitted from an intense support under Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), it was agreed to approach those services and areas outside of this. Through SDCCC a number of services were invited to a presentation about the initiative. Five services from Tallaght elected to participate at the 'Expression of Interest Stage'. These were:

- Bohernabreena Community Enterprise
- Tallaght Child Care Centre
- St. Mary's Community Childcare Services
- Young Explorers Preschool
- Fettercairn Little Ones<sup>1</sup>

The consortium grew and was supported by a number of additional stakeholders including South Dublin County Council<sup>2</sup>. Services were kept informed about the process and a second presentation held to complete a final application including a signed Memorandum of Understanding by each consortium member.

The gap between project approval and the recruitment of the project team was managed and mediated by meetings, service visits and regular phone calls to aid communication and ensure continued engagement.

<sup>1</sup> Fettercairn Little Ones withdrew at the time funding was granted due to a change in Management.

<sup>2</sup> The Clondalkin Rapid Co-ordinator provided considerable support at application stage in terms of data and demographics. He continued to support the initiative through his presence on the board of Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd.

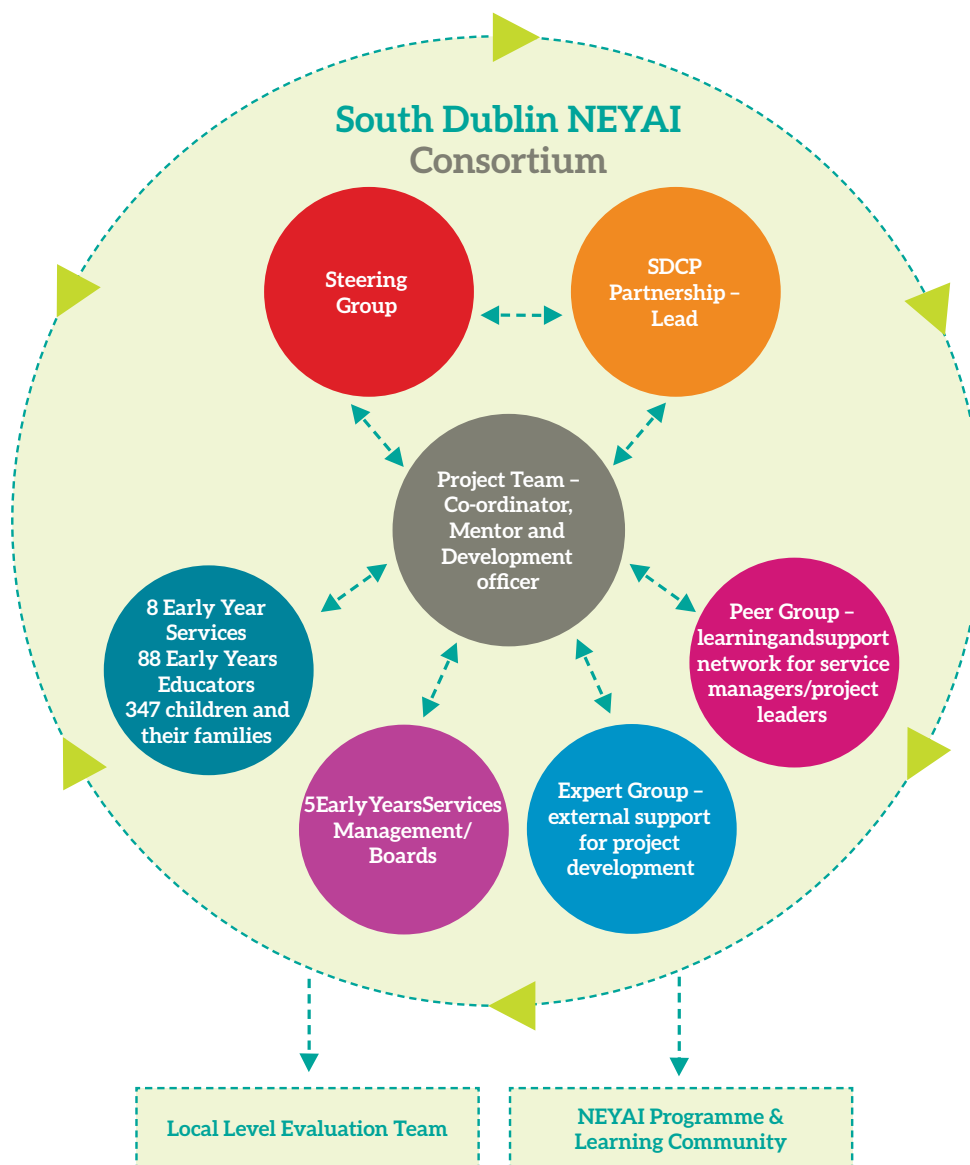
#### 1.4 Rationale for the Project

The establishment of DWCCLS in January 2010 was the stimulus for the South Dublin NEYAI project. It identified the need to improve quality standards within the community preschools and recognised the gaps and challenges that presented in transferring childcare knowledge and training into practice. Research undertaken locally highlighted significant shortfalls in practice across preschools despite 64% of staff within the targeted settings having a minimum FETAC Level 5 qualification, as reported in the consortium's NEYAI funding application to Pobal.

Challenges also existed in relation to the quality of work placement experiences for staff in training and for

other students. These findings were also reflected in learning emerging from the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Project (Hayes et al., 2013).

The need for good governance structures and quality provision had been acknowledged locally through a number of sources including South Dublin County Childcare Committee, feedback from the local preschool officer as well as local and national networks and forums. In light of increasing legislative requirements on voluntary boards of management, challenges existed for the strategic development and operation of the boards to ensure sustainability of quality, finance and governance within the community based preschool settings.



**Figure 1** Graphical illustration of the South Dublin NEYAI consortium

## 1.5 Policy Context

The policy context for the early childhood care and education sector has evolved significantly over the past two decades. It has developed into a formal and regulated sector; with clear policy goals, with national frameworks that guide practice (Aistear) and quality (Siolta), and with an embedded local infrastructure (City/County Childcare Committees). The continuation of government funding, primarily through CCS, CETS and ECCE schemes supports children and families and aids sustainability of community (and other) services. However, these same funding schemes require high levels of accountability and places quality and governance demands on staff, managers and boards of management. The development of the policy context drives expectations of practice but also recognises that efficient management and effective leadership (Walsh, 2005) play a significant role in the achievement of quality. At a broader policy level, there is a growing recognition of children's rights (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC]), evidenced in the Children's Referendum in 2012 which carries implications for services in how they position, understand and engage with children.

## 1.6 South Dublin NEYAI Consortium

The South Dublin NEYAI consortium operates under a formalised memorandum of understanding between partner organisations. South Dublin County Partnership (SDCP) [formerly Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan, Newcastle Area Partnership (CPLN)] and Dodder Valley Partnership] acts as the lead agency in the consortium supporting the co-ordination and financial management of the project on behalf of the consortium. Of note, is the level of organisational change for many of the bodies represented on the consortium over the duration of the South Dublin NEYAI. Figure 1 illustrates the range of partners involved in the South Dublin NEYAI.

The consortium involves a range of relevant stakeholders and early years services providers who operate in South County Dublin, including:

- South Dublin County Childcare Committee (SDCCC)
- County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (formerly County Dublin Vocational Educational Committee [VEC])
- Early Childhood Ireland (formerly Irish Preschool Play Association [IPPA] and National Children's Nursery Association [NCNA])

- South Dublin County Partnership (formerly CPLN Area Partnership and Dodder Valley Partnership)
- Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services, which includes:
  - Lime Tree Community Childcare Services
  - Kozy Kids Preschool and After School Childcare
  - St. Ronan's Community Play Group
  - Beechtree Community Childcare
  - Tallaght Child Care Centre
  - St. Mary's Community Childcare Services
  - Young Explorers Preschool
  - Bohernabreena Community Childcare<sup>3</sup>
  - Partas<sup>4</sup>

## 1.7 Organisation of the Report

The report has a number of aims. First, to discover whether the interventions had an impact on the quality of care and education being delivered in the participating services. Second, to examine the implementation process through studying preschool staff and project staff experiences of the programme. The third aim of the report is to provide a detailed review of the implementation practices in the South Dublin NEYAI regarding reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the interventions. Finally the fourth aim, to gain an understanding of corporate governance, local level interagency co-operation and sustainability of the South Dublin NEYAI.

The report is organised as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature relating to the main aims and objectives of the initiative
- Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology
- Chapter 4 describes the intervention components and gives a detailed account of the mentoring intervention arm
- Chapter 5 details the qualitative, quantitative and process evaluation findings as well as including a commentary on corporate governance, interagency collaboration, sustainability and work placement
- Chapter 6 summaries the key findings and outlines key recommendations for policy and practice
- Chapter 7 concludes the report
- Chapter 8 details the bibliography

<sup>3</sup> This service withdrew from the programme in June 2013. The data analysis controls for this.

<sup>4</sup> This agency withdrew from the project in 2012.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This review will incorporate both national and international literature. A range of early childhood care and education evaluation studies, focusing on quality improvement and delivery, namely mentoring and professional development in the context of the early years will be discussed.

The chapter will draw extensively on Irish research projects including, data emerging from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives, the Community Development Initiatives and the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study. Landmark studies and reports including the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project in the UK and CoRe Study on Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care will be drawn upon throughout the chapter. Policy developments including curriculum development (Aistear), quality assurance (Síolta), funding schemes (ECCE, CETS, and CCS), national plans (Literacy and Numeracy), and their implications for quality provision will underpin this literature review. This approach to the literature review will ensure that the research is located within the current legislative, economic, social and cultural context in Ireland.

Given the wide scope of this project, the literature will review the following areas:

- The emergence of early childhood care and education in Ireland
- Quality in early childhood care and education
- Mentoring
- Corporate governance in the early year's sector
- Interagency working within the early year's sector

### 2.2 The Emergence of Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland

Early childhood care and education has become the norm in many European and North American countries, where most children of 3 years and upwards attend regulated early education services. These services represent much more than a drop-off location for working parents and play an important role in child development by affording children an opportunity to engage in a range of educational and social activities (Currie, 2001). The increasing number of children in formal early childhood care and education settings is largely attributed, on the one hand, to the convergence of research showing the positive influence of early education on school readiness and, on the other, to the rise in maternal employment (Gregg et al., 2005). Many of the changes in childcare provision and women's work patterns were predicted by remarkable changes in the Irish labour force during the last twenty years. The period 1994 to 2007 was a period of exceptional and sustained growth in the Irish economy. The number employed almost doubled, from just under 1.2 million in 1993 to 2.2 million in 2007 (Central Statistics Office, 2009). One of the most distinctive features of this growth was the participation of females in the workforce. In 1992, the employment rate of women in Ireland was just over 37%. By 2004, the employment rate of women was 56%, similar to the EU average. Growing Up in Ireland data from 2008 states that the employment rate for women in Ireland was 60% (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2008). Since then, the employment rate for women has fallen due to the recession, although not as much for women as men, signifying that the gender gap in employment has also narrowed (Central Statistics Office, 2013).

---

The quality of childcare has been shown to be a key factor in child development outcomes, and previous research has demonstrated a clear link between carer qualifications and quality of care and education.

---



Historically, in the absence of a specific government department for early years education and without a national Irish preschool policy, preschool settings developed in a fragmented way across a wide policy context including, employment, education, family and child policy. Preschool services in Ireland compete across a community, private, commercial and state sector within a mixed market and mixed pedagogical system. During the decade 2000-2010, the Irish State and the European Union (EU) through the European Social Fund ((ESF) initiated an expansion programme, administered by the intermediary Pobal, to support the development of crèches. Over the last two decades various government departments and organisations have been involved in inspection, training and curriculum development and have worked to attain international targets for the sector.

Government support for childcare in Ireland has been guided by a number of competing objectives; including; a growing recognition that the first years of life track to later learning and social development, female employment, social inclusion and high birth rates. The Irish government attempted to steer a course that was neutral in terms of providing support through the Universal Child Benefit scheme for care in the home (by parents) and care outside the home, distinguishing Ireland from many European counterparts (OECD, 2006a).

Unlike other European countries, Ireland does not have a long tradition of young children attending preschool services (Department of Education and Skills, 2010a). However, the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (also referred to as the free preschool year) in 2010 has set about changing that. This year has provided a free year of part-time preschool education for children aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months on 1<sup>st</sup> of September of the year they will attend (Oireachtas Library & Research Service, 2012). The State of the Nation Report suggested that 95% of families availed of the free preschool year in 2012 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). The 2014 budget saw small investments within the sector with €4.5 million in total being ring-fenced, some of which was included in the €1.1 million for the preschool inspectorate; €2.5 million for a national mentoring programme and €1.5 million for training support to up-skill those already working in the sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2013). These additional funds are being used to appoint additional staff to the preschool inspectorate, establish a mentoring service

for preschool services, and provide a training support fund to assist staff already working in the sector to meet the new qualification requirements by 2015.

**Despite the increasing uptake of childcare, quality of provision within the childcare environment is varied, due to the costs associated with maintaining quality. High quality is characterised by a qualified, well-paid and stable work-force, low adult-child ratios, efficient management and good governance structures (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011). The OECD contends that while quality may cost more due to higher staff pay and lower ratios, the message is clear ‘quality costs but is worth the investment’ (OECD, 2012). This is discussed further in Section 2.3.**

## 2.3 Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

An earlier conceptualisation of preschool services very much viewed them as a service for working parents. This view focused on the needs of the service economy rather than on the development of the young child.

Currently influenced by a growing body of literature, this section underlines the importance of ensuring a quality childcare experience for children and their families.

Recent debates on Irish childcare policy have recognised the importance of the quality of care, qualifications and professionalisation of the childcare sector, as highlighted, for example by the publication of a Workforce Development Plan for the sector (Department of Education and Skills, 2010b). These milestones are very much welcomed and are in line with international policies and the quality of service provision (Oberhuemer, 2005, OECD, 2006a).

The quality of childcare has been shown to be a key factor in child development outcomes, and previous research has demonstrated a clear link between carer qualifications and quality of care and education.

**Developing the workforce in preschool services has long been identified as central to the delivery of quality experiences and environments for young children.** Many studies have demonstrated the impact of quality early years provision on educational outcomes. The Perry Preschool Programme, an early intervention program for disadvantaged African-American children was one of the first preschool education programmes to be evaluated. This programme generated short-term IQ gains that diminished within 2 years. However, this was

followed by long-term gains in attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates and earnings, and reductions in transfer payments and pregnancies (Gramlich, 1986). Furthermore, the programme resulted in higher levels of education, employment, and earnings, and lower rates of crime, teenage pregnancy and social welfare dependency, resulting in an estimated social rate of return of between 7-10% per annum (Heckman and LaFontaine, 2010).

The EPPE study in Britain, which involved ~3000 children found that high quality preschool provision accounted for significant improvements in Math and English scores in comparison to children who had attended no form of preschool. The data generated by this large scale research study suggests that the benefits deriving from 18 months of preschool is similar to that gained during 6 years of primary school (Melhuish, 2011). These findings were later replicated in the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPNI) study in Northern Ireland (Melhuish et al., 2013). This longitudinal study found that preschool experience was related to age 11 performance in English and Maths. Melhuish and colleagues reported that high-quality preschools show consistent effects that are reflected not only in improved attainment in Key Stage 2 English and Maths scores, but also in improved progress in Maths over primary school. In this study, children who attended high-quality preschools were 2.4 times more likely in English, and 3.4 times more likely in Mathematics, to attain Level 5 than children without preschool experience.

Furthermore, it has been postulated that providing any childcare or preschool education is not enough. Studies from the USA (Vandell et al., 2010), England (Melhuish et al., 2008), Northern Ireland (Melhuish et al., 2013) and Denmark (Bauchmuller et al., 2011) indicate that the quality of preschool is critical for longer-term beneficial effects. The OECD examined the educational attainment data for 65 countries. It found that literacy at age 15 was strongly associated with preschool participation in countries where a large population avail of it, where it is used for more months, and where there were measures in place to maintain quality. The OECD concluded that; widening access to preschool can improve performance and reduce socio-economic disparities, so long as extending coverage did not compromise quality (OECD, 2010).

According to Ahnert and colleagues, high quality ensures that care environments are developmentally appropriate and child ratios in the setting are kept

**The quality of services for young children lies partly in environmental characteristics (e.g. space, areas of interest, outdoor areas promoting gross motor play), but above all quality lies in the interactions between children and staff.**

low. Group size and composition also need to be considered as mediators of the quality of individual care provider-child relationships (Ahnert et al., 2006). It is also important to keep in mind the dynamic nature of childcare – infants depend, for example, on a caring didactic relationship with a parent or parent figure, whereas for older children the relationship of the carer with the whole group becomes more important. Caring for children requires different care strategies, and for this reason providers of care and education to young children need to be valued by society, well compensated, and enriched by careful education and training.

**The definition of ‘quality’ in the context of early childhood care and education is a much debated topic.** Moss and Dahlberg have argued that the concept of quality in childcare ‘as some universal and knowable thing waiting to be discovered and measured by experts’ is misguided and that quality is laden with a particular set of managerial values (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008). They focus instead on the importance of nurturing democratic values in practices with early childhood care and education. In line with this approach, Bennett (2003) suggests that within childcare settings there should be involvement of parents and respect for the natural learning strategies and agency of young children. **Bennett draws attention to the importance of developing high quality services, of effective governance structures, adequate and stable public funding, a well-qualified workforce, appropriate pedagogical practice, and ongoing professional development (Bennett, 2003).** In the Siolta national quality framework (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and the Aistear curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009), a vision is presented which sets about achieving high quality preschool provision for all children. The quality of services for young children lies partly in environmental



---

characteristics (e.g. space, areas of interest, outdoor areas promoting gross motor play), but above all quality lies in the interactions between children and staff. Factors that affect the ability of staff to engage responsively and appropriately with young children include their professional training, the ratio of adults to children, the curriculum, and the continuity of staff (Melhuish, 2004).

However, one of the challenges in developing national policy in relation to the provision of services for young children is the separation of childcare from early childhood education in terms of policy, funding, delivery and staffing (OECD, 2006). Unlike the education system which is clearly defined, services in Ireland that provide for the out-of-home care and education of children aged birth to six years are described variously as crèches, nurseries, preschools, playgroups, after-school clubs, etc. This reflects the variety of purposes which are attributed to these services including; caring for children of working parents and providing opportunities for early educational experiences for young children.

## 2.4 Mentoring

Mentoring is a term used to describe the activities of qualified and experienced practitioners involved in the professional development of students and newly-qualified or newly-recruited personnel through on-the-job training or support (Whitehead and Fitzgerald, 2007). In this modern sense, mentoring is used widely and in many different contexts.

The benefits and value of mentoring in supporting professional growth is often identified in discussions and research related to professional development for staff within early years settings. Compelling evidence exists to support the notion that service managers and senior staff within childcare settings play a significant role as mentors to other staff in their services. The literature on mentoring often discusses the reciprocal benefits to both novice early years educators and mentors: mentoring supports new professionals while revitalising experienced early years educators' reflective practice, professional development and the capacity

to impact the educational system (Buysse et al, 2003; Boyer & Lee, 2001; McCormick & Brennan, 2001; Moir & Gless, 2001).

In the early literature related to mentoring, Katz noted that early years educators of young children experience different stages of professional development (Katz, 1977). Early years educators at the start of their career are in survival mode, focused on day-to-day survival in the classroom and often experiencing anxiety about their ability to meet classroom challenges and realities. This survival stage may last the first whole year of teaching, during which they need support, understanding, encouragement, comfort and guidance. On the other hand, experienced early years educators experience a stage of renewal or maturity, during which time they are confident in their skills, and become more reflective and interested in widening the scope of their professional knowledge and skills. Experienced early years educators can benefit from opportunities to network with peers and examine issues and problems in the early childhood setting and field. Thus, a mentoring programme would be a suitable framework through which supportive relationships between early years educators starting out in the field and more experienced early years educators could form and ultimately enhance their professional work and improve early childhood practice (Pavia et al., 2003).

Holloway (2001) also noted that experienced early years educators benefit from mentoring early years educators who are beginning their career, because they (experienced early years educators) believe mentoring allows them to help others, improve themselves, receive respect, develop collegiality, and profit from novice early years educators' fresh ideas and energy (Holloway, 2001). That is, the benefits of mentoring are both career-related and psychosocial. Holloway also proposes, in agreement with Rowley, that in order to be effective mentors, prospective mentors need to undergo training that includes: professional development about the mentoring process, understanding what is expected of them as mentors, support, and opportunities to discuss ideas, problems and solutions with other mentors (Rowley, 1999).

---

**Compelling evidence exists to support the notion that service managers and senior staff within childcare settings play a significant role as mentors to other staff in their services.**

---



Mentoring can also play a part in the socialisation process for early year's educators starting out. Da Rosand and colleagues noted that the initiation of individuals new to teaching occurred without much thought or preparation (Da Ros and Swick, 1995). They argued that the socialisation of newly qualified early year's educators should be planned, with the learner being supported towards increasing competence, and the experienced staff supported in utilising the new staff as sources of strength and enrichment in the setting. Their case study of a teaching assistant's socialisation into a preschool environment confirmed the need for five teacher socialisation processes: **(1) the development and use of planned, continued professional growth strategies, (2) the development and support of meaningful mentoring programs, (3) the use of affective support that allows new early years educators to build confidence and competence, (4) the use of personal narratives to increase understanding of self and self-other dynamics typical in classrooms and schools, and (5) the use of reflection strategies to engage early years educators in individual and collaborative assessments of their teaching.**

Very little empirical evidence exists in terms of measuring the effectiveness of mentoring programmes. However, a thorough review of the literature generated 13 research studies and 1 doctoral thesis on the topic. They were all small-scale, with the number of participants ranging from 1 to 78. The study with one participant was a single case study of a mentor (Ryan and Hornbeck, 2004). The study with 78 participants was an interview-based study of early childhood centre directors who mentored their staff into pursuing higher education qualifications. The rest of the studies were conducted with both mentors and mentees as participants. Three studies in particular (Cassady et al.,

2003; Puig and Recchia, 2008; Uttley and Horm, 2008) reported that their participants were all female, as is typical in the sector.

Many of the studies reviewed suggested that the essence of a successful mentoring program lies in the mentoring relationship between mentor and mentee. As such, relationship-building in the beginning is a critical part of the mentoring process. Three of the studies reviewed focused on this particular component of the mentoring process (Pavia et al., 2003; Heung-Ling, 2003; Beaunea, 2009). **The initial orientation meeting, group meetings, planned contact time between paired mentor-mentee, and care in the pairing up of mentor and mentee were important components of relationship building common to all studies.** Additionally, Heung-Ling listed the following dimensions of an effective mentoring relationship: a high comfort level, respect, trust, openness, encouragement, on-going support, regular communication, mentor's expertise, level of commitment and time availability. Heung-Ling noted that these dimensions were probably interrelated, for example: the mentor's level of expertise contributing to the mentee's comfort level with his/her mentor. In Ireland, The 3>4>5 Learning Years Programme which was delivered as part of the Young Ballymun programme in Dublin reported that staff who engaged with HighScope (in particular) were more confident in their work and that the training received and coaching support from the HighScope coordinator was encouraging them to do things differently, which they could see was of benefit to the children (SQW, 2012).

All of the studies reviewed reported that the most critical element in building a successful mentoring relationship is time. The 'time' element includes:

- The length of time that the mentoring programme is run should allow for trust to be established between a mentor and mentee so as to build a successful mentoring relationship
- Contact time between mentor and mentee should be pre-planned in the program so that the mentor and mentee can get to know each other and build a relationship
- There should be funding for time release to allow the mentor and mentee some time-off from their regular duties/responsibilities and thus carve out some space for the mentoring to occur

The relationship between the mentor and mentee was reported across studies as being a significant factor related to the success of the programme. Cassady and colleagues noted that a successful mentoring relationship depended on both mentors and mentees having a clear understanding of the role of the mentor. This meant that there had to be a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, which should be established early on during the mentoring program (Cassady et al., 2003). Beaune's (2009) doctoral research project focused on theorising the interpersonal relationships between mentors and mentees. She noted that mentoring relationships were focused on, and strongly influenced by four aspects of the early childhood environment: physical, professional, social and emotional environments, and weakly influenced by the personal characteristics of participants. Both studies conducted by Gallagher used mentoring as an intervention to combat shortage and high turnover rates of early years educators. These studies emphasised building a trusting relationship with the mentee through ongoing support for the mentee during an entire year. To facilitate this type of mentoring, the researchers matched mentors and mentees based on classroom geographic proximity (also suggested by Pavia et al, 2003) and professional compatibility (Gallagher et al., 2011a, Gallagher et al., 2011b)

**The literature reviewed for this section points to several findings that may provide a helpful starting point to guide and plan mentoring programmes within early year's settings, which may be offered to staff as part of a suite of professional development opportunities.**

## 2.5 Corporate Governance in the Early Year's Sector

Governance is the 'glue' that holds the early childhood system together. Without strong governance parents may struggle to find reliable childcare services. Some parents end up choosing multiple preschool arrangements of

uneven quality to meet their family's needs. Children may experience discontinuity as they move from one setting to another (Moore and Vandiviere, 2000). Good governance can ensure that services attain quality standards, are affordable, meet local demand, promote cost-effectiveness and achieve equity goals. As the early childhood field expands and becomes increasingly complex, there is an increasing need for policymakers to address governance and ensure more coherent early childhood care and education policy across government agencies, levels of government and programmes.

The series of policy analyses carried out by the OECD Education Directorate from 1998-2006 show that the organisation of early childhood systems is extremely varied across the rich countries. Yet, distinctive patterns of governance emerge from this diversity (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2006b). Two traditional approaches exist, these include; integrated (one government or agency in charge) or split management. The adoption of one or other approach says much about how the early years is understood in a country, and the relative value given by governments to policy-making, funding and regulation in the sector.

No systematic examination of governance with the early year's sector exists. Evidence regarding its interaction with management and its subsequent impact on children, parents, staff or social fabric and community of a preschool setting is lacking. The lack of research on the governance and management of entities within the sector has resulted in little understanding of their costs and benefits to the wider community. Within the CoRe Report, Vandenbroeck and colleagues outline their approach to competence, with a holistic understanding of early childhood education and care. They report that this approach leads to a broad and holistic understanding of competence and competence requirements for working in this field (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011). From the research conducted in preparation of the CoRe Report, competence unfolds into four dimensions; at an individual level, at an institutional and team level, at an inter-institutional level and finally at a governance level. These competencies unfold further into the dimensions of knowledge, practice and values. Brought together in a coherent framework, competence in each of these four layers of the early childhood care and education system and across each of the four dimensions results in a competent system. In terms of competence at a governance level, the authors of the CoRe Report suggest that knowledge of the sector, the stakeholders and the diversity of these stakeholders is important. Those implementing governance standards must also value children and their participation within

**Table 3** Aspects characterising competent governance of early childhood care and education systems

Knowledge	Practices	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Knowledge of the situation of ECEC in local, regional, national and international contexts</li> <li>■ Knowledge of children's and families' rights</li> <li>■ Knowledge of cultural diversity and anti-discriminatory practices</li> <li>■ Knowledge of comprehensive strategies for tackling poverty and socio-cultural inequalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adequately resourcing ECEC in order to provide generalised equitable access to high-quality ECEC in particular for children with a socioeconomically disadvantaged background or with special educational needs</li> <li>■ Designing efficient funding models in the framework of coherent educational public policies</li> <li>■ Adopting an integrated approach to ECEC services at a local, regional and national level</li> <li>■ Co-constructing with all stakeholders a coherent pedagogical framework that ensures coordination between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ ECEC curriculum</li> <li>■ Qualification framework for professional preparation of ECEC staff</li> <li>■ Quality, monitoring and evaluation framework</li> <li>■ Governance framework addressing administrative responsibilities (at local, regional and national level)</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Ensuring cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors (education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice)</li> <li>■ Supporting professionalisation of ECEC staff through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ policies that address coherently initial preparation</li> <li>■ induction and continuous professional development of all staff (practitioners, assistants, centre leaders)</li> <li>■ investments in various forms of pedagogical guidance</li> <li>■ policies promoting career mobility of low-qualified staff through flexible qualification pathways</li> <li>■ enhancing the prestige of the profession by ensuring favourable working conditions</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Promoting policies to address the gender gap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Children's right to be able to participate in society</li> <li>■ Children's right to develop to their full potential through education and successful learning</li> <li>■ Respect and inclusion of diversity</li> <li>■ Education as public good</li> <li>■ Democracy, social inclusion and economic development</li> </ul>

*Adapted from The CoRe Report (p. 44, 2011).*

society and within the education system. Additionally, those involved in governance must adequately resource the services in order to provide high quality provision for their stakeholders. Table 3 adapted from the CoRe Report 2011, outlines in detail the elements of a competent system of governance within the early childhood care and education system.

The emergence of the Irish Governance Code in 2011 raised awareness of the importance of practicing good governance within community, voluntary and charitable organisations in Ireland. The Governance Code states that all community, voluntary and charitable organisations have a responsibility to provide and follow a code of good practice when it comes to how their organisations are run. It is the responsibility of the people who run the organisation, usually called the board or management committee, to ensure best practice in terms of governance is adhered to. Given the voluntary nature of the board, it has proved difficult to ensure that good governance is always practiced, despite best intentions (Brown, 2005). With the introduction of the Governance Code, board members now have access to a tool which will assist them in demonstrating their governance standards to their stakeholders.

To date, research on non-profit governance is based on the premise that well-performing boards exist alongside well-performing organisations (Herman and Renz, 1999), they recognized that effective boards improve organisational performance, despite not fully understanding the mechanisms by which this change occurs. The struggle to define board effectiveness is further aggravated by the struggle to define organisational effectiveness for non-profit organisations. Further investigation is warranted in this area to determine the impact of effective governance on the quality of preschool provision.

## 2.6 Interagency Working

The term 'interagency working' is often used interchangeably with other terms such as 'joined up', 'integrated' working, working 'in partnership', and 'multi-agency' working. There have been attempts to distinguish between these terms (Percy & Smith, 2006; Burke et al., 2010), however it has proved difficult to make definitive distinctions. In line with the work of Himmelman on collaborating for a change (Himmelman, 1995), Frost and colleagues described the four levels of partnership working within child and family related services, beginning with the least 'joined-up' approach to interagency working (Frost and Robinson, 2007).

- Cooperation – Services work together towards a consistent set of goals, while maintaining independence
- Collaboration – Services plan together and address issues which overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes
- Coordination – Services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards a set of shared and agreed goals
- Integration – Different services become one
- Organisation – In order to enhance service delivery

Interagency working is becoming increasingly common with all services provided to children and families. This way of working is widely regarded as a strategic way to improve the quality of services and support offered to children and their families. To date, limited evidence on the impact of interagency working on child outcomes exist, however, there is some promising evidence from international studies to suggest that a more joined-up approach in improving professional practice and providing better support earlier on in life for children and families who need it may be effective (Slatham, 2011).

Evidence documenting the impact of interagency collaboration is difficult to source within the literature. Many reasons for this exist, firstly, the difficulty related to isolating any changes which occur to that of interagency working and not another factor, secondly, the difficulty defining and measuring outcomes, and lastly, interagency working occurs at many levels within an organisation – identifying the interagency working at individual levels is difficult and thus creates a problem when trying to measure the amount of interagency working an organisation or group engages in.

Where evidence for the impact of interagency working does exist, it is mostly positive. Changes have been reported for service users; e.g. improved access and less waiting time; for professionals e.g. greater understanding of the sector as a result of increased knowledge and skills, better understanding of children, increased satisfaction within the workplace and further opportunities for career development; and for agencies e.g. greater efficiency, less duplication of work, diversification and greater involvement of stakeholders (Duggan et al., 2009). Some negative impacts of interagency working have also been reported, such as increased workload (at least in the initial stages) and increased demand for services as needs are identified earlier (Robinson et al., 2008).



There is considerable agreement in the literature on what hinders and what helps interagency working. Barriers include; lack of senior management commitment and buy-in to interagency working; a climate of constant organisational change; differences between agencies in priorities, systems, culture and professional beliefs; and difficulties with information sharing (Oliver et al., 2010). Factors reported within the literature which are thought to facilitate interagency working include; a coherent long-term vision; clarity of roles and responsibilities; commitment to joint working at all levels; strong leadership; dedicated posts for developing capacity; and time for strong personal relationships and trust to develop between partners (Sloper, 2004).

Organisations, services and groups who strive for interagency working need time for this to become

embedded, particularly if there is little history of this type of approach. The literature confirms that interagency collaboration is no easy feat and that barriers exist. Interagency working must be well thought out and justified if it is to be effective in impacting on child and family outcomes. It will only be useful if it is carried out in a systematic way and implemented accordingly. There is a strong body of international evidence which presents the barriers and enablers of interagency working and can be used within the strategic planning of organisations, services and groups.

This literature presented within this chapter sets a context for the chapters subsequent to this, specifically in terms of the importance of quality, professional development of the work force and the lack of information on governance within the sector in Ireland.

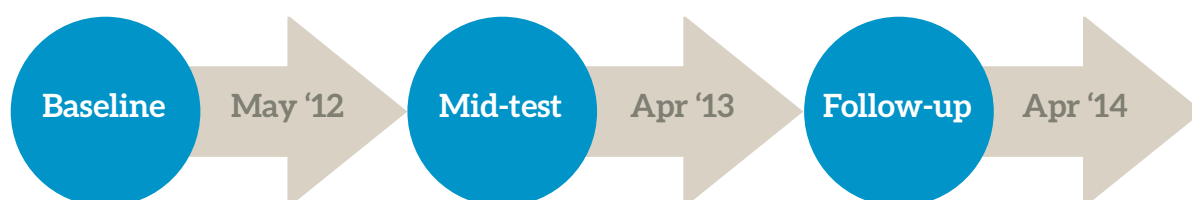


## Chapter 3: Methodology

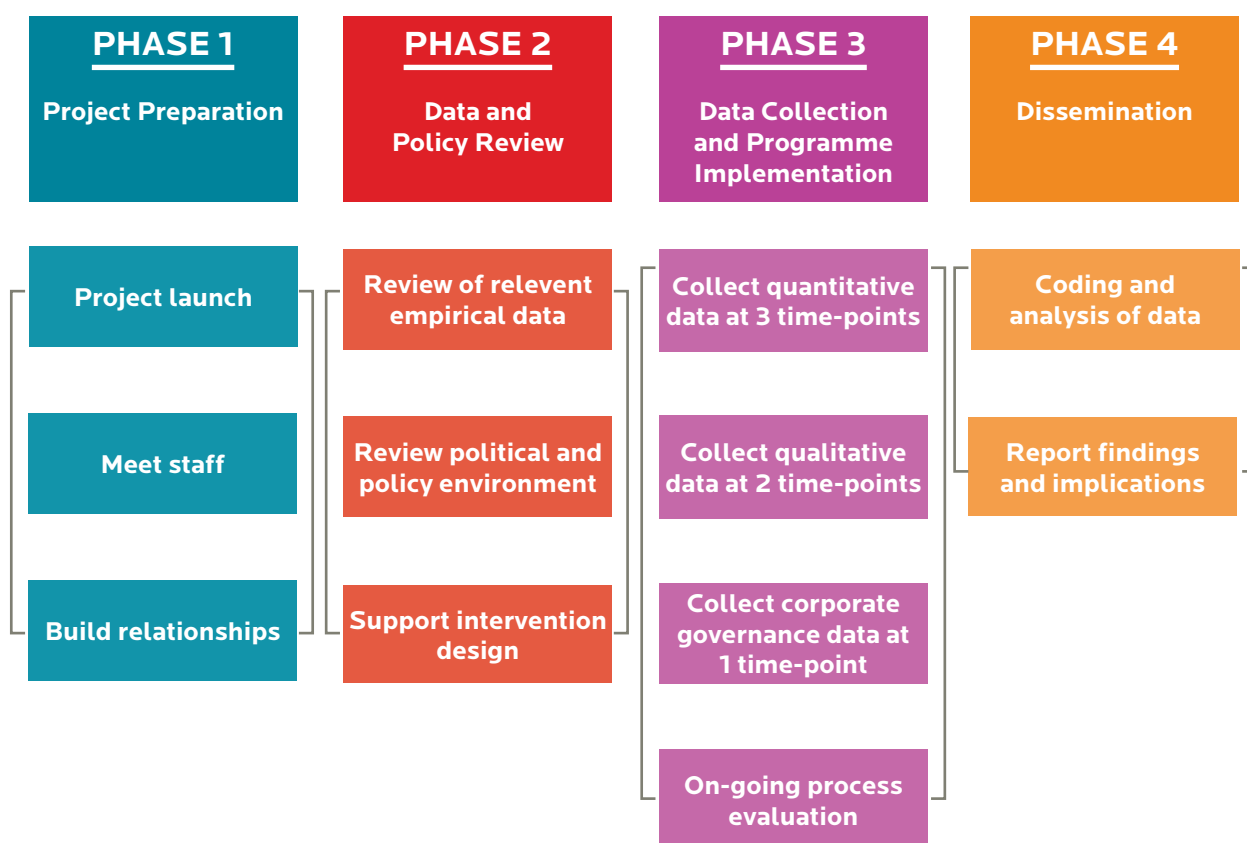
### 3.1 Research Design

Data collection, that happened as part of the external evaluation, occurred at three time points (baseline, mid-test and follow-up) making this research project quasi experimental in design. The project timeline is illustrated in Figure 2. A quasi-experiment is an empirical study used to estimate the causal impact of an intervention or interventions on its target population. Quasi-experimental research designs share many similarities with the traditional experimental design or randomised controlled trial, but they specifically lack the element of random assignment to a treatment or control

group. The evaluation was also formative in nature. This form of evaluation enables the evaluators to inform the programme delivery by feeding back findings to the project team, steering group and consortium at the end of each time-point. A formative evaluation seeks to strengthen or improve the interventions as well as assess the effectiveness of intervention on the outcomes. Figure 3 provides an overview of the methodological approach which was adhered to throughout the project. This outlines the major evaluation milestones in terms of project initiation, data and policy review, data collection and dissemination.



**Figure 2** Timeline for Data Collection

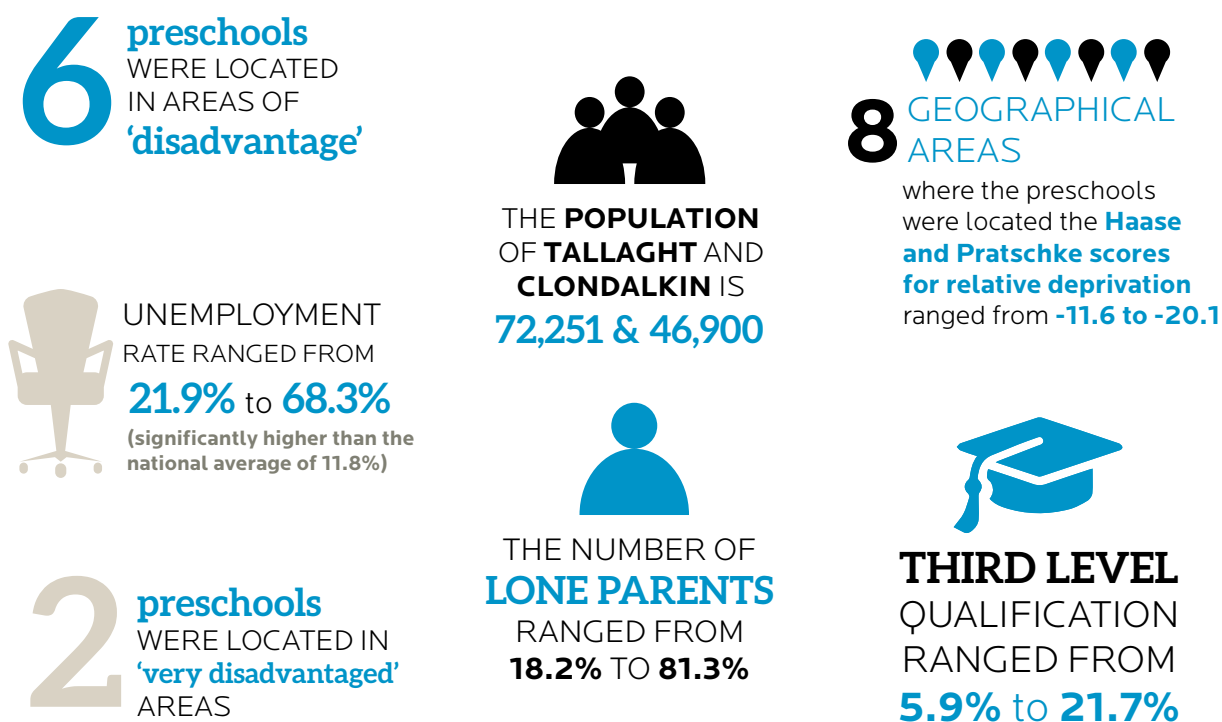


**Figure 3** Overview of Methodological Approach

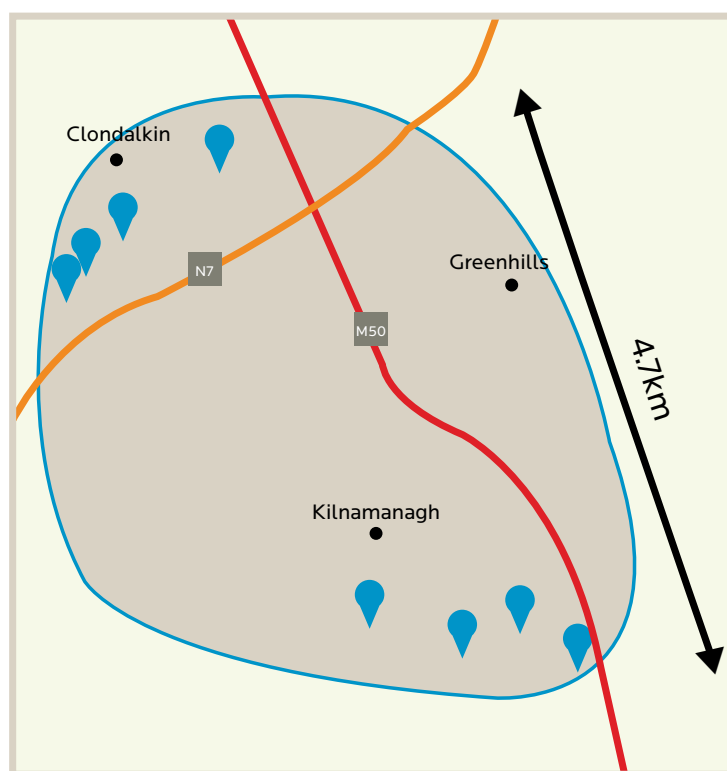
### 3.2 Participants and Settings

Eight preschools were invited to participate in the South Dublin NEYAI, all 8 agreed to take part. The geographical spread of the preschools included Tallaght and Clondalkin, two areas located in South County Dublin. The spread was equally distributed with 4 preschools situated in Clondalkin and 4 situated in Tallaght. The management structure differed across preschools; four of which were combined under one management structure (Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd.) whilst the 4 remaining preschools each had their own separate management board. One preschool withdrew from the project after the mid-test data collection point for reasons outside of the project. The geographical location of the preschools is mapped in Figure 5.

The Pobal Haase and Pratschke Deprivation Index (Haase and Pratschke, 2012) was used as a method to measure the relative affluence or disadvantage for each of the 8 geographical areas where the preschools were located. Using data compiled from various censuses a scoring was given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -35 (the most disadvantaged) to +35 (the most affluent). Data about lone parent ratios, third level qualification and unemployment rates were also collected. Figure 4 depicts the demographic statistics for the areas in which the preschools were located.



**Figure 4** Infographic: Demographic Statistics for Preschool Locations



**Figure 5** Geographical Location of 8 Preschools

### 3.3 Measurements and Procedures

The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative assessments. The benefits of the mixed method research design are many; this approach allows researchers to match the purpose of the method to the need in the study. For example; gaining an understanding of the key issues relating to the subject before embarking on further development in a study can be very useful to triangulate the data and assure its validity and level of variance is advantageous (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Other benefits include; the complimentary relationship between qualitative and quantitative data, one clarifying the other throughout the study. This addition of a supplemental dataset bolsters the effectiveness of the research (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Others attribute the ability to explain complex or contradictory findings as a benefit of using mixed methods research. Using the different processes can also lead to unexpected or emergent themes and information that would not have otherwise have come to light.

#### 3.3.1 Quantitative Measures

##### *Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire*

A bespoke preschool characteristics questionnaire was completed by each preschool manager during the baseline, mid-test and follow-up data collection phase (see appendix 1). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the sample composition and how it may have changed over time. Data was collected at the child, teacher and preschool level. Questions were asked in relation to the number of staff working within the preschool, their level of qualification and the number of years' experience they had. Questions in relation to the number of children attending the preschool were asked as well as they type of provision offered by the preschool.

##### *Quality of Preschool Environment*

The ECERS-R (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition) and the ITTERS-R (Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition) (Cryer et al., 2003; Cryer et al., 2004) were used to undertake a baseline, mid-test and follow-up assessment of the quality of preschool delivery. The administration of the scales was carried out on the same day by one trained researcher who had familiarised herself with the preschool. Each of the scales contain items to evaluate the physical environment; basic care routines; curriculum; interactions; schedule and program structure; relationships with parents and staff. The scales were chosen as they are suitable for use in evaluating inclusive and culturally diverse programs. These scales define environment in a broad sense and guide the observer to assess the

arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur within the setting, and the schedule of the day, including routines and activities. The support offered to parents and staff is also included. The major advantage of these assessment tools is that both of them have been developed in close collaboration with realistic field based sites. They have good inter-rater reliability and validity, thus making them suitable for research and programme evaluation, as well as programme improvement efforts. Given that subscale 7 (Parents and Staff) on the ITTERS and ECERS instrument cannot be physically observed, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with service managers after the main observation had occurred. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the relationship each service had with the families attending their preschool and the provisions in place for these families. Secondly, operations in terms of staff meetings, planning time, and the supervision and evaluation of staff were explored. The findings from these interviews inform the 'parents and staff' subscale score on the ECERS-R and ITTERS-R.

##### *Online Staff Survey*

Electronic surveys provide the ability to conduct large-scale data collection in a quick and inexpensive manner (Couper, 2000). The technology provides an inexpensive mechanism for conducting surveys online instead of through the postal mail (Sheehan and Hoy, 1999), and one in which costs per response decrease instead of increase significantly as sample size increases (Watt, 1999). Electronic surveys are becoming increasingly common (Lazar and Preece, 1999), and research comparing electronic versus postal surveys confirms that electronic survey content results may be no different than postal survey content results, yet provide strong advantages of speedy distribution and response cycles (Yun and Trumbo, 2000).

After the implementation phase of the South Dublin NEYAI had concluded, all staff who participated in the programme were invited to complete a bespoke 46-item online survey. Ninety-two percent of staff completed the online survey (see appendix 2). The survey included; dichotomous (yes/no), multiple choice, rating scale and open-ended questions which were developed to capture the viewpoint of the staff who had participated in the programme, and to gain an understanding of the programme and to determine any impacts from the perspective of the practitioner, highlight innovation and good practice and give a voice to the participating staff. The following sections were included within the survey:



1. About you (4 items)
2. General thoughts on programme (5 items)
3. Rating the activities and inputs (14 items)
4. Working with a mentor (9 items)
5. Participating in professional development (10 items)
6. Perceived impact of programme on staff (4 items)

At the end of the survey, each respondent was asked to state whether or not they would be interested in participating in a focus group to explore the major findings of the survey. All survey responses were anonymous and were stored within an online database which required a password to access.

#### *Preschool Board of Management Descriptive Questionnaire*

At mid-test and prior to the completion of the board of management facilitated session on corporate governance (detailed in section 3.3.2), the chair of each board was required to complete a bespoke board descriptive questionnaire (see appendix 3). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the composition of the board including the number of individuals who sat on the board, the roles of those individuals and the skillset present on the board. The questionnaire also investigated the frequency of meetings, whether the board adhered to any guidelines, operating procedures, or if they had a board manual.

### **3.3.2 Qualitative Measures**

#### *Interviews (Preschool Managers)*

In qualitative educational research, in-depth interviews are often used to explore what works (in terms of approaches, techniques, programme components, learning environments, understanding personal motivations, self-efficacy and competencies) within a particular programme and what can be improved. Eight one-to-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with preschool managers at mid-test. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain each manager's thoughts on the delivery of the intervention to date, to identify potential barriers and equally, successful elements of implementation. Programme sustainability and the challenges facing each preschool were also explored during the interview. The researcher encouraged the manager to talk about issues pertinent to the research question by asking open ended questions during the interview. The researcher re-worded, re-ordered or clarified the questions when necessary (see appendix 4). The mean duration of the eight interviews was 24 minutes (range 17 to 34).

#### *Interview (Quality Mentor)*

One semi-structured interview was undertaken with the quality mentor during the follow-up data collection phase. The purpose of this interview was to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the quality mentor. The interview was organised into four sections; the first section focused on establishing the role of the mentor and the associated pre-development work; the second section explored the implementation of training, activities and inputs over the duration of the intervention; the third section investigated the efforts made in terms of sustaining the work of the quality mentor and embedding the practice; and the final section explored any further considerations the mentor had in relation to the future roll-out of similar mentoring programmes. Prior to the interview, the researcher shared the interview schedule with the quality mentor to ensure the maximum benefit of the interview was achieved (see appendix 5). The interview lasted for 120 minutes.

#### *Focus Groups (Early Year's Educators)*

Following the completion of the online survey, staff were invited to participate in a focus group. Twenty-three per-cent of staff agreed to participate representing five of the seven preschools. Focus groups were led by a trained moderator who was also the main researcher working on the programme. They took place within the preschools where the early years educators worked. The focus groups lasted from 42 minutes to 46 minutes and took place in a sufficiently comfortable and neutral room. At the outset, the early year's educators completed a written informed consent in which they agreed for the focus group to be audio-taped. To ensure standardisation, a structured protocol, including a semi-structured interview guide was developed and reviewed and used within all participating preschools (see appendix 6).

The protocol consisted of guidelines for the taping of discussions, rules to be observed during the focus groups and guidelines for the moderator so that she could optimally lead the session. The focus groups were led by a trained moderator. The moderator was very familiar with the interview guide so that the topics for discussion could be introduced. Furthermore, the moderator helped the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion. After each focus group the moderator reflected on the experience and noted the most important topics raised; different ideas, differences with previous focus groups, unexpected findings and main impressions of the session.

The semi-structured interview guide used within the focus group was developed in accordance with

established guidelines (Greenbaum, 2000; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) and was based on the broad themes of the South Dublin NEYAI and the findings from the online survey. The focus group was formulated to investigate the early year's educator's perspectives on the overall programme; their perceived impact of the programmes, the translation of learning from one staff member to another and how they dealt with change throughout the duration of the programme. The early year's educators were also invited to put forward any thoughts they had about the design of mentoring programmes. The questions provided were broad and open-ended. More detailed optional questions were asked when the discussion did not start up or continue spontaneously.

#### *Focus Group (Project Coordinator and Delivery Staff)*

After the programme implementation had ceased, the evaluators conducted a focus group with the project coordinator and delivery staff to gain an in-depth understanding of the intervention and associated components. At the outset, the participants completed a written informed consent in which they agreed for the focus group to be audio-taped. The discussion was arranged by intervention component with each one systematically discussed. Each of the components were discussed under three headings; pre-development work, implementation and sustainability. The focus group was facilitated by a moderator and co-moderator. The moderator led the discussion and was assisted by a co-moderator. The moderator was familiar with the interview schedule and therefore the topics for discussion could be introduced. Furthermore, the moderator facilitated the participation of the group in a lively and natural manner while the co-moderator took notes and asked prompt questions when required. The focus group lasted for 120 minutes.

#### *Focus Group (Boards of Management)*

Corporate governance is an important issue for all organisations. The governing body – whether it is called a management committee, board of management or board of directors – is responsible for ensuring that the organisation delivers its objectives, is well managed and serves its users. It is responsible for ensuring that monies are appropriately spent and accounted for, that staff are properly employed, remunerated, and work within the law.

At mid-test, the researchers facilitated individual 3 hour sessions with four out of five boards. One board did not participate as they had already withdrawn from the project. To assess corporate governance and interagency co-operation and sustainability, the Irish Governance Code was administered to each of the boards

(Boardmatch Ireland et al., 2014). This instrument is a code of practice for good governance of community, voluntary and charitable organisations in Ireland. The Governance Code is for board members, managers, staff and volunteers of community, voluntary and charitable organisations. This code is the only developed tool of this kind in Ireland and is one that funders are now looking to the community and voluntary sector to adopt. It acts as a guidance to prompt boards to reflect on a good practice model of governance.

The session took place at a preschool or in a local meeting room that was easily accessible. The session was led by one moderator who was experienced in terms of board engagement and was assisted by a co-moderator. The moderator led the discussion and systematically worked her way through the 66-item code which covers 5 principles including; leading the organisation, exercising control over the organisation, being transparent and accountable, working effectively and behaving with integrity. The co-moderator handled the logistics including note-taking and creating a suitable environment for the session.

#### **3.3.3 Process Evaluation**

Process evaluation monitors the implementation of the programme and assesses the extent of programme delivery (compared to what was intended). Process evaluations explore what is done by the programme and for whom these services are provided. Ideally, process evaluations assist in the identification of *active ingredients* of treatment or intervention, and assess whether a programme is meeting accepted standards (WHO, 2000). In general, these evaluations pose questions in two areas: coverage and process. The evaluation of process can reveal a great deal about a programme or intervention in an educational setting (Suchman, 1967) and is often particularly useful in situations where a traditional summative evaluation may conclude that a programme did or did not work. In these situations, the process evaluation can help to ascertain what exactly made an intervention so successful, or conversely, why an intervention did not produce an intended effect or outcome. The process evaluation applied a variety of methods to gather a comprehensive and continuous record of the South Dublin NEYAI and combined both quantitative and qualitative assessments, providing data on the barriers and facilitator's on the implementation of the programme.

A range of data sources were used to explore how the intervention was implemented and received. These included: focus groups with with project team and staff coordinating intervention delivery in all preschools;

staff focus groups and manager interviews; ongoing review of project documentation including log sheets from deliverers detailing the utilisation; fidelity and organisation of the interventions (see appendix 7), service level agreements, work plans and minutes of meetings. The process evaluation aimed to explain the quantitative findings through qualitative analysis of information under the headings reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance (Glasgow et al., 1999).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

#### *Quantitative Data*

Quantitative data was generated from the quality assessments of the preschool environments, the sample and board descriptive questionnaires, the online survey completed by the early years educators and from elements of the process evaluation; specifically information provided about the number of inputs, training sessions and activities delivered as well as the number of staff attending them. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were generated for all scale variables (e.g. questions generating open ended number responses), frequency statistics were conducted for all nominal variables (e.g. questions with a yes/no response or a closed category response) and interval variables (questions generating a rating response [e.g. on a scale of 1-5, rate your level of enjoyment]). Independent t-tests were conducted to examine differences within the sample from baseline to mid-test and follow-up. The alpha level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

One way repeated measures ANOVA was performed on the ITERS and ECERS scores at baseline, mid-test and follow-up. Data for the preschool who withdrew from the programme after mid-test were included in the analysis at baseline and mid-test and were treated as missing data at follow-up. ANOVAS were used to analyse changes in ITERS and ECERS scores within groups over time.

Effect sizes were calculated for significant main effects based on Cohen's  $d$ , where  $d$  is the difference of the means divided by the average of their standard deviations. Cohen postulates that  $d=0.2$  be considered a 'small' effect size, 0.5 represents a 'medium' effect size and 0.8 a 'large' effect size. This indicates that if the means don't differ by 0.2 standard deviations or more, the difference is trivial, even if it is statistically significant (Thalheimer and Cook, 2002). All quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS V.21.

#### *Qualitative Data*

Qualitative data was generated from interviews, focus groups and from elements of the process evaluation, specifically the logs completed by the project team. Verbatim written transcriptions were produced based on the information in each of the audio tapes. Where transcripts were not available from the corporate governance focus group, responses were recorded by the researchers during the session and subsequently shared with the focus group participants for approval. Once the transcription was completed the researcher read each one in its entirety. A qualitative content analysis of the transcriptions was conducted using IBM SPSS Text Analytics Software. This software automates the categorisation process to eliminate the time and expense of manual coding and uses linguistics-based technologies to reduce the ambiguities of human language, helping to uncover patterns in the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of others. A data framework to code the data was used and was based on major topics of the interview guide. Major themes and sub themes were extracted from the analysis and all findings were summarised to include quotes and excerpts from the transcripts.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues arise in all aspects of research, and are particularly salient when studying vulnerable members of society. Throughout the research process participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the project at any time without reason. Participants were continuously reminded that they could ask questions about the research process by contacting the researcher any time. All participants had access to the contact details of the researchers. Although this flexibility may appear unnecessary, it allowed the participants to become familiar with the research protocol and in turn helped to demystify the research process, empowering the participants rather than making them objects of research. The research team adhered to the core ethical principles of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children (2012). These include:

1. Minimising risk of harm to all participants
2. Obtaining informed consent and assent from all participants
3. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process
4. Ensuring child protection and well-being is at the core of the project
5. Adhering to legal requirements and policy commitments
6. Ensuring that children are participants in the research process.

## Chapter 4: The South Dublin NEYAI Interventions

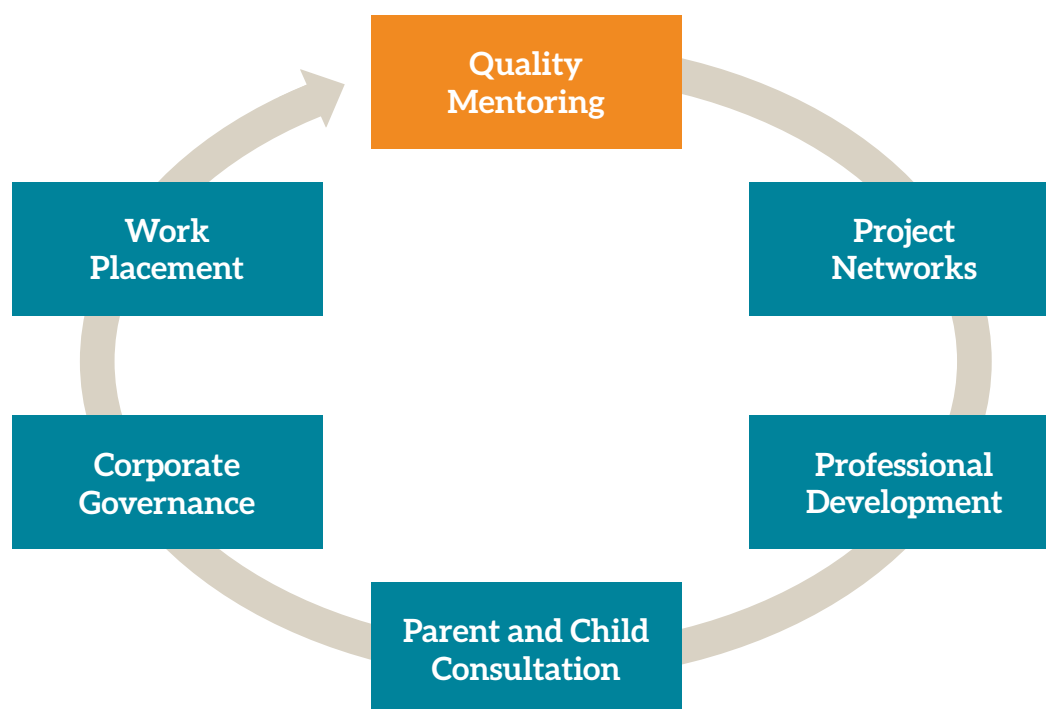
### 4.1 Intervention Design

The field of early childhood interventions continues to evolve, reflecting developments within its own practices as well as related developments in other fields. This has led to progressive reformulations of how it is defined and what its central aims and purposes are (Dunst, 2000, Dunst and Trivette, 2009)

Early childhood intervention has usually been defined as the provision of various multidisciplinary services to children, their families and the staff who work with them. An alternative way of considering early childhood intervention is that it involves providing children with experiences and opportunities that promote their acquisition and use of competencies that enable them to engage meaningfully with others in their

relationships, interactions, experiences and learning opportunities in social and physical settings (Dunst and Bruder, 2002).

This chapter aims to describe the 6 components of the South Dublin NEYAI (see figure 6) under the headings pre-development, implementation and sustainability.<sup>1</sup> It must be acknowledged that each of these intervention components were not rolled out in silos and a complex interconnectedness between all 6 existed which is described in detail from section 4.3.1 to section 4.3.6 inclusive. Furthermore, the quality mentoring component of the intervention was the cornerstone of the South Dublin NEYAI with the most time being invested in this component.



**Figure 6** Six components of the South Dublin NEYAI intervention

<sup>1</sup> 3 discreet phases were identified by the evaluation team to describe the intervention.

## 4.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

Each of the intervention components were theoretically underpinned by a number of frameworks, principles and programmes including Aistear, the Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009); Síolta, the Irish National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006); the Early Childhood Environment Rating Handbook (Cryer et al., 2003); the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Handbook (Cryer et al., 2004) and the Hanen Programme for speech and language development (Baxendale and Hesketh, 2003). As well as being underpinned by these theoretical frameworks, principles and resources, the evaluation findings informed the project activity throughout the project lifecycle. Lastly, the development of the intervention was guided by an intervention expert group.

## 4.3 Intervention Components

Since 2011, the South Dublin NEYAI consortium, steering and expert groups and project team have worked alongside the preschools participating in the project to develop 6 interrelated components of a complex quality improvement programme. Each of these components focused on supporting the capacity of the preschools to improve the quality of practice. The components of the programme were rolled out over three phases, namely, the pre-development phase; a period of time where the project staff built relationships with the project participants and provided some short interventions. This was followed by the implementation phase; where the implementation plan was shaped and where project staff rolled out activities and inputs to those involved in specific intervention components. Lastly, the sustainability phase; where the project aimed to recap the learning from the pre-development and implementation phase and put in place plans to continue the work post-project.

Timeline	Pre-development	Implementation	Sustainability	Data Collection
2011	A			
2012	B E F	A		X
2013	C D F	A B C D E F	B C D	Y
2014		A B	A B E	Z

**A Project Networks** Supported the development of locally based learning and co-operative infrastructure with a shared vision for high quality early childhood care and education

**B Quality Mentoring** Onsite support for early years educators using a variety of techniques including observation, role-modelling, videoing of practice and feedback, group and one-to-one training

**C Parent and Child Consultations** Supported preschools develop their engagement with families using a variety of approaches

**D Professional Development** Supported preschools develop a continuing professional development policy statement, policy and professional development portfolio

**E Work Placement** Proposing a structured model of workplace learning for Early Years Educators and the provision of training to key staff within the project

**F Corporate Governance** A review of all boards to highlight the principles of corporate governance and raise awareness of board functionality

**X Baseline Data Collection** Occurred in May 2012

**Y Mid-test Data Collection** Occurred in April 2013

**Z Follow-up Data Collection** Occurred in April 2014

**Figure 7** Graphical depiction of the South Dublin NEYAI intervention



Complex interventions such as the South Dublin NEYAI often consist of several separate components combined to produce a desired outcome (Campbell et al., 2000). The evaluation of such interventions generally leads to complex and lengthy discussions between components. Moreover, text descriptions within reports and journal articles may obscure aspects of the interventions in the project and hinder the discussion of them. To counter these problems Perera and colleagues recommend producing a single image that presents all of the components of the intervention to aid clarity of the programme details. (Perera et al., 2007). We have produced a single image (Figure 7) which aims to clarify the structure of the South Dublin NEYAI intervention and thus aid the interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

### 4.3.1 Project Networks

#### *Pre-development*

The South Dublin NEYAI project was developed and realised through a series of four local networks; the consortium, the steering group, the peer group, the expert group. In addition the project links with the other NEYAI projects through a national learning community structure. These networks were instigated and operational early in the project and were anchored in a developing network of relationships, characterised by strong interagency working. These learning networks enabled connections be made and maintained between all stakeholders. Figure 7 describes the entities and structures of the project networks.

From June to August 2010, key stakeholders from a range of statutory and voluntary agencies within the South Dublin area, representatives from boards of management, and preschool managers from local preschools initially came together to contribute expertise and inform the submission of NEYAI South Dublin expression of interest in August 2010. On 1st November 2010 the consortium held its inaugural meeting and shortly afterwards an application for funding under the NEYAI was submitted to Pobal. On 22nd February 2011, with formal notification of project approval from Pobal, the various project networks were established.

#### *Implementation*

Over the duration of the project, the **Consortium** convened on a bi-annual basis with additional meetings held in the first quarter of 2011 to finalise implementation plans. The consortium provides support and monitors the overarching framework for the project. It is at the consortium level that

members reflect on the progress of the project and are informed through inputs from others who are strategically involved including preschool managers, chairs of boards, the mentor and the steering group. Represented on the final consortium are:

- South Dublin County Partnership (SDCP),
- South Dublin County Childcare (SDCCC),
- Early Childhood Ireland (ECI),
- Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (ETB),
- Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd. (DWCLS),
- Young Explorers Preschool
- St. Mary's Community Childcare Services
- Tallaght Child Care Centre
- Beechtree Community Childcare
- Kozy Kids Preschool and After School
- St. Ronan's Community Play Group
- Lime Tree Community Childcare Services
- South Dublin NEYAI project team,

The composition of and commitment to the consortium has remained consistent over time. This is particularly notable in light of significant structural changes within a number of member organisations that were engaged in mergers or were in the process of formation and where nominated representatives changed over the life time of the project. In the context of a challenging economic climate, funding reductions and high levels of change within member organisations, active participation rates remained relatively high, with a number of consortium members also involved in the steering group.

The **Steering Group** managed the project and convened six times per year. The group was chaired by South Dublin County Childcare Committee and comprised of representatives from SDCP, SDCCC, DWCLS, ECI, ETB and the South Dublin NEYAI project team. The steering group managed and monitored the progress of the project and it is here that the activities were informed and shaped. It was also through the work of the steering group that strong interagency links were formed and consolidated. These collaborative relationships added significant value to the overall project, enabling funding and support for additional training and joint actions to be leveraged. Interagency working at steering group level built trust among members and member organisations and created a mechanism by which to remain connected and current with developments in the wider sector.

The **Peer Group** was established early in the project and held its first meeting on 30th November 2011.

This group convened on a monthly basis excluding the summer months. The peer group consisted primarily of the managers and key personnel from the preschools involved in the project. The network was facilitated by the South Dublin NEYAI project team and was attended by a representative of the SDCCC to maximise information sharing. Full participation in the peer group network was not always possible as attendance was dependent on the day to day happenings in the preschool service. The peer group network was considered a fulcrum of the project. It is here that the knowledge and experience of members was sought to inform and shape project actions that were implemented in each preschool which involved staff, parents and children. The network was also a place for discussion and reflection, providing opportunities for managers and senior staff to share with and learn from the experiences of others both within the network and beyond. Through the network, services shaped and took ownership of the actions with consequential buy in. It is here that issues which have potential repercussions for the effective operation of services and the roll out of the project emerged and were addressed.

The **Expert Group** had their first meeting on 23rd November 2011 and have had a total of 7 meetings over the duration of the project. Given the ambitious nature of the interventions undertaken, the intention was to convene a group of experts with a specific mix of knowledge and experience that would support and inform the development of the project at relevant and critical points along the way. Over the duration of the project, the composition of the expert group changed to fit the particular context at any given time. The relevance of the external expertise into the project was deemed more important than having merely an ongoing representative involvement in the project. The expert group played a critical part in conceptualising the mentor's role and activities as well as considering the mentoring tools that were core to the work of the project. A member of the expert group with specific pedagogical knowledge provided professional development and one-to-one support for the mentor in relation to training inputs for preschools and approaches for using video as a mechanism for practice analysis and for quality improvement with preschool staff. The project team also engaged the expert group, individually and collectively, to inform other elements of the project (work placement and CPD) at particular junctures. As with other networks, the expert group afforded the project opportunities to leverage and access additional resources, for example CDI Quality

Services, Better Outcomes, Quality Services, Better Outcomes training for service managers.

Finally, the project has engaged with the *NEYAI National Learning Community*. The learning community comprised of representatives from the 11 local NEYAI projects and members of their consortia, along with Pobal staff and the national evaluators. This group met quarterly over the life of the project and its purpose was to share and disseminate learning from the projects and to collectively influence policy. The project co-ordination team along with the local evaluator participated in this forum, and the project co-ordinator participated in a 'planning and dissemination working group' of the national learning community.

### *Sustainability*

The learning communities and networks established during the project have facilitated the consolidation of relationships among the organisations and agencies involved. There was a strong interest among members to continue with the steering group (which in essence incorporates many of the consortium members) post project completion. It is at the culmination of the project that products from the various components are completed. The steering group has a valuable role in supporting and disseminating legacy elements of the project including the production of an Implementation Guide for Mentoring (South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, 2014a), A Model of workplace learning for Early Years Educators (South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, 2014b) and the project evaluation findings.

The peer group network has evolved into a supportive space for preschool managers, which they value. Outside of structured NEYAI sessions, members of the peer group continue to support each other informally in sharing learning, in helping to solve problems and in visiting each other's services.

It has been agreed that SDCCC will facilitate the continuation of the peer network structure after the life of the project. A representative from the peer group has been nominated to lead the new process, to meet with SDCCC and NEYAI co-ordinator to develop new terms of reference for the network. Emerging from this process there may be opportunities for the peer group network to expand and support other service managers into the future.

While the expert group as an entity will not continue, there has been a value in adopting this model of support. The relationships developed with individuals

and organisations will endure and may prove to be another lasting legacy of collaborative working.

#### 4.3.2 Quality Mentoring

It is important to note that the quality mentoring component of the overall intervention was the cornerstone of this project. Much of the on-site work within the preschools was linked to the quality mentor. This component was complex and detailed. Figure 9 provides an overview of the deliverables linked to the mentoring component.

##### *Pre-development*

Pre-development work for this component began after the recruitment of the quality mentor, a process which required some time and the assistance of the expert group. Within this project the recruitment of the mentor was one of the most crucial stages of the project. A candidate with the capacity to focus on change management was an important consideration in appointing the mentor. The Mentoring for Quality Practice in Early Years Education and

Care: Implementation Guide (South Dublin County Partnership 2014) outlines that at the core of the mentoring intervention is the individual, not just the what they bring in terms of their qualifications, professional knowledge, skills and competencies but equally important is their personal traits and their ability to support managers and early years educators in a challenging change process. The knowledge and experience of the mentor is important; a minimum requirement of a Level 8 primary degree in Early Years Care and Education complemented by at least 4 years' experience working in the sector was defined as essential criteria for the the recruitment process for the mentor. The mentor should be able to relate to the realities and pressures facing early year's educators and have an understanding of adults as learners. In terms of the personal characteristics of the mentor, they should be able to demonstrate energy, flexibility, adaptability and possess a social intelligence that understands the complexity of human interactions and behaviour change. See figure 8 for a graphical depiction of the key traits of the quality mentor.



**Figure 8** Key Traits of the Quality Mentor (South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, 2014a)

Once the mentor was appointed, pre-development work began within the preschools. In the beginning, this was mainly focussed on forming relationships and building trust. The mentor spent approximately 2 months in the beginning visiting individual services, getting to know them and gaining an understanding of their provision and identifying gaps and potential areas of work. These visits varied from preschool to preschool in terms of time, who the mentor met with and the frequency of the visits. The mentor reported that in the beginning the individual meetings with preschools were very formal and this type of approach did not work. The mentor adjusted her approach to be more informal and casual and found that this way of working was well-received by the managers and early years educators.

The pre-development phase was shaped by a number of activities including:

- The development of an intervention expert group to guide and develop the mentoring programme
- Self-assessments with all participating early years' educators (see appendix 8)
- Baseline evaluation scores from the ITERS and ECERS observations

After the baseline data collection phase had finished, a number of short interventions were provided within each preschool, these included:

- Changes to environments (areas self-selected by preschool)
- Curriculum training (informed by Aistear)
- Learning story training (delivered by Early Childhood Ireland)

In the pre-development phase, the mentor worked individually with all preschools to implement changes to their indoor or outdoor environments. Supported by the project team, each preschool put together a proposal which resulted in successful applications from all preschools. Funding for these improvements was made available by South Dublin NEYAI. This area of work was complemented by study trips the mentor and some early year's educators made to Norway and Donegal. Both of these trips focused on the outdoor area. In terms of curriculum training, the mentor facilitated a session in each of the preschools. Afterwards, the mentor reported that 7 of the 8 preschool settings were not aware of what their curriculum was or how they should implement it. According to the mentor this training input marked a pivotal point of the pre-development work. Additionally, learning story training was offered to 2

members of staff from each preschool. The manager selected the members of staff who would attend. It was the responsibility of the trained staff to translate the learning into their setting. The mechanisms by which this occurred are discussed further in Chapter 5.

The pre-development phase for the mentoring component lasted for 9 months. The project team felt that this time was important to build relationships with each of the preschools, to plan and negotiate actions and embed the project which would be implemented over the following 3 years.

### *Implementation*

**Influenced by work during and learning from the pre-development phase, an implementation plan was devised to support the work of the mentor. The mentoring component was the most resourced component of the intervention in terms of on-the-ground delivery with the preschools.** The implementation of the mentoring component is discussed under 5 separate headings.

#### *(a) Framework for Delivery*

When the implementation plan was agreed, on-site work began in each preschool. This on-site work was guided by two documents:

1. The service level agreement (see appendix 9)
2. The service level action plan (see appendix 10)

The service level agreement was a bespoke plan developed in partnership between the mentor and each preschool. The agreement outlined how the mentor would implement changes within the service, the targeted areas for intervention input, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the manager and early year's educators and basic logistical arrangements. The service level action plan was a planning tool used by the mentor which outlined tailored plans for each service. Specifically, this planning tool included information on the areas for the development and a rationale; the timeline for implementation in each quarter and the action; outputs and anticipated outcomes for each of the proposed activities. Each preschool had their own service level action plan. The development of the plans were guided by the ECERS and ITERS handbooks, part of the suite of resources being used by the evaluation team to measure quality. Aistear and Síolta were used on an ongoing basis to guide the work of the mentor in terms of her work with services and provided a framework within which to work.

### *(b) Focus of Intervention Delivery*

Once the plans and agreements were negotiated and signed off the implementation of the mentoring component began. Seven of the eight preschools adopted a very similar service level action plan working on a new area each quarter. In 2013 the focus was

on environments in quarter 1, in quarter 2, the focus was activities, in quarter 3, the focus was programme structure and in quarter 4, the focus was interactions. Table 4 outlines the main activities for these environments, activities and programme structure. The work on interactions is discussed in this section below.

**Table 4** Target areas for environments, activities and programme structure

Domain	Target area
Environment	Defining spaces, rearrangement of rooms, relaxation spaces, space for privacy, child related display, space and equipment for gross motor play
Activities	Fine motor activities, art activities, music, science and nature
Programme Structure	Routines, free play curriculum, key worker system

Given that one preschool had received their Siolta accreditation, it was decided they would exclusively focus on interactions for all 4 quarters of 2013. It was felt that this preschool would benefit more from by-passing the environments, activities and programme structure elements of the programme and move into work focused on interactions. This preschool had their own service level agreement and service level work plan to reflect this work. There were a number of steps that the mentor and preschool engaged in during the interactions work with this one preschool. These included:

**Step 1:** The development of consistent interactions guidelines (see appendix 11)

**Step 2:** Videoing of the early year's educators by mentor

**Step 3:** Video feedback in groups underpinned by reflective dialogue (see appendix 12)

**Step 4:** Develop implementation plan based on feedback (see appendix 13)

By the 3rd quarter of 2013 the mentor had taken the learning from the work on interactions in this project, and developed it to inform her input on interactions with the other 6 services involved in the project. At this stage the mentor was also receiving her own professional development support from a member of the expert group to support and develop her expertise in interactions, particularly in terms of re formulating the approach(moving from group to individual feedback).

The time spent and lessons learned during the interactions input in this preschool proved very useful in the preparation of the interaction input for the other 6 preschools (note: one preschool had withdrawn from the programme by this stage of implementation). Following one round of video and feedback with the staff from 6 services, the mentor participated in the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It training to support the delivery of the remaining interactions training with early year's educators. Two additional rounds of video and feedback were then implemented. The interactions training was rolled out in the 6 other preschools as it was in the preschool who had received interactions training for a full year previous to this. There were two main differences, Step 3 (video feedback) was delivered on an individual basis rather than as a group, and secondly, there were significant limitations on the availability of staff time to engage in this time consuming work. The Mentoring for Quality Practice in Early Years Education and Care: Implementation Guide details the video practice and feedback in great detail (South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, 2014a).

### *(c) Mentors Approach*

During the completion of the service level agreements the mentor and the managers discussed the best approach the mentor could adopt when engaging with the preschools e.g. non-contact time; the mentor being present in the rooms with the early year's educators; mentor meetings with all staff; mentor meetings with room leaders; meetings with management, etc. Managers chose what worked best for their preschools



and the final decision was unique to each preschool. The mentor's visits to each preschool was documented within a Mentor Support and Development Record (see appendix 14). The record described the focus of the visit, strengths and modifiable areas observed during the visit, new agreed goals and actions to be taken by both the mentor and the early year's educators. After the visit the mentor sent a copy of the completed record to the manager whose responsibility it was to share it with the early year's educators for discussion. It was recommended that a copy of the record should hang on the staff notice board.

#### (d) Time

During quarter one when the preschools focused on environments, **it was acknowledged that a certain amount of time needed to be allocated to the preschool for the mentoring intervention to have an impact. The negotiation for non-contact time at this point of the implementation phase was critical to the later development of the programme.** Initially, the individual boards of management agreed this time allocation, which was later managed by the preschool manager. The mentor developed schedules on a quarterly basis which were then agreed with the manager of the preschool. The time spent in each preschool varied and site visits were mainly planned in conjunction with the preschool's needs. The mentor timetabled approximately 2 visits per month to each preschool. Each visit lasted approximately 3 hours. Non-contact time was not always guaranteed as this depended on the ratios within the preschool on any given visit.

#### Techniques used to encourage change

The mentor utilised a number of behaviour change techniques (Abraham and Michie, 2008) during the implementation of the mentoring programme. Of note were the following:

- Provide information on specific topics
- Prompt specific goal-setting
- Set graded tasks
- Prompt review of goals
- Provide instruction
- Prompt self-monitoring of practice
- Provide feedback on performance
- Positive reinforcement

The mentor also self-reported the following as critical attributes she possessed during the programme implementation:

- listened carefully to concerns
- monitored progress
- showed a sensitivity to ethnic and cultural issues and was respectful of professional needs, interests and work roles

- recognised and respected the significance of the role and its potential power
- provided feedback in a thoughtful and timely fashion

The key learning in terms of facilitating change related to the mentoring input, which brought services to a point of being able and wanting to engage. It was important that the mentor supported each preschool to develop in areas where they felt they needed to improve or in which they had an interest.

#### (e) Resources

The mentor utilised a number of resources throughout the programme implementation. The most important being the ECERS and ITES handbooks, the Síolta handbook, and access to an early year's quality specialist who provided professional development for the mentor particularly during the delivery of the interactions work. The project staff also developed a number of resources during the life of the South Dublin NEYAI, the most critical resources used by the mentor were the Service Level Agreements, the Service Level Action Plan and the Mentor Support and Development Record.

#### Sustainability

Sustaining the work of this component was always a priority for the project team. Several steps throughout the delivery of this intervention aimed to contribute to the sustainability of the work carried out. Firstly, the time invested in the beginning by the project team to build relationships with the managers and early year's educators was successful in securing buy-in from the preschools to participate in what was a long-term, high intensity intervention. Secondly, the use of behaviour change techniques throughout the delivery of the intervention aimed to embed and sustain the key messages from inputs, training and facilitated sessions with the mentor. Thirdly, securing places for early year's educators on courses such as the Hanen Training and the Advanced Diploma in Teaching Training and Assessing Learning post-intervention was used to reinforce the learning from the working with the mentor as well as invest in the staff employed within the preschools in the hope that they would continue to mentor within their own setting. Fourthly, underpinning all of the mentors work in national frameworks (Síolta and Aistear) and internationally recognised resources (ECERS, ITES and Hanen) contributed to the sustainability of the programme. Finally, the engagement of the South Dublin County Childcare Committee as a significant partner in this project ensured that the project was on local agendas. As a legacy tool, South Dublin NEYAI Consortium have produced a detailed implementation guide which

	Mentoring Component							
	Year 1 (2012)			Year 2 (2013)				Year 3 (2014)
	Qr.2	Qr.3	Qr.4	Qr.1	Qr.2	Qr.3	Qr.4	Qr.1
Pre-development Phase								
Relationship building								
Study trips								
Outdoor area improvements								
Curriculum training								
Learning story training								
Early years educators self-assessments								
Implementation Phase								
Interaction intervention (1 preschool)								
Environments intervention (7 preschools)								
Routines intervention (7 preschools)								
Activities intervention (6 preschools)								
Hanen training for mentor								
Interaction intervention (7 preschools)								
Sustainability Phase								
Hanen training for early years educators								
Advanced Diploma in Teaching, Training and Assessing Learning								

**Figure 9** Deliverables of the mentoring component

details the pre-development, implementation and sustainability activities of the mentoring programme (South Dublin NEYAI Consortium, 2014a).

#### 4.3.3 Parent and Child Consultation

##### *Pre-development*

A review of tools to be used to implement this intervention component commenced in 2013. The purpose of these tools were to support preschools

improve their engagement with families. The Well Connected Toolkit was originally proposed as the tool of choice, but on later inspection, it was decided that this was not appropriate as it required a member of the project team to be on-site within the preschool. It was felt that preschools may feel saturated with additional visits alongside the mentor and the evaluation team. The Lets Listen resource created by the Young Children's Voices Network (YCVN) along with the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) were identified

as suitable resources. The Let's Listen resource is designed to support the development of a listening culture in early year's settings. The Mosaic Approach is a framework for listening which recognises the different languages or voices of children, treats children as experts and agents in their own lives; is reflexive; adaptable and focusses on children's lived experiences. The two resources were presented to the peer group (preschool managers) who were all in agreement with the choice of tools. All eight preschools were invited to participate in the piloting of the resources and two agreed to participate.

### *Implementation*

The project development worker operated alongside the two preschools who agreed to participate in the pilot study. The preschool who opted to pilot the Mosaic Approach explored and looked at ways in which they could understand how children viewed their preschool and what was important to them in their preschool and their home environment. Each child who participated in this pilot study (n=22) was given a disposable camera to capture, document and share their views and thoughts. Early years educators from one room in the preschool worked alongside the children and parents to implement this approach. Children used the cameras within their preschools and homes to identify what was important to them and have their voices heard. This was particularly important for children who had limited verbal skills. The preschool who opted to pilot the Lets Listen resource was spearheaded through the manager. The development worker along with the manager undertook a review of the preschool in terms of how they listen to and record young children's voices focussing on domains of the Lets Listen resource specifically on the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments, learning and development, partners and planning. The review took 4 hours and resulted in identifying gaps in relation to partners and planning. As a result the preschool worked to develop a map in the preschool which identifies all of the different countries where families come from. The preschool continue to work with the parents and have implemented a number of actions to engage parents e.g. requesting a photo of something that is important to them and their families.

### *Sustainability*

Once the piloting of both approaches ceased, the outcomes and experiences were shared with the managers at a peer group meeting. Each manager was offered an opportunity along with a small amount of funding to introduce either one of the approaches into

their preschool. Four of the six preschools agreed that it was something that they were interested in but they were not sure about when they would have the time to roll it out. Most preschool managers agreed that the Mosaic Approach was the most appropriate for their preschool. The reasons for this included that it was more visual, instant gains were observed, staff were engaged in the process, the level of skill and time demanded by the Lets Listen resource was low, whereas the Lets Listen resource required more paperwork and planning and only engaged the preschool manager which left in doubt whether the impact would reach the early years educators, children and their families. The preschool which piloted the Mosaic Approach continued to roll out the approach to another preschool also under her management. This continued roll-out has resulted in the design of a community wall where children and families used cameras to identify areas of their community which was important to them. The photos are currently displayed in a room of the preschool. At the time of conducting the evaluation field work, no other preschool had formally adopted either of the approaches.

## **4.3.4 Professional Development**

### *Pre-development*

The pre-development work for this component commenced in 2013. The development worker arranged to meet with the preschool managers to discuss their current practices in relation to the professional development of staff in their preschool; this included a review of their recruitment and induction procedures, their practices in relation support and supervision, the preschools policies and procedures and the structure of appraisals. The meetings also focused on what was meant by the term 'professional development' and what the expectations of the preschool were. The findings from these individual preschool reviews revealed that there was great variation between preschools, which resulted in managers identifying gaps within their management practices. This prompted discussions within peer group meetings and it was felt by preschool managers that additional support was required particularly in relation to human resource management. The project team undertook a thorough review of best practice approaches to supporting managers in the area of human resource management. In line with the inter-agency working ethos of the South Dublin NEYAI, the project team leveraged support from external agencies including Early Childhood Ireland and South Dublin County Childcare Committee, their consortium, the expert group and the peer group throughout this phase of pre-development.

### *Implementation*

This phase commenced with the development of a generic continued professional development portfolio. This portfolio was later used to facilitate a session with managers to review their current policies and practices within each preschool. Following discussions within the peer group, it was decided that each preschool would develop their own continued professional development statement and policy. Throughout 2013, the development officer worked with each preschool manager to look at how continued professional development could be supported within each setting, while also resolving concerns from the boards of management in relation to expectations of promotion from the staff. Once the continued professional development statement and policy had been developed by each preschool it was shared with the boards of managements for sign-off. Two preschools opted out of participating in this component. One preschool reported that they feared that the staff were being overloaded while the other preschool reported that their board of management was engaging in the development of a strategic plan and they wanted to avoid duplication of work. As well as working alongside managers and boards of management, the project development officer also undertook training with early years educators. This brief training focused on the definition of professional development and the importance of using a continued professional development portfolio. The roll out of this training was received by 5 preschools and the delivery varied from preschool to preschool. In all 5 preschools, the training took place during the staff meeting time.

### *Sustainability*

The project staff maintained contact with the preschool managers after the training had been delivered. The purpose of this contact was to ensure that managers continued to support their staff in using their professional development portfolios. Early years educators were also visited by the project team to observe how they were progressing with the use of their portfolios. The quality mentor also reinforced the importance of keeping the professional development portfolio up to date and encouraged staff to file any training or inputs they undertook with the mentor into their professional development portfolios. The project team reported that the uptake of the professional development portfolios varied among preschools, with staff from some preschools continuing to develop theirs while other staff didn't engage in the process. Additionally, managers undertook the Quality Service, Better Outcomes training through the Childhood Development Initiative. A training session delivered

over 2 days and funded through SDCCC supported managers with support and supervision of staff. Follow up practice clinics, again supported through SDCCC, facilitated managers to focus on HR practice issues.

### *4.3.5 Work Placement*

#### *Pre-development*

Work commenced on the workplace learning component in April 2013, which comprised of two elements, namely, the development and delivery of a Trainer of Trainer's programme and secondly the development and roll out of a work placement model. The alignment of these two actions was intended to be synergetic, bringing together the trained onsite (staff) mentor who would professionally support, induct and enculturate new staff and students, drawing on an innovative and tested workplace learning model.

Exploratory work began to identify key staff within the preschool settings who potentially could fulfil an in house mentoring role. Simultaneously, discussions were initiated with a number of training providers, (Kings College, PDL, Carmichael House, Meithael, CDI) to develop or source a suitable accredited training programme. It was felt strongly by the consortium and steering group that the programme identified would have to sit on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) thus providing recognition for learning and pathways for progression.

Initial contact was made with local colleges in the South Dublin area offering early childhood courses, to establish their interest in being involved in the work placement model. Changes were underway in the education sector, the timing of the approach to the colleges was not suitable and this element of the component could not proceed.

The pre-development phase of this component was significantly hampered by a number of national policy and infrastructural changes, which saw the establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) replacing the national awarding bodies FETAC and HETAC; the dissolution of FAS the National Training Agency and the replacement of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) with Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Coupled with changing legislation, which established new qualification requirements in preschool services, the possibility did not exist to develop and secure accreditation for a new Trainer of Trainer's /mentoring module at that time.

#### *Implementation*

In the second half of 2013, negotiations took place between a number of consortium agencies (SDCCC, SDCP and South Dublin NEYAI) to source and fund suitable mentoring training. Early Childhood Ireland had certification to deliver a Specialist Advanced Diploma in Teaching, Training and Assessing learning, accredited through City & Guilds, which met the requirements of staff, managers and the consortium. Through the peer group network, it was agreed that 2 staff from each preschool would be selected to participate in the training which commenced with an introductory session in December 2013 and runs until June 2014 on a bi-weekly basis.

To progress the work placement component the steering group agreed to focus on the development of a practice guide to work placement. Support was sought and obtained from Pobal to enable work on the practice guide to continue. Two of the seven preschools, both with extensive experience of work placement agreed to share their learning on this topic. An externally facilitated follow-up session enabled both services to identify, review and evaluate the work placement processes, procedures and practices within their own settings. This contributed two valuable case studies to the final guide.

The methodology guiding the development of the practice guide included a literature review, the two case studies, interviews with tutors delivering FETAC Level 5 and an online survey with stakeholders, all of which contributed to the final draft of the practice guide to work placement.

#### *Sustainability*

The capacity and skill-set of the staff undertaking the accredited mentoring training is core to the sustainability of this component. It is envisaged that these committed staff members in developing the competencies and confidence to mentor new staff and placement students in their services, will embed best practice in their settings; will be well positioned to effectively share learning with others; and will sustain and build on the learning from the project.

Circumstances mitigated against the creation of the work placement model. In its stead the development of the practice guide gathers learning from the project and provides a legacy for the services and the broader sector.

### **4.3.6 Corporate Governance**

#### *Pre-development*

This component sought to support governance in participating boards of management and to assist them

in identifying and addressing their own development needs. In 2012 research was undertaken to determine an appropriate tool to be used with and by the various boards of management of participating community preschools in the NEYAI project. The Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in Ireland was selected as the most proportionate and user friendly tool. Contact was made with the chairpersons of each board to advise on the local evaluation strategy and to garner their support for participation in completing the Code of Governance. At this point in time a series of breakfast briefings, hosted by SDCCC were made available to the boards of management in the NEYAI project services.

#### *Implementation*

In March 2013 work with the boards continued. Contact was re-established, one-to-one meetings with the NEYAI co-ordinator took place in preparation for the Board's engagement with the local evaluation team, who would facilitate a self-evaluation session against the Governance Code criteria. In the period May 2013 to July 2013, four evaluation sessions took place with the boards of Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services Ltd., St. Mary's, Tallaght Day Care Centre and Young Explorers preschool. Subsequently, training options were offered by the NEYAI project team to the boards which included HR support and supervision. A further option for training and supports to address any aspect of board performance arising out of the self-evaluation exercise was available to the groups. Some limited strategic planning support was provided to one board, but overall for various reasons there was limited take up on the training offered.

#### *Sustainability*

All boards of management in the South Dublin NEYAI project have taken the initial steps in engaging with the Governance Code, which aims to support boards in applying good practice principles, in being compliant and accountable, transparent and fair. Feedback from the evaluation process provides a starting point in meeting the requirements of the Governance Code.

This chapter aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of the breadth of the South Dublin NEYAI interventions and the range of activities delivered under each of the six components. The programme was ambitious in its design, however, in the main, fidelity to the original proposal was maintained. This chapter sets a context for the next chapter which presents the research findings from the evaluation.





## Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from the qualitative and quantitative measurement procedures as well as the process evaluation.

- Section 5.2 describes the quantitative findings in relation to sample descriptives for preschools, staff and children.
- Section 5.3 describes the quantitative findings from the quality assessments across time and the findings from the staff survey in relation to their general thoughts on the programme, their rating of the activities and inputs, their experience of working with a mentor and participating in professional development and their perceived impact of the programme on their practice.
- Section 5.4 describes the qualitative findings from the evaluation, these include interviews with managers at 18 months (mid-test) and focus groups with staff at 30 months (follow-up).
- Section 5.5 describes the findings from the process evaluation in relation to reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the intervention (Glasgow et al., 1999).

### 5.2 Sample Descriptives

The descriptive data for preschools, children and staff-level variables at baseline, mid-test and follow-up are displayed in Table 3. Independent-samples t-tests revealed that there were no significant changes within the sample from baseline to mid-test, from mid-test to follow-up or from baseline to follow-up. However, some changes are worth noting; the decrease in staff from 88 at baseline to 75 at mid-test and the increase in children from 347 at baseline to 411 at mid-test. One explanation for the decrease in staff numbers may be as a result of one preschool losing a number of their community employment (CE) staff in 2012/2013, which is also reflected in the drop in CE staff from 34 at baseline to 25 at mid-test. The increase in children attending the preschools from baseline to mid-test is likely to be as a result of the new staff ratios introduced for September 2012 with respect to preschool provision within preschools participating in

the ECCE Programme (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). Aside from the increase in the number of children attending the preschools and the decrease in staff, specifically CE, there were no other major sample descriptive changes from baseline to mid-test or mid-test to follow-up. Interestingly, 100% of the preschools reported operating a play-based curriculum while one service had just obtained Síolta validation prior to being involved in this project. A FETAC Level 5 qualification was the dominant qualification obtained by staff working within the preschools, with 56.8%, 64.0% and 65.7% having achieved a Level 5 at baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively. These findings align with the National NEYAI dataset where the data was collected at approximately the same time as the baseline data collection for the local level evaluation (McKeown et al., 2014). McKeown and colleagues (2014) report that 52.0% of staff working within the South Dublin NEYAI had obtained a Level 5 award. It is worth noting that the national evaluation only included staff working with children, however, the local evaluation asked for information on all staff working within the preschool. Another interesting finding arising from the sample descriptive questionnaire reported that the number of children diagnosed with additional needs represented 2.0%, 2.0% and 3.0% of the whole sample at baseline, mid-test and follow-up, respectively. Anecdotal evidence provided by managers and staff from all of the preschools suggested that they suspected more children had additional needs but had not yet received their assessment of need and therefore were undiagnosed.

**Table 5** Sample descriptives

	Baseline	Mid-test	Follow-up
<b>Preschool Characteristics</b>			
Number of preschools	8	8	7
Number with Síolta validation	1	1	1
Sessional (%)	100	100	100
Full day-care (%) <sup>p</sup>	25	25	25
Baby room (%)	0	0	0
Wobbler room (%)	25	25	25
Toddler room (%)			
Preschool room (%)	100	100	100
Play-based curriculum (%)	100	100	100
<b>Child Characteristics</b>			
Number of children	347	411	440
Number of children with additional needs <sup>†</sup>	10	8	9
Average age	4.2 ± 0.4	4.1 ± 0.7	4.2 ± 0.2
<b>Preschool Staff Characteristics</b>			
Number of staff	88	75	70
Average number of staff per service	11.0 ± 4.3	9.3 ± 3.6	10 ± 2.7
Number of full-time staff	35	36	35
Number of part-time staff	25	24	22
Number of CE staff	34	25	26
Number of staff with level 4	5	1	1
Number of staff with level 5	50	48	46
Number of staff with level 6	17	17	15
Number of staff with level 7/8 (Ord./Hons. Degree)	6	7	4
Number of staff with level 9/10 (Mas./ PhD)	1	2	1
Number staff with no qualification	19	14	16
<p><sup>p</sup> Two preschools within the sample operated full-day care alongside their sessional provision</p> <p><sup>†</sup> The additional need was diagnosed by a professional</p>			

## 5.3 Quantitative Findings

### 5.3.1 Quality within Preschool Environment

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare scores from the ECERS observations at baseline, mid-test and follow-up. It is important to note that the rating scale for ECERS ranges from 1-7 (see Table 6 for description of rating scale).

**Table 6** Description of ECERS rating scale

Inadequate	Minimal	Good	Excellent
1	3	5	7

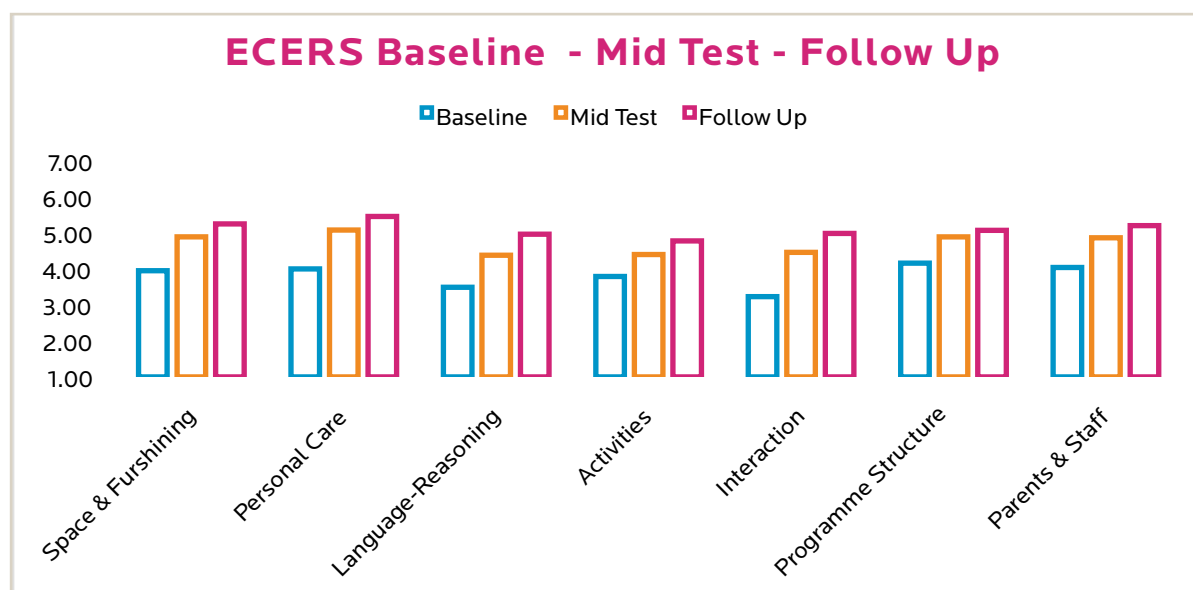
**The intervention had no negative effect on any element of the preschool environment as measured by ECERS. There was a significant effect for time across all of the 7 subscales with the largest effect size observed in the subscale interactions.** There was a programme effect on the interactions subscale [ $F(2,7) = 89.73$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ], which is likely given the significant input focussing on interactions during the final implementation phase of the programme. **This finding was also reflected within the staff survey and staff focus groups, which is discussed further in section 5.4.2.** It is also noteworthy that this subscale scored lowest at baseline. All other subscales showed improvements across time. The means, standard deviations, p-values and effect sizes are presented in Table 7.

Of interest is the lack of intervention effect on programme structure from baseline to mid-test. **The reason for a lack of change on this subscale may be due to an already moderate score at baseline, therefore causing a ceiling effect at mid-test, however this subscale showed significant improvements across time, suggesting that a long-term intervention (>2 years) aiming to improve quality within preschools is necessary to embed change.**

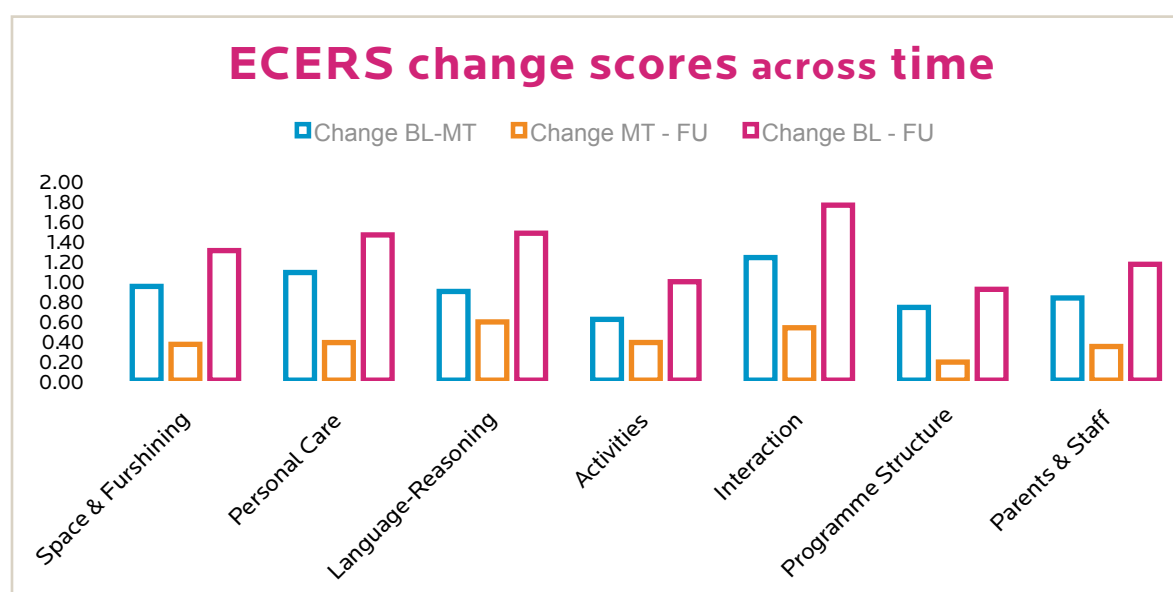
Overall, the results revealed that the multi-component intervention provided statistically significant benefits in the preschool rooms. Figure 10 graphically displays the changes in scores across time.

**Table 7** Average mean and standard deviations from ECERS observations

	Baseline (mean, SD)	Mid-test (mean, SD)	Follow-up (mean, SD)	P-value	Effect size
Space and Furnishing	3.95 (.34)	4.89 (.43)	5.25 (.54)	0.000 ***	.962
Personal Care Routines	4.00 (.52)	5.08 (.38)	5.46 (.34)	0.000 ***	.966
Language and Reasoning	3.49 (.54)	4.38 (.70)	4.96 (1.06)	0.002 ***	.843
Activities	3.79 (.43)	4.40 (.59)	4.78 (.57)	0.005 ***	.783
Interactions	3.23 (.47)	4.46 (.66)	4.99 (.63)	0.000 ***	.934
Programme Structure	4.16 (.86)	4.89 (.72)	5.07 (.59)	0.001 ***	.846
Parents and Staff	4.04 (.57)	4.89 (.56)	5.20 (.73)	0.031*	.631
Significant effects are indicated by asterisks: * $P < .05$ , ** $P < .01$ , *** $P < .001$					



**Figure 10** ECERS Scores across Time-points



**Figure 11** ECERS Scores Change Scores across Time-points

The intervention had no negative effect on any element of the infant and toddler environment. Similar to the ECERS scores, there was a significant effect for time across all of the 7 subscales, with the largest effect size also observed in the subscale interactions [ $F(2,3) = 62.73, p < 0.000$ ]. Although the results generated for the ITERS are positive, their level of significance for this group is less reliable than the ECERS results due to a smaller sample of preschools involved in ITERS observations. However, this data closely mirrors the ECERS scores on many of the subscales and suggests that there is a consistency in trends in terms of quality which track from the infant

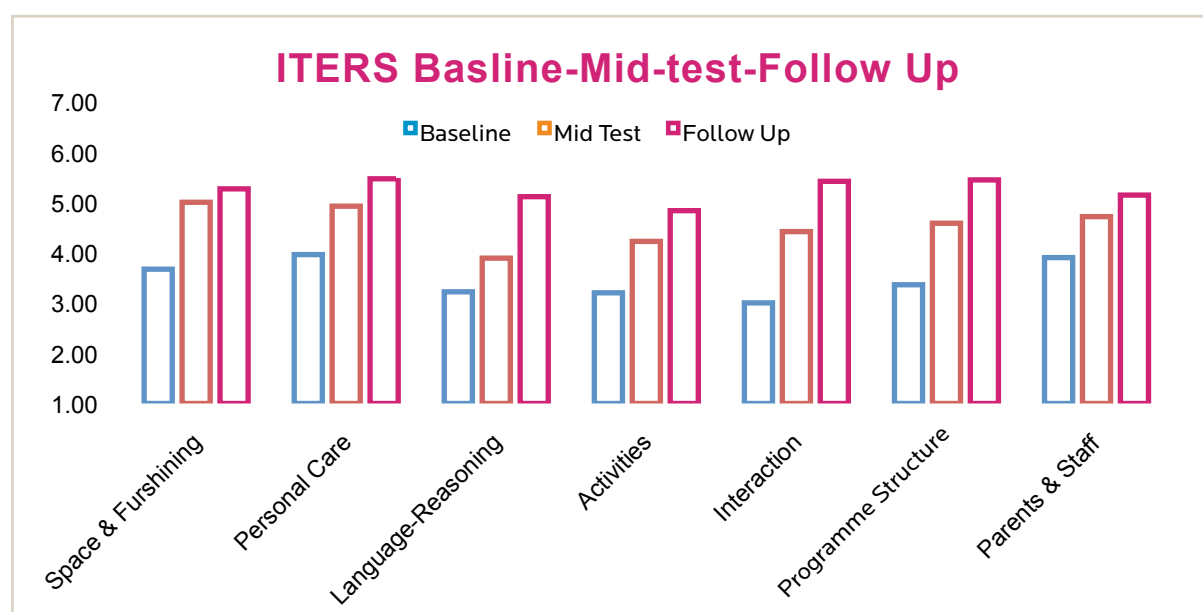
and toddler age group to the preschool age group.

The standard deviations within the ITERS data suggest that the most variation in scores occurred within the subscales listening and talking and parents and staff, suggesting that more tailored intervention approaches for individual preschools may be justified for these components of the infant and toddler environment. Table 8 describes the scores (mean (SD)) for each subscale at each time point along with the p-value and effect sizes. Like the ECERS, the rating scale for ITERS ranges from 1-7 (see table 4 for description of rating scale). Figures 12 and 13 describe the changes in subscale scores across time.

**Table 8** Average Mean and Standard Deviations from ITERS Observations

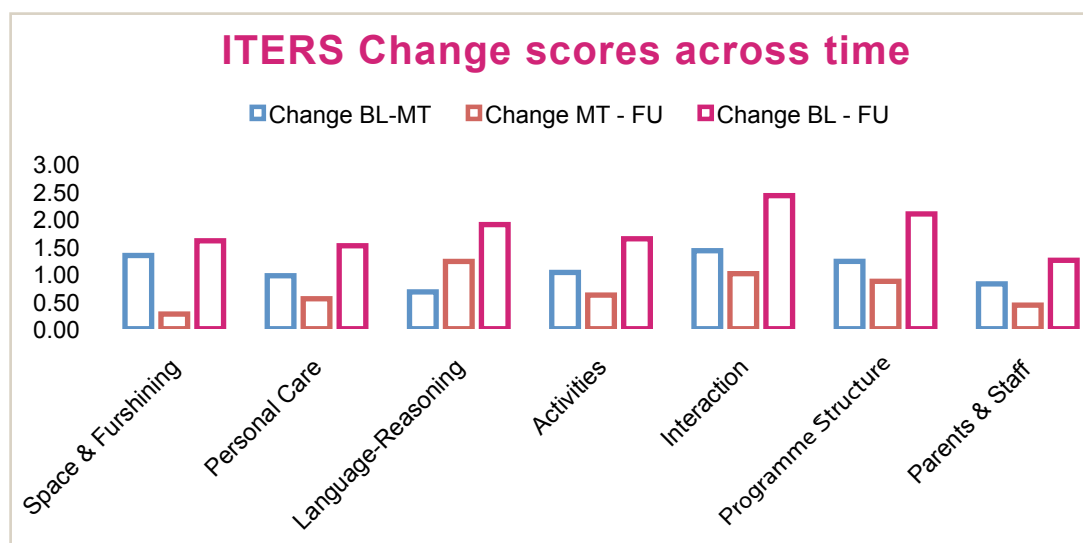
	Baseline (mean, SD)	Mid-test (mean, SD)	Follow-up (mean, SD)	P-value	Effect size
Space and Furnishing	3.66 (.12)	5.00 (.53)	5.27 (.42)	0.000 ***	.871
Personal Care Routines	3.96 (.50)	4.92 (.45)	5.47 (.50)	0.01 **	.629
Language and Reasoning	3.22 (.84)	3.89 (.77)	5.11 (1.01)	0.000 ***	.831
Activities	3.20 (.52)	4.22 (.56)	4.83 (.24)	0.007 **	.787
Interaction	3.00 (.25)	4.42 (.38)	5.42 (.38)	0.001 ***	.891
Programme Structure	3.36 (.63)	4.58 (.72)	5.45 (.39)	0.002 **	.738
Parents and Staff	3.90 (1.05)	4.71 (.90)	5.14 (.50)	0.04 *	.691

Significant effects are indicated by asterisks: \*  $P < .05$ , \*\*  $P < .01$ , \*\*\*  $P < .001$



**Figure 12** ITERS Scores across Time-points

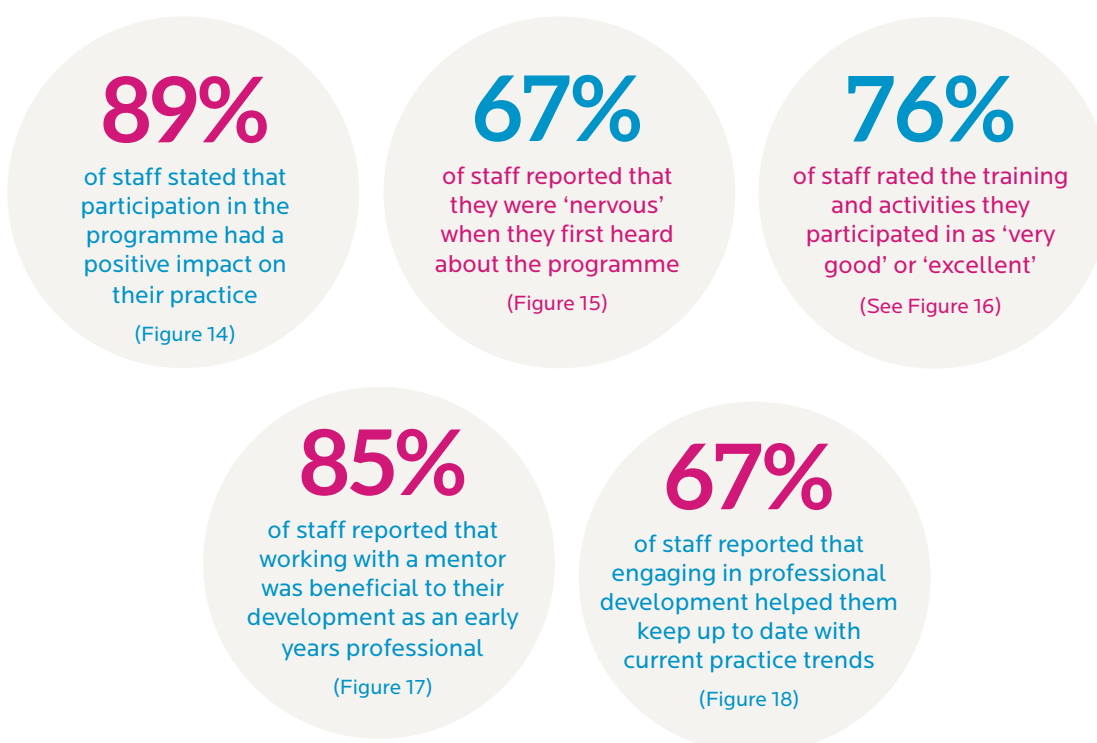


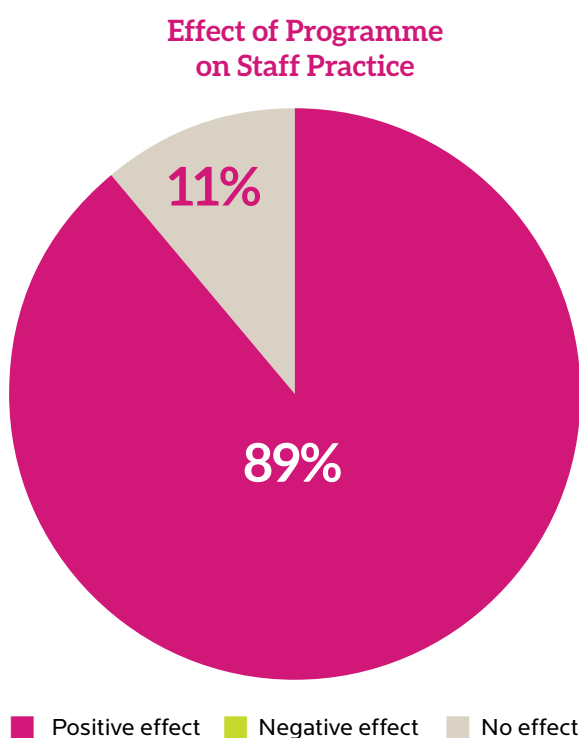


**Figure 13** ITERS change scores across time-points

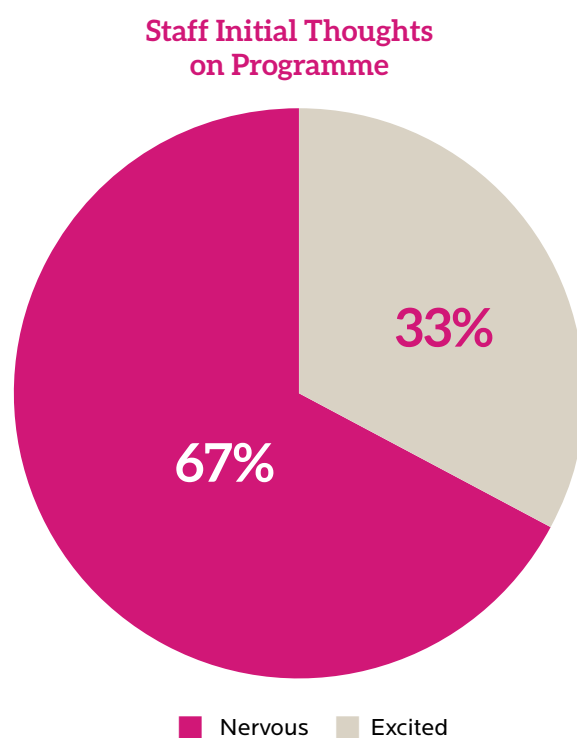
### 5.3.2 Staff Experiences

An online survey was administered to all staff who participated in the South Dublin NEYAI after the delivery of the intervention had ceased. This survey investigated the general perspective the staff had of their experience of participating in the programme; how they ranked the activities and inputs they received; how they felt about working alongside a mentor and participating in professional development, and how they perceived the programme had impacted on them as a professional working within the early childhood care and education sector.

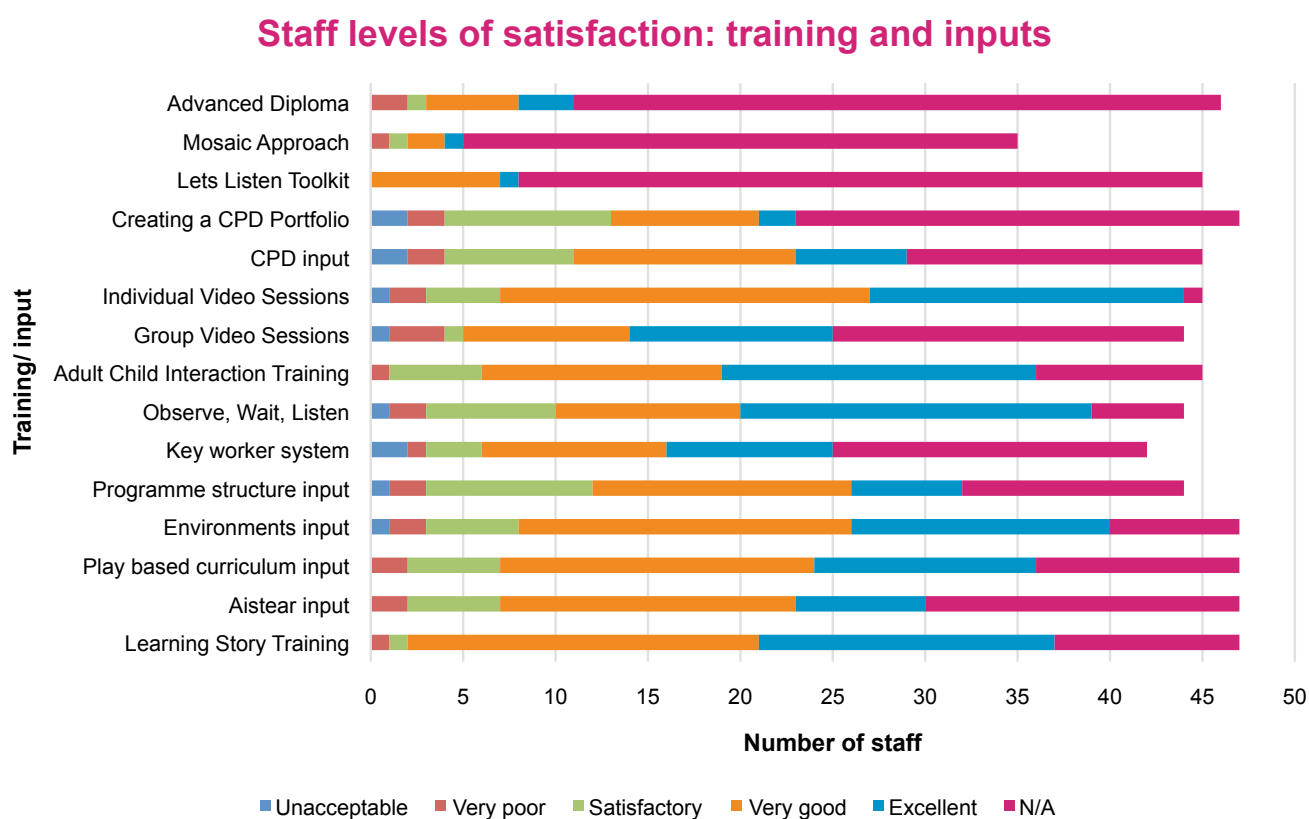




**Figure 14** Effect of programme on staff practice

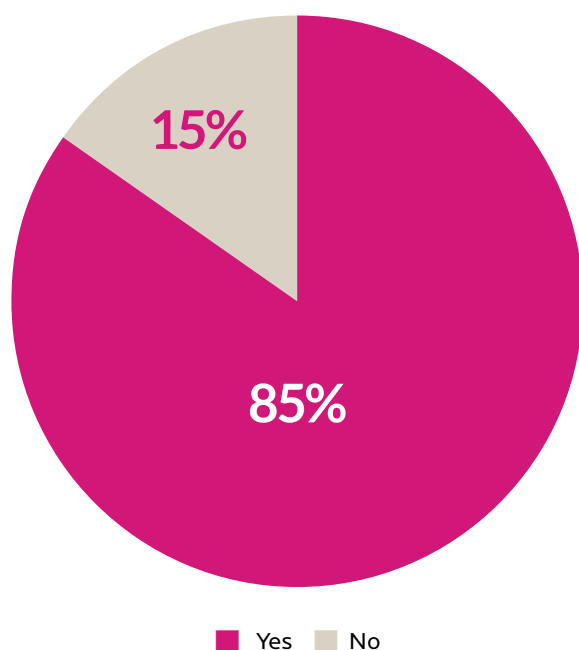


**Figure 15** Initial thoughts upon hearing of programme



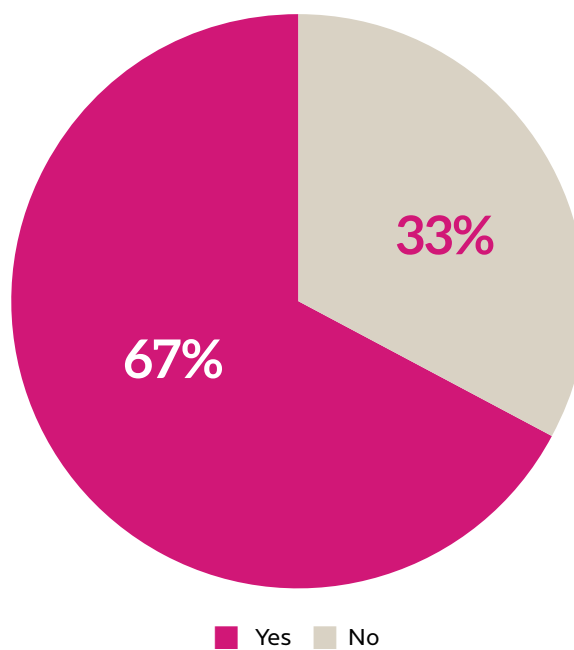
**Figure 16** Staff levels of satisfaction for training and activities received

Staff perception of working with a mentor: do you believe that working with a mentor has been beneficial to your development as an early years professional?



**Figure 17** Staff perceived impact of working alongside a mentor

Has engaging in professional development impacted on current practice trends?



**Figure 18** The impact of professional practice engagement on current practice trends

The five main findings from the survey are as follows:

The results from the survey suggest that staff had a positive experience of the programme, with 89% of staff reporting that participating in the South Dublin NEYAI had a positive impact on practice – this also mirrors the results from the ITERS and ECERS. Of interest was the finding around the staff level of nervousness before the programme commenced, with 67% of staff reporting they felt nervous upon hearing about the programme. This justifies the energies invested during the pre-development phase of the programme, specifically the building of relationships with preschools and staff and embedding the implementation and evaluation plans within all preschools. It also suggests that time must be set aside during programme design to bring staff along through the process as partners in the implementation and the evaluation and not just as participants. In the survey, staff rated each training or input they received,

the input the staff rated most highly was ‘individual video feedback’ with 82% of staff rating it as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’. This input was part of the mentoring component of the intervention; the component to which staff received greatest exposure to. Staff rated the mentor very highly, with 85% of staff reporting that working alongside a mentor was beneficial to their development as an early years professional. When responding to questions related to professional development, staff did not rate these as highly and in the main were often rated as ‘non-applicable’. Some reasons for this is that the staff received less exposure to the professional development intervention component. Additionally, not all staff received professional development inputs, information was often translated back through the manager or room leader which begs the question of how effective this model of information translation is. This is explored further in the findings from the staff focus groups (Section 5.4.2).

## 5.4 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings describe the managers and educators experience of the programme. Systematic reviews of qualitative research show that key aspects of study design are often not reported, and for that reason we have adopted the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) to report the qualitative findings. These criteria comprise a formal reporting checklist for in-depth interviews and focus groups; the most common methods for data collection in qualitative educational research (Tong et al., 2007). (See appendix 15 for the COREQ for the managers interviews and appendix 16 for the COREQ for the staff focus groups).

### 5.4.1 Managers Perspectives of the South Dublin NEYAI

In total 7 interviews were conducted with 7 managers of 8 preschools, (where one manager headed up two preschools.). The interviews took place during April 2013. Five key domains were explored during the interview, these included:

- Overall perception of the programme
- Beneficial elements of the programme
- Challenging elements of the programme
- Perceived impact of the programme on staff
- Sustainability of the programme

An overview of the results from the interviews with managers can be found in Tables 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. The findings presented in these tables outline higher and lower order themes as well as supporting quotes for each of the domains investigated.

#### *Overall Perception of the Programme*

All managers felt that at the time of interview, the programme was going well within their preschools, expressing that the additional support of a mentor was a valuable asset to their preschool environment. Managers felt that the presence of a mentor offered reassurance and confidence among staff. Six out of 7 of the managers felt that there was a great level of uncertainty within the programme in the beginning and that the level of accompanying change impacted on staff. This level of change was mainly in relation to an increased workload and subsequent increased pressure for staff. **The managers felt that time at the beginning of the project was required for the mentor to find an approach that worked with staff and that this was important to the success of the project.** As time progressed (after 1 year) and the managers and staff found their place within the programme, 5 out of 7 managers reported that they had noticed an improvement in the working environment, specifically

in terms of communication among staff and the physical environments within the rooms.

#### *Beneficial Elements of the Programme*

The mentor was one element of the programme that all managers felt was most beneficial, this can be explained due to the large weighting the mentoring component received in the overall programme. Managers (n=5) commented on how non-contact time for staff had been beneficial for the preschool. **This dedicated time was facilitated by the preschool manager and required a lot of organisation on behalf of the manager.** Once appropriate cover had been arranged, non-contact time allowed staff to leave the room in which they were working to revisit the goals the mentor had set during her previous visit, as well as set new goals for the future. This time also allowed for staff to plan together and work on their shared vision for the programme. Other benefits the managers noted were the observed changes they had noticed within the staff, specifically in relation to empowerment and confidence, however these were also linked to the work done by the mentor within the preschools.

#### *Challenging Elements of the Programme*

**The main challenge that the managers faced related to the concept of managing change within the preschool.** Change occurred in all preschools quite early on and in the beginning was quite intense, this change involved changes to the physical environment, changes to the curriculum as well as the physical presence of a mentor within the preschool. All managers noted that the change was welcome, however it was important that time was allocated accordingly to allow the mentor's messages sink in. **Another challenge that the managers faced (n=3) related to managing different points of view, which was particularly true for the boards of management, where the manager often felt unsure of the right thing to do where the boards were resistant to specific elements of the programme.** Additionally, when approval was needed from the board, it was often a tedious process trying to get agreement, resulting in additional stress and pressure for the managers. Although non-contact time was reported as being a beneficial element of the programme, managers (n=3) reported challenges associated with it, which related in the main to adhering to ratios and managing room schedules. Another challenge reported by 2 managers was the difficulty in managing the mentor and the preschool's own quality specialist. Given that their roles were similar, this proved a challenge for the manager to deal with. A reduction in the amount of visits the mentor conducted was suggested by the managers as a potential solution for this challenge.

### *Observed Changes in Staff*

**All of the observed changes in staff as witnessed by the manager were positive and included increased motivation, increased empowerment, more reflective educators, an increase in confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem – their belief in themselves to do their job better which resulted in a happier workforce.**

Interestingly, the managers noted that the attitude of the staff towards the mentor had changed as the programme progressed. When the programme started, the mentor required time to find a suitable approach and receive buy-in from staff. **As time progressed, the relationship between the mentor and the staff strengthened, resulting in the staff having more positive attitudes towards the mentor. This is further discussed in the findings from the staff focus group (section 5.4.2)**

### *Sustainability of the Programme*

The sustainability of this programme is core to the project and was therefore deemed an important topic

to investigate with the managers of the preschools.

It is important to note that these interviews were conducted at mid-test of the evaluation. At this point in time, managers (n=6) felt that they weren't yet ready to think about sustainability, for the programme to end and for the preschools to 'go it alone'. This reiterates the point regarding the duration of programmes such as the South Dublin NEYAI. Time is essential to allow those participating in the programme find their place and enter into a space which facilitates change. However, when probed, the managers felt that a floating mentor who would visit on occasion would be helpful to maintain high quality practice. Additionally, managers felt that the peer group meetings were also a forum that would contribute to sustaining learning from the programme. Lastly, managers felt that a tangible document e.g. an induction manual for new staff would be helpful in sustaining the beneficial work of the South Dublin NEYAI and would act as a resource to revisit when implementing changes within their preschools.



## Overall Thoughts on the South Dublin NEYAI programme

**Table 9** Thematic analysis: Managers overall thoughts on South Dublin NEYAI

POSITIVES		
Additional support (n=7)	Knowledge and awareness (n=6)	Improved working environment (n=5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Access to Quality Mentor</li> <li>■ Mentor's flexibility</li> <li>■ Mentor's personality</li> <li>■ Hands on approach</li> <li>■ Builds confidence among staff</li> <li>■ Reassurance</li> </ul> <p><i>"I mean it's brilliant; it's just fantastic for us to have the communication with the NEYAI team. At one stage we felt, not lost but, kind of here on your own but then with the mentor coming in it's like wow. You've got your routine and now you have extras to complement it. It has made us more focussed and enthusiastic about our job".</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Gaining knowledge through varied initiatives</li> <li>■ Incorporating learning stories</li> <li>■ Understanding the process of CPD</li> <li>■ Understanding the importance of evaluation</li> </ul> <p><i>"It's been really good for the staff in the rooms; when they completed the questionnaire about their practice - the feedback from that was absolutely fantastic. It raised their awareness around practice. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know, if you get me".</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better communication among staff</li> <li>■ Observing changes in physical environment</li> <li>■ Motivated and enthused staff</li> <li>■ Accepting the camera</li> <li>■ Accepting the need for change</li> </ul> <p><i>"The NEYAI mentoring project is another mechanism by which we can continue to develop ourselves and strive for best practice. The project also acts as a reassurance for us".</i></p>
NEGATIVES		
The beginning... (n=6)	Increased pressure (n=4)	Increased workload (n=3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Delay in getting project off the ground</li> <li>■ Uncertainty and fear of unknown</li> <li>■ Mentor finding approach that worked</li> <li>■ Dealing with change</li> </ul> <p><i>"It was slow at first to kind of get off the ground and I think that was kind of; well the mentors approach has kind of developed along the way. It just wasn't really working so well in the centre; just in the way you have to get used to each centre. So it was a bit slow."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spotlight on the service</li> <li>■ Feeling like we were being scrutinised</li> <li>■ Comparing ourselves to other services</li> </ul> <p><i>"No matter what you think people are going to come in and look at us and criticise us. Now that's not the way we feel; now we did in the beginning but of course there is going to be lots of ups and downs and we would be comparing ourselves to other services, wondering if we scored less than other services and what would it mean and that sort of thing, but now with time, we have learned more about the process and we understand it more. We know that you need to measure how we are doing, otherwise you won't know if the mentor works or not".</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Juggling responsibilities</li> <li>■ Ensuring mentor's approach was working</li> <li>■ Ensuring mentor's role and staff roles complement each other</li> </ul> <p><i>"There's a lot of input from us, actually a huge input from us. For me personally it has taken a lot of juggling to make sure that I have enough staff to allow the mentor to come in". (S.5)</i></p> <p><i>"We do have literacy issues with the staff in here so it needs to be really scaled back and we need to start everything at the very beginning. We need to make it really basic for everyone to kind of grasp. There was a bit of juggling around and we were a bit all over the place in the beginning, but we've settled into it and now it's ok".</i></p>



**Table 10** Thematic analysis: Beneficial elements of South Dublin NEYAI

Elements of the NEYAI programme that are particularly beneficial?	
The Mentor (n=7)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Focuses staff</li> <li>■ Mutual respect</li> <li>■ Flexible and adaptable approach</li> <li>■ Physical presence</li> <li>■ Feeling supported</li> <li>■ Learning through doing</li> </ul>	<p><i>"It's the support with the staff. For a change, it's not just me as the manager saying this is important, there is somebody coming in saying, yes, this is important and it almost echoes what I've been telling them".</i></p>
Observing Change (n=6)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Positive changes in physical environments</li> <li>■ Planning is more child focussed</li> <li>■ Documenting learning through learning stories</li> <li>■ Spending more time with children</li> <li>■ More relaxed environment</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The changes she helped us make to the environments have been great; we really love the new cosy corner. The children like to take some time out in there; it's made the room more relaxed overall."</i></p>
Empowered Staff (n=6)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Staff are working harder</li> <li>■ Staff enjoying their jobs more</li> <li>■ Staff eager to impress mentor</li> <li>■ More enthusiastic team</li> <li>■ Working together more</li> <li>■ Sharing ideas more</li> <li>■ Increased confidence in their ability</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I don't know where it comes from but it just seems to be that when the mentor comes in everyone listens. Their task is set and their task is done, the mentor really focuses them. I've set tasks many a time and I could probably go back now and still find that half of it is there - there is never an actual completion or whether it's that we don't look back and see, sit down and reflect or maybe bring the issue back up again. Whereas we know that when the mentor is coming back in and it has to be done by a certain timeframe and everyone just gets on with it. The staff are really motivated at the moment and are always up for a challenge, it's really great!"</i></p>
Achieving Non-Contact Time (n=5)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Goal setting</li> <li>■ Revisiting goals</li> <li>■ Troubleshooting</li> <li>■ Time out together</li> <li>■ A deserved break from the room</li> </ul>	<p><i>"We have non-contact time every Wednesday morning and on the day when the mentor comes in. So they get freed up for about half hour every Wednesday when the mentor is here and they meet in the staff room. They go through everything and set their targets and things like that. It's great for them, it's great for them to be able to get in there and it's great for them to do it together. They could have been done one to one but I think they just find it's more comforting together as there is strength in numbers. They bounce off each other different ideas; things that they might have changed that didn't work or things that they did change but didn't work. They love that time with the mentor and to get out of the room".</i></p>

**Table 11** Thematic analysis: Challenging elements of the South Dublin NEYAI

Elements of the NEYAI programme that are particularly challenging?	
<b>Dealing with Change (n=4)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Moving rooms around</li> <li>■ Implementing play-based curriculum</li> <li>■ Dialogue with parents</li> <li>■ New addition to room (mentor)</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I suppose it was difficult moving the room around but once all the staff had bought into the changes, then it was much easier. In the past I would change things around but the next day it would be back the way it was, cos the staff didn't understand why I was moving things, the mentor makes sure all the girls understand. That's the difference. Another challenge was the play based curriculum. We were thinking things like what if a parent comes to the door and their child is not sitting with the group; he's over here on his own. What does that look like to the parent?"</i></p>
<b>Managing Different Views (n=3)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uncertain of what the right thing to do is</li> <li>■ The board's resistance</li> <li>■ Approval from board (time consuming)</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The mentor sets lots of tasks for us. Some we have tried to do but some have been really tough for us and there is nothing we can do unless we bring it to the board and get some help. That can be a challenge. I found it very difficult to implement free choice because I understand what choice is but I don't think everyone else understands. If we are saying we are giving choice you can't say 'we don't do that'. I find that when I'm in the room the children have choice during that time but when I walk out it's not allowed. You hear 'you can't do that'.</i></p>
<b>Facilitating Non-Contact Time (n=3)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Difficulty to implement with tight ratios</li> <li>■ Difficult to timetable and adhere to timetable</li> <li>■ High levels of organisation required</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Non-contact time has been really hard for us. When NEYAI came in there was this lovely talk of us being able to get staff in and relieve people while they came into these rooms. I've been particularly lucky where I have got some Tus workers in and I have got extra staff there but they are not trained in childcare. What is very awkward for me on the days that the mentor is in and I have one person off sick it throws everything on its head. It's just very hard you have to get your person, who we call our floater; to go into the room let one person out. Go into another room let another person out. I suppose I'm looking at it as a balancing act. As a manager, I need to be quite organised for it to work".</i></p>
<b>Buy in from Staff (n=4)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ CE staff resistance</li> <li>■ Staff not grasping concept of free choice</li> <li>■ Staff not fully understanding purpose of learning stories</li> <li>■ Not enough time to embed learning</li> </ul>	<p><i>"We have a lot of CE staff who I think should be attending the meetings with the mentor because they come in and make changes too, and then say they don't feel that they need to be listening to the mentor but they need to understand why we are making these changes".</i></p>
<b>Managing Mentors Role/ mediating with other staff (n=2)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Too many visits</li> <li>■ Distinguishing between role of mentor and childcare co-ordinator</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The mentor presence has always been a bone of contention for us because we have a childcare coordinator. For her to come in and see someone doing that role already is hard. The mentor has brought some really good ideas as well".</i></p>

**Table 12** Thematic analysis: Observed changes in staff

## Observed Changes in Staff (n=7)

### Increased Motivation

"I found that the mentor really motivated the girls that day. \*\*\*\* came back in with all these curtains to hang up and she was all excited. I haven't seen that since we moved up here. She was really enthusiastic and trying to get things done".

### Increased Confidence

"In terms of the learning stories the staff are fantastic at doing them. In the beginning it was tough the staff didn't understand what they were or why they were doing them but as soon as they saw one done and seen how simple it was, their confidence grew".

### Attitude to Mentor

"There was never any resistance but they did not understand what the mentor was about. One of the girls was saying that they didn't understand what she was saying so she just stopped listening. It was very jargon based and a bit too complicated. It was very like an educated person just waffling on and the other girls were just not getting it. Definitely that has changed massively, the attitudes have changed. The mentor has really given them a sense of empowerment".

### Increased Sense of Empowerment

"Definitely 100%. Empowerment is the main difference I have noticed. Their voice is being heard, they have an opinion. I never realised that in my role I never gave them that space and I actually didn't realise I wasn't giving them that space. Taking part in the NEYAI has shown me when you give your staff an opportunity to speak then you get way more from them".

### More Reflective

"For me I saw straight away a change in a few people that I never thought would. The self-assessment questionnaire really made them reflect. I think for years there wasn't anything that questioned their work or their practice or why they were in childcare. I mean we lost two members of staff during the self-assessment questionnaire. I mean one in particular shouldn't have been in childcare".

### Happier Staff

"The momentum and the atmosphere in the room with the girls - they are just so much happier with the way things are calmer. It's just great and it's working".

**Table 13** Thematic analysis: Sustainability of the South Dublin NEYAI

## Sustaining the Programme

### GENERAL THOUGHTS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Not ready to go alone (n=6)	Haven't thought about it (n=4)	Doesn't matter to us (n=2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Project only settling down</li> <li>■ More time needed</li> <li>■ More resources needed</li> <li>■ Need to embed learning before leaving</li> </ul> <p><i>"It's too soon to pull the plug and think that everything will be OK, that the girls will know everything they need to know about working in childcare. That's impossible. We need time and we need resources. You have to remember that a lot of these girls have no formal education themselves, that's just the way the sector is right now. So we can't expect them to grasp concepts such as interactions straight away"</i> .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Focussing on learning at the moment</li> <li>■ Not ready to think of end point</li> </ul> <p><i>"I don't even want to think about the sustainability of the programme. You have to walk before you run as they say. We are only developing. We need support and we aren't ready to go alone yet. It takes time to layer in changes. I think with time the changes can be sustained, but it's very easy to slip back into your old ways"</i> .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Doing it all already</li> <li>■ Structure in place</li> </ul> <p><i>"The mentor's presence, no disrespect to her, won't have an effect on us. We have a childcare co-ordinator and the three room leaders so mentoring won't be missed because of our structure nothing personal to the mentor"</i> .</p>

### WHAT WOULD AID SUSTAINABILITY?

A floating mentor (n=6)	Maintaining peer group meetings (n=5)	A concrete document (n=3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Focuses staff</li> <li>■ Keeps staff on track</li> <li>■ Heightens interest levels among staff</li> </ul> <p><i>"It would be amazing if we could keep the mentor going in the long-term. These types of programmes need time. Like I know most of the girls are getting it, but we had a meeting recently and a couple of the girls aren't fully getting everything that the mentor is saying and maybe they don't feel confident enough yet to say it. We need time to make a change so keeping the mentor would be great for the service"</i> .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing issues</li> <li>■ Not feeling alone</li> <li>■ Challenge is making time</li> </ul> <p><i>"The peer group meetings are a great way to share issues, good stories and just generally discuss the project, however they do take time and it's hard to get away from the service sometimes. Maybe we need to just concentrate on one or two things and do that right, rather than spreading ourselves too thin. Sometimes, I reckon there is too much going on in the project"</i> .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Using ECERS manuals in-service</li> <li>■ A professional development manual</li> <li>■ An induction Manuals</li> </ul> <p><i>"After taking part in this project, I would really like to see one thing happen; Development Officer and I have done a lot of work on an induction piece - if we could have some sort of a coherent manual. Like a process that we all agreed. That way, we would have a physical tangible document that we could refer to and use when we have a new member of staff"</i> .</p>

### 5.4.2 Staff Perspectives of the South Dublin NEYAI

In total, 3 focus groups were conducted with 12 members of staff from 5 preschools. The focus groups took place during April 2014. Five key domains were explored during the focus group, these included:

- Fondest memory of programme
- Impact of programme on practice
- Impact of programme outside of work
- Perceived required training
- Translating and embedding learning within the preschool

An overview of the results from the focus groups with staff can be found in Tables 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. These results tables outline higher and lower order themes as well as supporting quotes for each of the domains investigated.

#### *Fondest Memory of Programme*

**All staff related their fondest memory of the programme to working with the mentor, this theme was particularly strong for the interactions training the staff received when they used the video within their rooms.** This was a unique finding as staff reported feeling anxious and nervous about having their practice videoed but once they received feedback from the mentor they felt relieved, assured and confident. The individual feedback sessions were reported as being a very powerful input for all staff, this finding was also mirrored within the findings from the staff survey. **Furthermore, staff felt that the level of cohesiveness which grew within their preschool throughout the project was very motivating. Again, this was witnessed during the interactions training, where it was reported that staff saw the positives within each other during the playback of the video clips; this built confidence and morale among the staff of each preschool.**

#### *Impact of Programme on Staff During Work*

In line with the results from the ECERS, ITES and staff survey, the results from the focus group affirms that the programme positively impacted the staff who participated. **Staff reported that the impact the programme had on them was two-fold; firstly, the programme had a direct impact on them as professionals and secondly, as a result of participating in the programme there was an indirect impact on the children in their care.** In terms of the impact on the staff, they felt more valued as professionals, their levels of self-confidence increased and they had become more reflective in the care and education they provide. In relation to the impact on the children, staff-child interactions had improved and become more meaningful which in turn improved the relationships between the staff and children.

#### *Impact of Programme Outside of Work*

The responses from the staff to this topic varied widely. **In some services as a result of the training they received, staff had found themselves at home asking open-ended questions to their families or getting down to eye-level with their own young children.** Changes in the curriculum meant that for 2 preschools there was a lot less stress during the day and as a result, the staff in those preschools felt a lot less stressed in their personal life. For other services, they didn't notice any impact of the programme outside of work.

#### *Perceived Required Training*

**All staff participating in the focus groups felt that they would benefit from more support and more training. The most frequently mentioned support by staff was the continuation of a mentoring structure within their preschools.** Staff felt very strongly that a mentor within their preschool to reinforce learning, maintain focus, set goals, challenge practice and provide support is necessary to maintain a high quality preschool environment. Additionally, staff reported that a course focussed on special needs and a course focussed on behaviour management would assist them in becoming more skilled professionals, providing them with the skills and confidence to care and educate children with all types of needs.

#### *Translating and Embedding Learning within the Preschool*

Given that the majority of training and inputs were directed at certain members of staff, it was of great interest to investigate the mechanisms by which feedback was translated to the greater staff team. Three main modes of information feedback were identified:

- Informally within room
- On a one-to-one basis
- As a whole group

The findings suggest that the most effective ways to translate the learning were on a one-to-one basis or as a whole group (depending on what suited the preschool), however this involved non-contact time which as the managers highlight is often difficult to organise due to ratio requirements. **Staff reported that they felt they had an opportunity to really understand the topic and ask questions if feedback was given outside of the room.** However, in one service where predominantly feedback from training and inputs were given on an informal basis during contact time with the children, staff reported that this was problematic as the whole message was never fully conveyed as their primary duty to care for the children was a priority and feedback was often interrupted by this.

**Table 14** Thematic analysis: Staff' fondest memory of South Dublin NEYA

Fondest Memory of the South Dublin NEYA	
Being videoed (n=9)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Confidence boost Reassurance</li> <li>■ Observing level of interaction with children</li> <li>■ Observing peers interaction with children</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The videoing...I think this would have been the fondest and the most petrifying moment ... where the mentor was going to film us supporting children in conversation. The whole idea of it, beforehand, we were all in an awful state because we were going to be filmed and it was something that was going to be set up, where everything here is meant to be so free-flowing. So, I think we all got into a bit of a tizzy over that but when we actually saw it then and went through it with the mentor we kind of went, oh God, yeah it was kind of amazing."</i></p> <p><i>"Like I didn't think I interacted with the children as much as I did until I had a look at the video. It was a great confidence boost for me – just to see that I could actually do it."</i></p>
Changing the Routines (n=6)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Planning is less frequent</li> <li>■ Less stressful environment</li> <li>■ More child centred</li> <li>■ Following child's interests</li> <li>■ More choice for children</li> <li>■ Flexibility</li> </ul>	<p><i>"For me I found the mentor simplified a lot of stuff, like when we introduced the new routines with more choice she explained it's important to follow the children's interests. It just made the preschool run so much easier. You know, trying to get them all to sit at the one time to do things, but it's not like that now, we invite them to do it, they don't have to come and do it and its just, it's so much smoother, it's easier, you're not getting stressed trying to get everybody to do this one thing. Everybody is doing what they want to do and you're following and supporting. It just makes it so much easier."</i></p>
Changing the Environments (n=6)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More room for exploration</li> <li>■ More freedom</li> <li>■ Parents coming into the rooms</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The room improvements; the layouts. I think that was really great, especially for the kids, you know. At least they can explore more areas now, they have more freedom. Now that the rooms have changed the children have alternatives, you know, they can go off and do something else."</i></p>
Interaction Training (n=5)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Learning how to interact meaningfully</li> <li>■ Eye level</li> <li>■ Childs height</li> <li>■ Open-ended questions</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Some of us are only in training and we are not always 100% sure of what we are doing when we are working with children. You end up doubting yourself; whether or not you're doing it right but taking part in this programme and learning about interacting with children by getting down to their level and making eye contact and that, I found that very helpful. Normally, I would bend down but I wouldn't get as low as I probably should have and then learning through that experience - learning how to interact more meaningfully helped me and then asking open ended questions as well was another thing because like that I would've asked silly questions and the child would give you a one word answer and then they are gone, whereas now I know how to make the most of my interactions with a child. This was a great achievement for me."</i></p>
Staff Cohesiveness (n=4)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Motivated staff</li> <li>■ Observing staff working together</li> <li>■ Staff supporting each other during videoing</li> <li>■ Identifying the positives in each other</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Coming from the role of senior worker my fondest memory was the fact that everybody wanted to get involved and even though people were a bit reluctant in the beginning, they really got involved and they learnt so much from it and from each other. Out of all the staff that have been here over the two years, there hasn't been one person that hasn't found the benefit of this programme."</i></p>



**Table 15** Thematic analysis: Impact of the programme on the staff within the workplace

## Impact of the Programme on the Staff

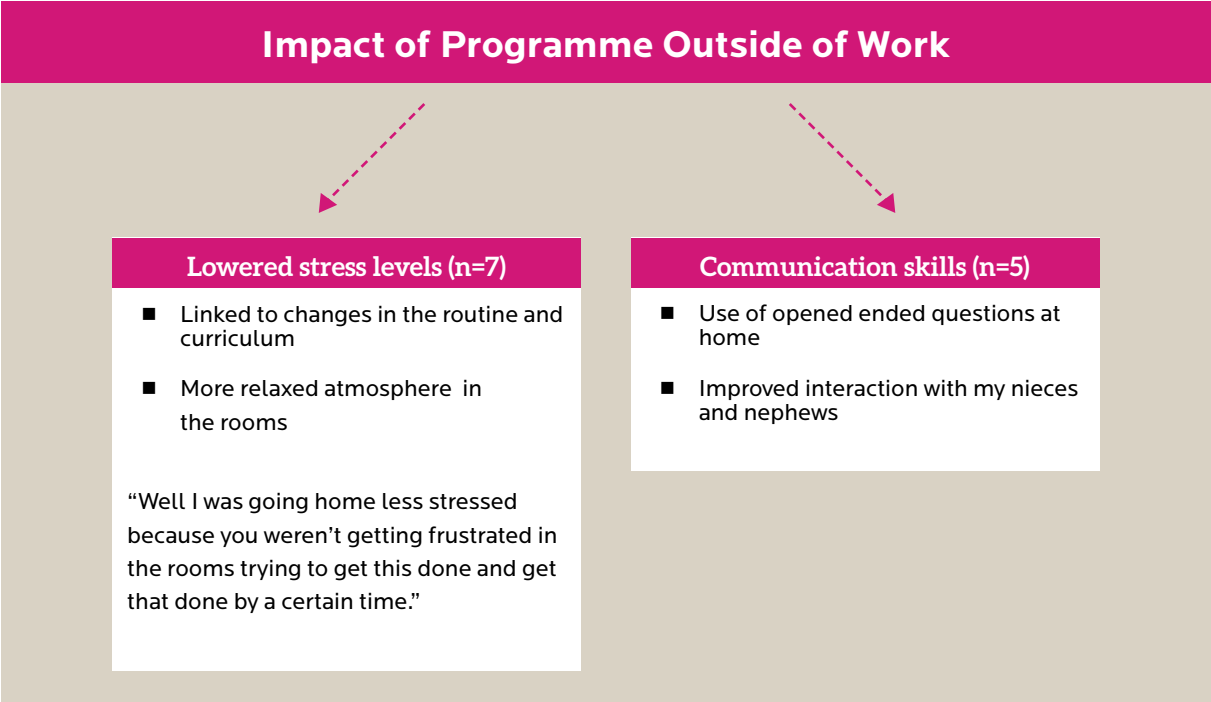
### DIRECT IMPACT ON STAFF

Feeling valued (n=10)	Increased confidence (n=10)	More reflective (n=5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Role more defined</li> <li>■ Recognised by management</li> <li>■ Receiving credit</li> <li>■ Recognised as a professional</li> </ul> <p><i>"For me, it was being recognised more, instead of being treated like glorified babysitters, we were being recognised as actual professionals who can make an impact on a child's life. This gave me confidence."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Observing the positives after videoing</li> <li>■ Reassurance that we were doing our jobs</li> <li>■ Encouragement from mentor</li> <li>■ Encouragement from peers</li> </ul> <p><i>"Participating in a programme like this really makes you realise and understand the work that you are doing. It makes you realise it because to me it would have been just a very insignificant conversation with a child, but then when you see it on the film you kind of go well actually there was a lot more in it and I am not just talking about the one that was taped – you begin to look then at the other interactions with the children - now I put more value on it now than originally I just thought it was talking to children."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased levels of self-awareness</li> <li>■ More time</li> <li>■ Identifying areas to improve on</li> <li>■ Less stress</li> </ul> <p><i>"I think by looking at it [the videos] you are kind of saying to yourself 'God I didn't realise I did that...' That's reflection; taking the time out to reflect on your practice. You get this sort of confidence just looking at it and it's the confidence in yourself that passes on to the child. So you know you are helping them as well as yourself."</i></p>

### INDIRECT IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Improved interactions (n=6)	Improved relationships (n=5)	Seeing potential in children (n=7)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Meaningful engagement</li> <li>■ Eye level</li> <li>■ Open-ended questions</li> <li>■ Understanding children better</li> </ul> <p><i>"Participating in this programme has improved and helped my interaction with the children. It's all the ideas and the discussions the mentor had with us, and the video recording that she did with us. I think it really helped us learn how to engage the children. How to come into their play, how to join, how to interact with them, how to come to their level, to help their language, along with their speech. And it helps you get to know the kids better"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Marte Meo training</li> <li>■ Better communication</li> <li>■ Increased knowledge to solve issues</li> <li>■ Getting to know children better</li> </ul> <p><i>"When we were on the course seeing Marte Meo; they were talking about the importance of communications, it was lovely to realise that we are now doing that. We could actually see that we're doing it now. It kind of raised awareness among us. Everything that the mentor was trying to get us to better with the children and now we could realise that we were actually doing it!"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifying capabilities of children</li> <li>■ Facilitating children's interests</li> <li>■ No longer 'minding' children</li> </ul> <p><i>"Not having to do things for them all the time, rather saying 'now do that yourselves' you can see it in one of my videos..."</i></p> <p><i>"We got to know them more and what they're capable of, instead of giving them the words all the time, they gave them to us."</i></p>

**Table 16** Thematic analysis: Impact of the programme on the staff outside workplace



**Table 17** Thematic analysis: Additional training perceived by staff as necessary

Additional Training Requested by Staff	
Maintain the Mentoring Programme (n=8)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reinforce learning</li> <li>■ Maintain focus</li> <li>■ Set goals</li> <li>■ Challenge practice</li> <li>■ Provide support</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I would really love for the mentoring programme to continue. It's been so good for us, although it took some time to get off the ground. Now, we feel we are fully benefitting from it. I think you'll always need help, because there's ... kids are always different. And some years might be more challenging than others with kids and stuff, so yeah, you know, there's never going to be a time when you're not going to need some kind of help. We are all human – we do forget like and then you need to be reminded."</i></p>
Special Needs Training (n=8)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increase confidence</li> <li>■ Provide new strategies</li> <li>■ Individual approaches for individual needs of children</li> <li>■ Best practice videos</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I would love some kind of special needs training... it is a constant struggle for us in this service. I am always afraid that I am doing the wrong thing around them. Whatever about a child that you can talk through things with and reason with them but it's the children that don't speak. They are the ones that I am always worried about and I find myself constantly asking 'Is this the right way to go about it?' Some training in special needs would make me feel more confident in the work I do."</i></p>
Behavioural Management Training (n=7)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide information on how to overcome issues</li> <li>■ Current situation exhausting</li> <li>■ Very challenging behaviour in rooms</li> <li>■ Keep abreast of current practice trends</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Out of the training with the mentor as well came that behaviour management training thing that we were to go on, but unfortunately it got postponed. We were really looking forward to doing that, but hopefully we'll get to go on it. We definitely need that because we do have about three children in the group with serious behavioural problems and it's very challenging behaviour. It's very exhausting some days and we've literally got together umpteen times with the manager and tried to think of ways to sort it but sometimes we just need to do a good course to give us information."</i></p>
Psychology Training (n=3)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Understanding the 'why'</li> <li>■ Child development</li> <li>■ Build on learning about choice and the reasons behind it</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I'd love to know a bit about psychology, like, why the children do certain things. It would help make more sense of all the work we did on children's choice. You know the way they would act out behaviour, or do certain things and I'd love to know why, you know, what's the reason behind it."</i></p>
Level 6 Training (n=3)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eagerness to continue learning</li> <li>■ Desire to be the best room leader</li> <li>■ Requirement in 2016</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I can't stop learning, I love it. No knowledge is ever wasted, we will always use it and with the way early childhood is going now, new information coming in all the time. So an opportunity to do the Level 6 would be fantastic, just to keep up on trends and broaden our knowledge, you know, about what we're doing with the children. In 2016, we are going to need it as a Room Leader but it's not just about that, it's about learning more and improving so that we can be the best for the children."</i></p>

**Table 18** Thematic analysis: how to embed learning throughout the whole service

Translating the Learning into the Whole Service		
<b>Informally within rooms (n=4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Often rushed</li> <li>■ Doesn't always happen</li> <li>■ Usefulness questionable</li> <li>■ No time for information to resonate</li> </ul> <p>"At the moment the information would be translated in an informal way. I think we need non-contact time to do it, away from the children and away from distraction. Like, when I was bringing back information from the learning story training, I was trying to tell the girls and there were kids talking to you, and, do you know that kind of way, so I don't know how much they actually took in. Now, I am on the mentoring course myself, I realise how important it is to get someone out of their room to go through it."</p>	<b>One-to-one feedback (n=5)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Responsibility of senior member of staff</li> <li>■ Requires time</li> <li>■ Opportunity to discuss material</li> <li>■ Ensure individual understanding</li> </ul> <p>"There are so many staff here that we meet frequently, so we always take time to go through things on an individual basis. For example, with the learning stories, I met each member of staff for 10-15 minutes, that way everyone had an opportunity to understand what was going on. That works for us and then if you have any questions you can go to one of the other girls and they discuss it within their rooms."</p>	<b>Group feedback (n=3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Within a staff meeting</li> <li>■ Led by staff who received training</li> <li>■ Group understanding</li> <li>■ Staff gained through each other's questions</li> </ul> <p>"When we finish a particular piece of training, we discuss it in the staff meeting with the girls who didn't go on the training. We bring examples back, for example with the Aistear training, that way everyone has a shared understanding, it's really brilliant. Because you can't, you know, try and go around to everyone's room because you would get distracted and it just wouldn't happen."</p>

## 5.5 Process Evaluation

Process evaluation is a valuable approach to assess variations in how the project and aspects of the project were experienced by a broad range of stakeholders and can shed light on why an intervention may or may not be effective. The information reported in this section is discussed under the domains of the RE-AIM Framework (Glasgow et al., 1999). RE-AIM was developed by Glasgow and colleagues (1999) to help evaluators attend to specific implementation factors essential for success in the real and complex world of educational, healthcare and community settings. It is an acronym that focuses attention on five key domains related to successful impact, specifically: **Reach; Effectiveness; Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance**. RE-AIM provides a very appropriate framework to anchor the process evaluation of the South Dublin NEAI. The process evaluation findings pertain to the programme implementation from

March 2013-April 2014. Process evaluation data was captured for 4 of the 6 intervention components including learning communities and peer networks, quality mentoring, professional development and parent and child consultation. The process evaluation involved consultation with the project co-ordination and implementation team, a review of programme implementation documentation, such as meeting minutes, process evaluation logs, mentor reports; individual preschool plans (see appendix 1) and service level agreements between preschool and project; to provide information additional to the qualitative and quantitative findings outlined earlier in Chapter 5.

### Overall Reach of the Intervention

Table 19 describes the reach of the intervention to those for whom it was intended. Overall, all sessions were excellently attended for those who they targeted.

Although parent and child consultation sessions were the best attended sessions, the other three intervention components were also excellently attended over the 13 month monitoring period. The quality mentoring

component was heavily weighted in terms of dosage with an average of 11.8 sessions per month being implemented, accounting for Summer, Christmas and Easter breaks.

**Table 19** Intervention reach

Intervention component	Number of preschools involved	Number of contact sessions	Total number of staff invited	Total number of staff attending	% of staff attending
<b>Project Networks</b>	8	12	87	68	82.0%
<b>Quality Mentoring</b>	8	107	451	392	89.5%
<b>Professional Development</b>	5	18	123	98	85.0%
<b>Parent and Child Consultation</b>	2	12	53	44	90.0%

### *Project Networks*

The peer group network was a structural element of the South Dublin NEYAI implementation and was designed to allow for support, shared learning, feedback and consultation with the project co-ordinator and implementation team. The meetings took place between the NEYAI project team, a Programme Development Officer from South Dublin County Childcare Committee and the preschool managers. They took place on a regular basis and contained different agendas into which all of the NEYAI project team had an input.

Process evaluation logs in relation to the project networks suggested that managers felt the meetings kept them on track and were useful in terms of the discussion of ongoing issues and concerns or for information sharing. **This forum also proved effective in building relationships between preschools; resulting in increased communication between some managers whose preschools are located in close proximity to each other.** The minutes and the process evaluation logs from the meetings report that this forum was a very positive experience in terms of engagement for all the participants; all participants *adopted* a positive

outlook on this component of the intervention as it unfolded. The meetings were well organised and the organisation was underpinned by a meeting agenda, which 82% of time was adhered to. Reasons for deviating from the agenda included; issues arising which required discussion or an over ambitious agenda for the meeting. Agendas were always sent out in advance to ensure the most efficiency from the meeting. Elements of the meeting reported as being positively received varied throughout the project, these elements included, the introduction of good news stories, presentations from the quality mentor or local evaluation team as well as the sharing of new resources. This suggests that these types of meetings require new and exciting elements in order to maintain participant's interests. The element of this intervention component which was most difficult to *implement* related to organisation of the meetings e.g. time, adhering to the meeting agenda and preventing meeting participants from deviating from the point. This requires high levels of skill and organisation on behalf of the meeting Chair. It was reported that setting the next meeting date at the end of the current meeting was crucial in *maintaining* participation of the group.

### Quality Mentoring

This component of the intervention was delivered to all preschools and all staff received contact with the quality mentor. However, some staff more than others received input depending on the arrangements with the individual service. **As documented through the quantitative and qualitative findings, the quality mentoring arm of the intervention continued to effect the primary outcome measure (quality) from baseline to mid-test and mid-test to follow-up with the greatest effects observed from baseline to mid-test.** During the initial phases of the project, the *adoption* of the programme varied from preschool to preschool, with some preschools embracing the presence of a quality mentor while some took a bit longer to become accustomed to the new changes. Within the process evaluation log, the mentor reported that time was a critical factor during the implementation of the programme, as was the mentor's sensitivity to the staff, ensuring that she always worked alongside the preschool staff at a level with which they were comfortable. **The process evaluation logs which were completed by the quality mentor prior to her visit to a preschool suggested that the service level agreements were critical documents aiding the successful implementation of the project.** The individual agreements outlined the expectations of the preschool and the mentor, as well as the modes of communication that would be used between each party. **However, like many elements of this programme, the mentor's flexibility was key, given the changing environment of a preschool, adhering to ratios and responding to children's emerging requirements. The mentor also reported that the resources she used during the implementation were key to the maintenance of the programme, these included but are not limited to the mentor record, planning templates, implementation plans and the ECERS and ITERS manuals.** The mentor highlighted that when working with the staff she always adopted a strengths based approach to her work, focussing on the positives and constructively working as a team on areas in need of improvement. The mentor felt that although she had a plan, no two preschools or no two staff members were the same, she therefore was required to constantly review her approach and the way she worked alongside the staff.

### Professional Development

Professional development was an intervention component which was delivered during two phases; the first phase of delivery focussed on the preschool manager and business development manager (if

one existed for the preschool) and the second phase of delivery focussed on the staff. Both phases were limited to one meeting. This intervention component did not *reach* all preschools participating in the programme as some preschools felt that they were already engaging in work related to professional development internally. The process evaluation reports suggest that the meetings generated an equal amount of positive feelings and mixed feelings. The mixed feeling in relation to the meetings with the managers centred on the lack of money to fund training for their staff, whilst the mixed feelings observed during the meetings with staff were underpinned by increased workload and pressure as a result of compiling a professional development portfolio. The *effectiveness* of the professional development component is questionable, mainly due to the lack of time spent on the implementation of this component and the small number of staff who participated in this component. Staff did not receive much exposure to this component and were therefore never fully aware of its purpose, which is also mirrored in the results of the staff survey and the lack of discussion about this component during the manager interviews and the staff focus groups. Professional development was always an integral element of this programme which developed as the programme developed. However, once the plan for implementation was agreed fidelity to and *adoption* of the plan was good with 78% of the plan adhered to. Similar to the project network component, successful *implementation* of this component related to prior preparation before the session took place. A highlight of the implementation, related to this component, was the coming together of four preschools on a Saturday to discuss their professional portfolio. Prior to the commencement of the South Dublin NEYAI this would not have been possible. The issue that arose most frequently during the implementation of the professional development component was access to staff. The deliverer of this component noted that it was often difficult for staff to attend the meeting due to ratios and the lack of cover in the rooms. Two factors contributed to the *maintenance* of this component, firstly the agreement of dates for the next meeting before the deliverer left the preschool and secondly the use of resources, specifically the professional development portfolio template. Additionally, the project development officer (deliverer of this component) encouraged the managers to work closely with their boards on this component to ensure maintenance of this work.



### Parent and Child Consultation

This component of the intervention was piloted within 2 preschools, therefore the *reach* of this part of the programme was very limited, questioning its overall impact on programme *effectiveness*. However, from the process evaluation logs completed by the project development officer implementing the activities, it was reported that the parent and child consultation was very well received in the first instance by managers, staff and children. Preparation for preschool visits, phone conversations with the manager and an agenda influenced the smooth *implementation* of this component. However, great flexibility was required on the part of the project development officer, during the implementation of activities given that the majority of the work was alongside the child and a child led approach was always *adopted*. It was reported that the children very much enjoyed participating in this element of the programme, in particular the use of the camera when adopting the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011). The project development officer commented on the difficulty in implementing this part of the programme at certain times of the year, specifically during the build-up to Christmas. It was also noted by the staff that time is required to embed both the Mosaic Approach and the Lets Listen Toolkit. It was felt that the preschool managers did not acknowledge this component of the project as a priority therefore questioning the possibility for *maintenance* of the activities beyond the duration of the programme. The project development officer highlighted that time was the most important element to influence effectiveness within the component.

## 5.6 Corporate Governance

### 5.6.1 Introduction

This small-scale sub-study stemming from the local evaluation explores the management and governance interaction in 7 preschools. The paucity of governance and management research in the not-for-profit sector and particularly as it relates to the early childhood care and education sector motivates this study. This aspect of the study is exploratory in nature and presents the findings of a cross-sectional study of board functionality based on the 5 Principles of the Governance Code; leading the organisation, exercising control over the organisation, being transparent and accountable, working effectively and behaving with integrity (Certain and Kahn, 2002). It is generally accepted that the major challenge in studying board effectiveness is the absence of criteria in defining and measuring board effectiveness (Herman et al. 1997)

and the Governance Code provides a starting point for reflection. It is important to note that this study involved the participation of 4 voluntary boards of management and the commentary reported provides a one-point snapshot is not representative of the boards of managements within the childcare sector in Ireland.

### 5.6.2 Board of Management Profile

Four voluntary boards of managements participated in this element of the research evaluation. As described in the methodology (3.3.1), each board completed a broad descriptive questionnaire. Table 20 outlines the findings from this questionnaire. There was little variation among the numbers of board members and the frequency of when they convened. The skill set on the boards was also typical of voluntary boards. Reassuringly, every board had an early year's expert ensuring that quality within the preschool remained on the board's agenda. Interestingly, all boards had some type of sub-committee; all boards had a finance sub-committee; while one board had a staff support and fundraising sub-committee. Two of the boards reported having a board manual, while the remaining two reported being in the process of finalising their board manual.



**Table 20** Board descriptives

Variable	Mean (SD)
Number of boards participating	4
Average number of board members per board	7.8 ± 1.2
Treasurer on board	3
Secretary on board	4
Minute taker on board	2
Any sub-committee	4
Finance sub-committee	4
Staff support sub-committee	1
Fundraising sub-committee	1
<b>Skillset on board</b>	
Accountancy	3
Legal	1
Early years	4
Enterprise	1
Parent	2
Local knowledge	4
Family support	3
Meeting frequency (weeks)	5 ± 0.8
Board manual	2
Charity status	4

The researchers utilised the Irish Governance Code (Boardmatch Ireland et al., 2014), drawing on the five principles of the code in relation to board functionality. Prior to the discussion each board were asked to self-select the organisation type that felt best matched their operation. Two of the boards nominated their board as a Type B organisation and two of the boards nominated their board as a Type C organisation (see appendix 18 for description of organisation type).

### 5.6.3 Commentary on Corporate Governance

#### *Leading the Organisation*

All boards scored well on this principle. In all instances, these had agreed their vision, purpose and values ensuring that they remained relevant to their work. Boards who had their own manual outlined this

information within their document, whereas other boards outlined this information on their website.

In order to achieve their stated purpose, each of the four boards had a plan in place to ensure they suitably developed and resourced their preschool. The element of this principle where greater attention was required was in relation to monitoring and evaluating the preschools, to ensure there was a consistency of approach to their stated purpose and agreed values. All boards reported that they managed, supported and held accountable staff who acted on behalf of their preschool/s.

#### *Exercising Control over the Organisation*

All 4 boards reported positively on the level of organisational control. All boards had identified

**There is growing recognition that early childhood care and education can be of huge benefit to children - but only when it is of high quality.**

and complied with the relevant legal and regulatory requirements, as it related to them and the preschool which they governed. In terms of financial and management control, most boards ensured that there were appropriate internal financial and management controls. In the case of two boards, they did not conduct a full risk assessment each year nor did they have an audit committee of three or more directors. For those reasons, they were unable to identify major risks that the preschools may encounter.

#### *Being Transparent and Accountable*

This principle generated the most variation in responses from boards and was the principle on which boards need to focus greater attention. Not all boards had an agreed spokesperson, however those who had not were in the process of appointing one. Appointing a spokesperson is important for good governance as it means that boards can coherently respond to stakeholders' questions or views about the work of their preschool and how they run it. A number of boards did not make publically available their annual report, nor did all of the boards involve their beneficiaries (e.g. parents) in decision making, which is important as it encourages and enables the engagement of those who benefit from the preschools reassuring them that they have an important role to play in shaping the preschool their child attends. All boards have successfully identified stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in the work of the preschool. When boards were asked to report the range of bodies, networks and organisations with whom they collaborated with, it was clear that there were strategic plans in place to build and maintain links with stakeholders who will embed, promote and support the preschool services within their communities. However, maintaining regular and effective communication with stakeholders was a challenge faced by all boards, mainly due to other work commitments and time constraints. All boards reported that they would like to widen the range of agencies that they work with and would welcome ideas on how to engage more effectively with relevant stakeholders.

#### *Working Effectively*

According to the feedback received, boards performed very well under this principle. It was evident from the discussions with boards that individual board members, committees, staff and volunteers understand their role, legal duties, and delegated responsibility for decision-making. Board members also expressed that they exercised their collective responsibility during board meetings, rather than sole members taking responsibility for actions. In a number of boards clear division of responsibilities between the chairperson and the preschool manager were not clear. It is recommended that for good governance and transparency that clearly defined roles and responsibilities exist for both of these roles. Due to time restraints, boards struggle to conduct yearly board reviews on an on-going basis to ensure that there was a suitable board recruitment and retirement process in place.

#### *Behaving with Integrity*

From the discussions held with each of the boards of management, it can be reported that all of them operated in an honest, fair and independent manner. In all of the boards it was evident that the chair led the board in developing an ethical culture in line with the values of the preschools. It was clear that each board understood the importance of declaring and managing conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalties. However, not all boards had an operational code of conduct or a policy outlining how to manage conflicts of loyalty and conflicts of interest. Lastly, it was strongly observed that all boards were interested in protecting and promoting the reputation of their preschools.

### **5.7 Commentary on Work Placement**

This project is grounded in the intention to address the gaps between training and practice. Systemic thinking at the project design phase identified the value of building mentoring capacity within the services and providing a model or resources to support new staff or students move effectively into the practices and cultures of the preschool service.

Work placement was an important component of the project, which lay outside the scope of the evaluation, but from which activities were conducted and drawing on focus group discussions with the project team, some initial learning can be identified.

**The selection of staff to engage in the Specialist Advanced Diploma in Teaching, Training and Assessing Learning is critical** as they become

skilled in communicating and sharing new ideas and knowledge with the wider staff group. This approach also signals the preschool setting as a learning organisation, demonstrates a commitment to building staff and develops an open and dynamic culture. Reflection on this component highlights the importance of building staff capacity within the service with specific targeted accredited training.

This component recognises the ad hoc approach that exists across services to work placement for students and new staff. A more systematic method is required to facilitate the transfer of learning into daily practice. Learning emerging from this component also suggests that **a structured, consistent approach to induction, support and supervision and on-site mentoring is required to promote positive outcomes for new staff and students** and allow them make connections between the knowledge they bring and new knowledge they construct with others as they enter into the life of the service. A strong approach to work placement will also serve to ameliorate the varying quality of training that is currently delivered to the sector.

## 5.8 Conclusion

There is growing recognition that early childhood care and education can be of huge benefit to children - but only when it is of high quality. The professional competence of early year's practitioners is perhaps the single most important factor in determining the quality of services for young children. However, it must be recognised that the impact of governance structures

that surround a preschool are extremely important in impacting on quality. The CoRe Report (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011) highlights how we must not solely be concerned with the knowledge and skills of the individual practitioner, though these are of course vitally important. We must also look to the ways in which practitioners work together in joint learning and reflection; at the mix of different occupation levels within a setting (not just leaders, but assistants too); at the working conditions that reduce staff turnover; at the supports and opportunities created through training institutions, and at governance structures. In short, what we should be looking for is not just the 'competent practitioner', but the 'competent system' where good governance structures have a vitally important part to play.

This study contributes to research and practice that is concerned with the performance of non-profit boards. Literature on non-profit governance suggests that effective boards are associated with effective organisations (Brown, 2005). Findings emerging from this current study suggest that this premise holds true. However, given the small-scale nature of this cross-sectional study it is not possible to generalise the findings to other non-profit boards. It is suggested that the assessment method used should be replicated in other boards governing preschools as it is only through context-specific replication the validity of measures can be tested and refined to better encapsulate the major features of board development.







## Chapter 6: Learning for Policy and Practice

### 6.1 Introduction

The South Dublin NEYAI was a multi-faceted programme with an ambitious plan; to address the gaps between training and practice. Fidelity to the plan, which was outlined in the initial expression of interest and detailed in the subsequent funding application to Pobal, was maintained over the four year life cycle of the project.

This project emerged as a strong and collective response to support and improve the practice of early year's educators in selected preschools across Clondalkin and Tallaght. The development, the delivery and plans for sustainability has been a collaborative endeavour between project networks (in all their complexity), the preschools and the project team. Within all these networks and groups, numerous agencies were represented which added a great strength to the design and implementation of

the programme. Evident throughout this study has been an openness, energy and persistence among the stakeholders to meet the aims and objectives that were agreed at the outset.

The learning stemming from this project has depth and meaning for those involved and for those in particular who told their stories of change and learning in interviews, in focus groups and at project networks. Challenges, frustrations and constraints were an important and valued part of the project, primarily because expectations of the project among stakeholders were high and all those involved understood the opportunity presented through the NEYAI to bring about significant and potentially lasting change.

Some of the key learning from the project and how it relates to the myriad of stakeholders involved is described below. The chapter concludes with three main signposting steps for policy makers to consider.



## 6.2 Learning For and From

The sub title ‘Learning For and From’ signifies the relationships and interconnectedness in the project. Stakeholders learned about themselves, they learned from and with others and shared that learning across their communities over the life of the project and its accompanying components. In this section, we adopt a themed approach to highlight some of the key learning emerging from the project.

### *Mentoring within Preschools*

The cornerstone of the South Dublin NEYAI was a mentoring component primarily focused on the improvement of practice within preschool settings. This mentoring programme produced significant positive effects in relation to all seven subscales of the infant and toddler and early childhood environment rating scales.

**Key learning from this study is that mentoring as an intervention is beneficial, appropriate for early year’s educators and significantly impacts on practice.**

However, there are a number of considerations in relation to rolling out a mentoring programme which are outlined in the paragraphs below.

The selection of the mentor was identified as a critical part of the whole project, with criteria established before the recruitment process begins. **Learning from the South Dublin NEYAI recommends that the mentor should have a minimum of a Level 8 in Early Childhood Care and Education, should possess excellent communication skills, and is someone who is self-motivated, flexible, energised and pragmatic. The mentor should also be highly organised and solution focused.**

It is not realistic to design detailed interventions for implementation before the programme commences nor is it recommended, considering a recommendation within this report to actively engage stakeholders at all the stages of the project. **However, learning from the project proposes that a basic toolkit is devised prior to the mentor’s appointment.** The purpose of this toolkit is to assist the mentor in providing services to the preschools that they will serve.

We propose including the following information within the mentor’s toolkit:

- Information on the role of the mentor
- A self-assessment planning tool
- A broad mentoring framework

- A service level agreement template
- A service level action plan template
- A mentor record template
- Information on the conditions for effective adult learning
- National framework documents
- Environmental rating scales and
- National standards for preschool services

Additionally, it should contain information on each of the settings that the mentor will be working with e.g. manager’s name and contact details, number of staff working at the preschool, number of children attending the preschool, the type of provision offered, number of rooms, and any other useful information that will assist the mentor build a relationship with the preschool.

One of the principles for a successful mentoring programme identified within the findings is that each mentoring relationship is unique, and that mentoring programs should allow for individualised mentoring approaches in order to fit each participant’s needs. In the South Dublin NEYAI, the project team felt strongly about working with each preschool at a level with which they were comfortable and where they were willing to participate. For example, in this programme the mentor first targeted environments as this was an area that was relatively straightforward to impact on and the staff had previously identified environments as an area within their setting that needed attention. According to the project team, this approach resulted in a palpable and immediate success which served to build competence and confidence. **It is evident from this project that at the outset mentors must spend time working with the preschools to identify areas of their setting that the early years educators feel passionate about working on. This may not be the area in need of most attention, however it begins to embed a culture of change among the staff. Furthermore, it is recommended that the national frameworks Aistear and Síolta are utilised to guide this work, as they allow for a differentiated approach when working with individuals and settings.**

The literature indicates that training and support for mentors is crucial for successful mentoring and therefore the professional development of the mentor throughout the project is an important consideration. This project has identified that in addition to the skills, attributes and experiences that the mentor brings to the role, ongoing support and the provision of opportunities for continuing professional development are vital. Learning from this project is strong in highlighting the need for and benefits of a mentor for the mentor.





### Early Years Educators

Learning from this project highlighted that to bring about change, early years educators must be considered as partners in the process rather than participants within a programme. Their involvement is crucial and rather than being subjects of a programme or evaluation they should be considered partners, who are respected and whose thoughts and ideas are welcome and shape project developments.

A common theme from both the project team and the participant's responses during the evaluation, was that mentoring was important for both new and experienced early year's educators, especially during a time of major reform. Learning from the project suggests **that interventions are received by all staff irrespective of their qualifications or experience in years. The leadership skills of the manager are critical not only in managing staff but in supporting their staff to engage with the mentor. It is equally important that each individual asserts leadership in relation to their own professional practice.**

One of the most significant interventions of the mentoring component for the early year's educators was the use of video analysis and feedback to improve individual and group awareness, skills and confidence in interacting with children. The study shows that this

approach, while stressful for staff in the beginning, was progressed through support from the mentor and managers and through the provision of time to engage in one to one feedback outside of the normal daily work in the room. **Learning from this project identifies video analysis as a beneficial approach to improving practice but highlights that it is an intensive process requiring a skilled mentor and time.**

Research shows that effective mentoring reduces staff attrition and enhances outcomes for children. The professional lives of early years educators could be regarded as moving along a mentoring continuum, from being mentored as student early years educators and graduating early years educators, to eventually becoming experienced mentors themselves. **Identifying the changing mentoring needs and roles of educators, and providing resources to support them through these career stages, may be a profitable and valuable investment.** The new National Quality Support Service could provide a very worthwhile opportunity for establishing mentoring as an essential activity for early childhood professionals, and for developing mentoring skills in experienced practitioners.

### Preschool Managers

The peer group (meetings of managers and the project team), while providing opportunities for networking,

information sharing, and discussion of ideas, at the same time also supported management functions. For example, managers identified their reasons for attending the peer group meetings as including:

- being able to talk about individual case studies at their preschool
- being able to find out more information about funding schemes and the associated application process
- being able to find out in advance trends in terms of the number of childcare places needed the following year highlighting that the meetings for this group were not solely focused on the South Dublin NEYAI
- Furthermore, a number of managers also remarked that they appreciated being able to discuss issues with someone outside of their own setting, who had no links to their workplace

Findings from the manager interviews and process evaluations strongly affirm **that the peer group was of benefit to the preschool managers**. This group gave managers an opportunity to meet up and discuss any issues or concerns that they had in relation to the programme or in general. Importantly, this forum gave managers an opportunity to share any good news stories that they had from their preschool. This was frequently reported within the process evaluations as an item on the agenda that really engaged the managers and created a positive atmosphere. Preschool managers enjoyed hearing about all of the good work that was happening in other preschools. **The continuation of these meetings is something that all managers would value, it is recommended that thought is given to this throughout the implementation period in terms of the purpose of these meetings, who can facilitate them and where and when do they occur. Managers do not have the time to take on the responsibility of facilitating the meetings so it is advised that an external agency is in control of this.** Steps have already been taken to transfer and mainstream this activity to the South Dublin County Childcare Committee.

The importance of leadership in services emerged consistently over the project. Managers demonstrated leadership in paving the way for the mentor, in introducing each new requirement or opportunity for staff. Through leadership strategies managers leveraged support and buy-in from the staff groupings and in

building on the work of the mentor worked to embed change in the culture of their respective services. While the peer group was a significant support to the managers, **there is a need to consider the provision of ongoing leadership training for this group.**

In the preschool setting, it is important that preschool managers show leadership and ensure that new practices are embedded within their setting. All staff must be included on this journey and of particular importance is the induction of new staff. Without ensuring this, there is a concern that if key staff leave the preschool it will impact on the quality of provision. **The development of a work placement model which outlines procedures in relation to a structured, consistent approach to induction, support and supervision and on-site mentoring is recommended to assist with this.**

### Parents

Parents, carers and families are by far the most important influences in a child's life. Their presence and support is core to their child's learning, development and wellbeing. Improvements in practice that bring about best outcomes for children, involve real and meaningful engagement with parents.

**Learning from this project reinforces the concept that using evidence based tools and strategies that early year's educators are comfortable with and can use easily, irrespective of their level of training is a most effective approach.** The favoured approach in working with parents emerging from this project was one which required minimal paperwork and appeared to promote authentic engagement in a relatively short space of time. Time is an essential element that is required in developing relationships with parents and it must be recognised and valued as a core part of work for early years educators. **If as research indicates, that working with parents is crucial and this project highlights that with some support success can be achieved in developing or strengthening relationships between children, parents and educators. It is therefore important that an element of time (paid non-contact time) is incorporated into the work of the educators so that these relationships can be meaningfully fostered.**

### Boards of Management

Engaging boards of management proved to be one of the most difficult elements of the South Dublin NEYAI. This was mainly due to the busy schedules of board members and the voluntary nature of boards of management. The study suggests **that more exploratory research is required to understand how best to engage and sustain boards.**

Furthermore, as an additional resource to boards, it recommended that boards **utilise a guidance tool such as the Irish Governance Code, which is free to access and will guide them in their operations.** It is important that from the outset, the board carefully considers its role and responsibilities and identifies the key activities and priorities that it will address during its term of office. These will vary from preschool to preschool depending on the settings individual circumstances.

### *Working Collaboratively*

Involving stakeholders in the design of programmes, as well as being ethically preferable, has important practical advantages. Initial engagement and ongoing participation of early years services are likely to be sustained if the intervention is valued by potential participants, concerns about fairness are addressed and, buy-in, which supports the implementation of the programme and its evaluation, is achieved. Empowering stakeholders may also contribute to a better understanding of the process by which change is achieved. Appropriate 'users' of the programme should be involved at all stages of the development, process and outcome analysis of the programme, as this is likely to result in better, more relevant outcomes and a higher chance of producing implementable data.

The level of interagency working within the South Dublin NEYAI was a key element to the programme design and implementation. From the literature review completed, it was noted that the evidence on improved outcomes through interagency working was scarce, however the limited evidence base that does exist is generally promising. Evidence however from the South Dublin NEYAI evaluation, documents a range of impacts as a result of interagency working including: greater involvement of service users and wider community, an increased ability to harness the resources of various agencies involved at a broader level, building of capacity to resolve programme issues and a greater awareness of evidence-based practice. However there were some difficulties reported in terms of interagency working including increased demands and pressures on individual agencies from earlier identification of need, difficulties in engaging and retaining some partner agencies as well as the time and resources needed to support interagency planning.

### *Time as a Key Element*

The concept of time appeared repeatedly throughout this evaluation study, namely:

- Time to initiate the programme with staff
- Time for the mentor to establish her approach with staff

- Time for the early years educators to receive the intervention and adjust to change (non-contact time)
- Time to embed learning and conclude the project with staff

**Firstly, time is important during the initiation of the programme; time to establish the project, establish relationships and for the project staff to get to know the preschools.** The longest period of pre-development was assigned to the mentoring component (9 months). All of this time was required to successfully get the programme off the ground.

**Secondly, time for the mentor to establish her approach within each individual preschool and identify the level at which each preschool is currently operating.** No two preschools are the same and although the same programme is being implemented, each setting needs time to adjust to the new programme and prepare themselves for change.

Thirdly, the provision of time as a resource is essential for successful mentoring. This is reflected in the comments from early year's educators, preschool managers and project staff, where busy workloads and lack of time impeded the implementation of the programme, particularly for managers involved in the peer group meetings. This was also true for early year's educators who were sometimes unable to take the time out of the room to meet the mentor. **Learning from this study highlights that non-contact time should be budgeted for and incorporated into the design of mentoring programmes.** It is too much to expect early year's educators to respond to a programme while working with the children. The staff need time away out of their room to work with the mentor in a meaningful and focused way.

Lastly, learning from the project **suggests that sufficient time be allocated to wind down the programme.**

In particular, the mentoring component of the South Dublin NEYAI came to an abrupt stop after an intense phase of implementation. It is recommended that more time is allocated at the end of the project for project staff to review work that has been completed and put in place an exit strategy for all preschools to improve the sustainability of the project within the services.

## **6.3 Sign-posting for Policy**

Despite the vast amount of learning arising from the South Dublin NEYAI, three main sign-posting points for policy makers are described below:

**1. Mentoring as a Vehicle for Improving Practice**

This project has demonstrated that mentoring works, that it is a complex and intense intervention, but that it is empowering, that it makes a difference to the quality of practice and provision and augurs well as a mechanism to bring about sustainable change. Lessons learned around strategies for engaging services, meeting services where they are at, making time available at each of the process, building capacity and drawing on different methodologies all have relevance for the development of the new National Quality Support Service. South Dublin NEYAI consortium believe it is imperative that the learning emanating from and investment in this project informs national developments.

**2. Professional Development as a means to Creating Reflective Educators**

The continuing professional development of early year's educators is the key to creating a culture of reflective practice and sustaining change. An opportunity now exists to develop a national framework for professional development – a planned system of professional development that is effective and efficient, that is responsive and

consistent, that ensures and monitors the quality of training delivered and which draws on a range of methodologies to meet the needs of diverse adult learners. This study strongly endorses calls that already exist in the sector for CPD days for early year's educators on a service wide basis. Findings from this study, that have relevance for policy signal the value of learning communities where professionals (including educators) can engage, learn and support.

**3. An Interagency Approach**

This project has evidenced the benefits of collaboration and interagency working to address the complex needs of early year's educators and services in community based settings. A strength of the project has been the capacity to harness and target scarce resources to identified actions at specific points in time. This learning highlights the opportunity that exists with the initiation of the National Quality Support Service to build a competent system, one that meets the myriad needs of educators, children and services and which can only operate effectively when a multi-disciplinary lens and multi-disciplinary supports are readily available.







## Chapter 7: Signalling the Way Forward

The evaluation of the South Dublin NEYAI has demonstrated the positive effects of a multi-component quality improvement intervention on the quality of provision in preschool settings. This multi-component intervention was anchored in on-site mentoring but was complemented by many other layers including professional development for managers and early year's educators, consultation with children and their families, inputs to governing structures, enhancements in work placement structures and the building of collaborative networks of key stakeholders. This multi-faceted intervention which targeted all elements of the preschool environment and networks affirms that a whole system approach is required to bring about change. This is both resource heavy and time consuming, but it works.

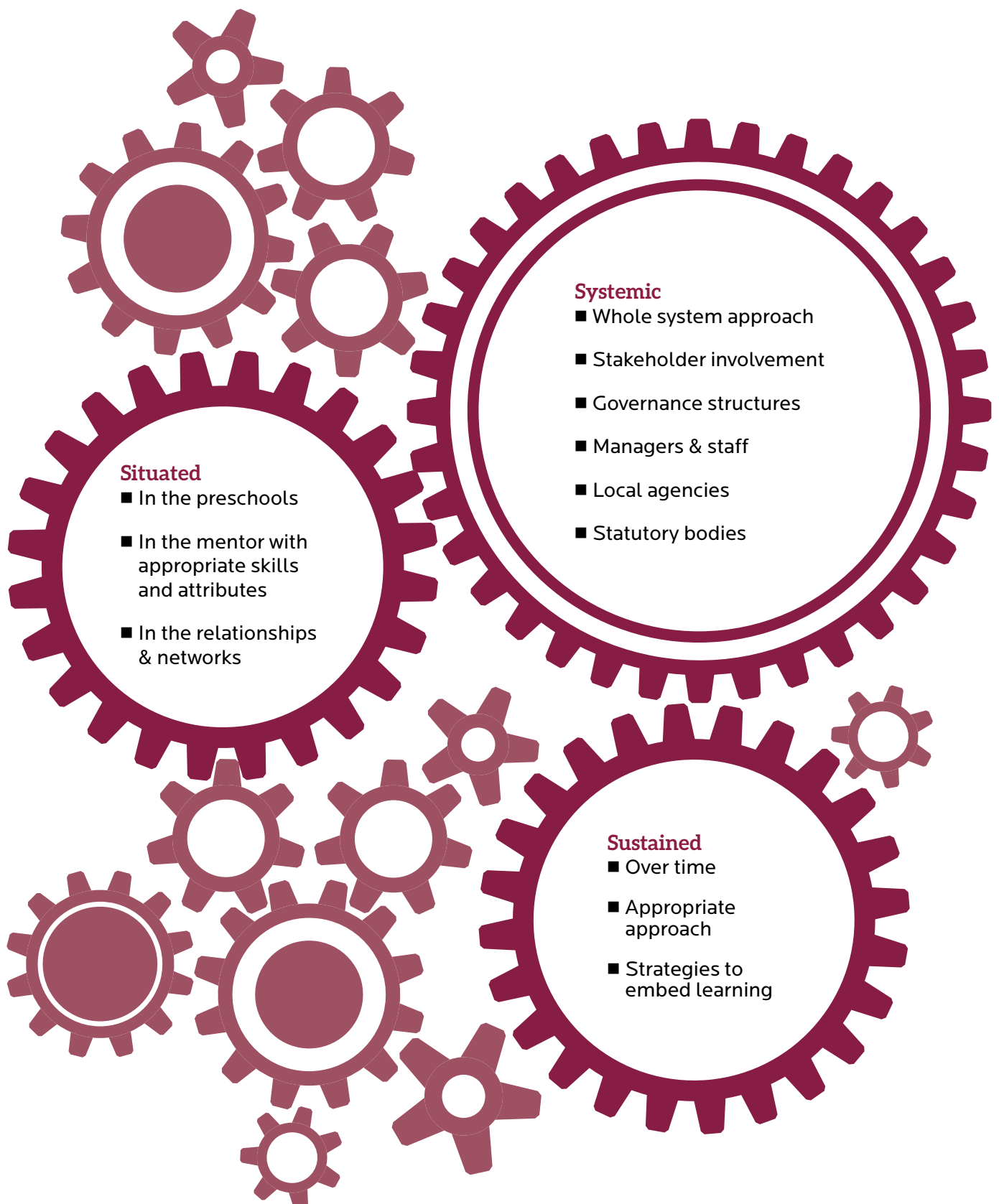
Rather than conclude this report, the authors believe that signalling a way forward to build on the learning is more constructive. We believe that going forward, a number of cogs, representing the key ingredients to bring about change at this level must be working in symbiosis. Figure 19 graphically depicts how the change process must be structured for long-term impacts to be observed.

Firstly, the changes must be situated within the preschools, where trusting relationships have been formed between the mentor and the early year's educators. It is the responsibility of a skilled and experienced mentor to assess the point at where the services can respond to engage in changes.

Secondly, to sustain the changes and build on the success of the current project, the continuation of an on-site mentor who utilises an appropriate approach coupled with the provision of paid non-contact time would contribute to the legacy of the project. Furthermore, an appropriate amount of time must be allowed for preschools to react, respond and embed the learning.

Lastly, the foresight of an effective consortium contributed to the systemic approach in terms of collaborative working. The successes of the South Dublin NEYAI hinged on the range of key stakeholders including parents and children; boards of management; managers; staff; local agencies and statutory bodies, all of whom contributed by offering their knowledge and providing support.





**Figure 19** Graphical Depiction of the Key Ingredients for Long-term Impact Following the Implementation of a Quality Improvement Intervention in Preschools





## Chapter 8: Bibliography

ABRAHAM, C. & MICHIE, S. 2008. A taxonomy of behavior change techniques used in interventions. *Health Psychol*, 27, 379-87.

AHNERT, L., PINQUART, M. & LAMB, M. E. 2006. Security of children's relationships with nonparental care providers: a meta-analysis. *Child Dev*, 77, 664-79.

BAUCHMULLER, R., GORTZ, M. & RASMUSSEN, A. W. 2011. Long-run benefits from universal high quality pre-schooling. *AFK Working Paper*.

BAXENDALE, J. & HESKETH, A. 2003. Comparison of the effectiveness of the Hanen Parent Programme and traditional clinic therapy. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 38, 397-415.

BEAUNEA, C. 2009. Early years educators' perceptions of interpersonal mentoring relationships in one early childhood mentoring program: Unpublished dissertation. University of Florida.

BENNETT, J. 2003. Starting Strong: The Persistent Division Between Care and Education. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 1, 21-48.

BOARDMATCH IRELAND, BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY IRELAND, CARMICHAEL CENTRE FOR VOLUNTARY GROUPS, CLANN CREDO, ICTR, THE DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND, VOLUNTEER IRELAND, THE WHEEL, THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND, SHEILA CAHILL CONSULTING & COX, A. 2014. *The Governance Code: Organisational Types* [Online]. Dublin. Available: <http://www.governancecode.ie/> [2014].

BROWN, W. A. 2005. Exploring the Association Between Board and Organizational Performance in Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 15, 25.

BURKE, K., OWENS, S. & GHATE, D. 2010. *Learning from experience to inform the future: Findings emerging from the initial phase of the Children's Services Committees*, Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.

CAMPBELL, M., FITZPATRICK, R., HAINES, A., KINMONTH, A. L., SANDERCOCK, P., SPIEGELHALTER, D. & TYRER, P. 2000. Framework for design and evaluation of complex interventions to improve health. *BMJ*, 321, 694-6.

CASSADY, J. C., MUCHERACH, W. & HOFFMAN, N. 2003. Meeting the need: delivering quality child-care education on the web. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 24, 8.

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE 2009. Quarterly National Household Survey: Childcare, Quarter 4. 2007. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE. 2013. *Persons aged 15 years and over classified by sex and principal economic status* [Online]. Dublin. [Accessed 28/1/2014].

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE 2011. Census 2011 Report.

CENTRE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION 2006. *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*

CERTAIN, L. K. & KAHN, R. S. 2002. Prevalence, Correlates, and Trajectory of Television Viewing Among Infants and Toddlers. *Pediatrics*, 109, 634-642.

CLARK, A. & MOSS, P. 2011. *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach*, London, National Children's Bureau.

COUPER, M. P. 2000. Review: Web surveys: A review of issues and approaches. *Public opinion quarterly*, 464-494.

CRESWELL, J. W. & CLARK, V. L. P. 2007. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, Wiley Online Library.

CRYER, D., HARMS, T. & RILEY, C. 2003. *All About the ECERS-R: A detailed guide in words and pictures*.

CRYER, D., HARMS, T. & RILEY, R. 2004. *All About the ITES-R: A detailed guide in words and pictures*.

CURRIE, J. 2001. Early Childhood Education Programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 15, 25.

DA ROS, D. & SWICK, K. J. 1995. The socialization of beginning early years educators. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 16, 4.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS 2012. *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012*. Dublin.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS. 2012. *Guide to the ECCE Programme and Administrative Procedures* [Online]. Dublin.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS 2010a. *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS 2010b. A workforce development plan for the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland. In: SKILLS, D. O. E. A. (ed.). Dublin.

DUGGAN, C., CORRIGAN, C. & SOCIAL, W. 2009. *A literature review of inter-agency work with a particular focus on children's services*, Children Acts Advisory Board.

DUNST, C. J. 2000. Revisiting "Rethinking Early Intervention". *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 20, 95-104.

DUNST, C. J. & BRUDER, M. B. 2002. Valued outcomes of service coordination, early intervention, and natural environments. *Exceptional Children*, 68, 361-375.

DUNST, C. J. & TRIVETTE, C. M. 2009. Using research evidence to inform and evaluate early childhood intervention practices. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 29, 40-52.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IRELAND. 2013. *Initial Response to Budget 2014* [Online]. Dublin: Early Childhood Ireland. [Accessed 28th May 2014].

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE 2008. Growing Up in Ireland: AMF 9 month old data set. In: INSTITUTE, E. A. S. R. (ed.). Dublin: Irish Social Science Data Archive.

FROST, N. & ROBINSON, M. 2007. Joining up children's services: safeguarding children in multidisciplinary teams. *Child Abuse Review*, 16, 184-199.

GALLAGHER, P. A., ABBOTT-SHIM, M. & VANDEWIELE, L. 2011a. An evaluation of the Individualised Learning Intervention: a mentoring program for Early Childhood early years educators. *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Childhood Field*, 14, 17.

GALLAGHER, P. A., ABBOTT-SHIM, M. & VANDEWIELE, L. 2011b. Head Start mentor early years educators impact child outcomes in protégé early years educators' classrooms. *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Childhood Field*, 14, 3.

GLASGOW, R. E., VOGT, T. M. & BOLES, S. M. 1999. Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1322-1327.

GRAMLICH, E. M. 1986. Evaluation of education projects: the case of the perry preschool program. *Economics of Education Review*, 5, 17-24.

GREENBAUM, T. L. 2000. *Moderating focus groups: A practical guide for group facilitation*, Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.

GREGG, P., WASHBROOK, E., PROPPER, C. & BURGESS, S. 2005. The Effects of a Mother's Return to Work Decision on Child Development in the UK\*. *The Economic Journal*, 115, F48-F80.

HAASE & PRATSCHKE. 2012. *Pobal HP Deprivation Index* [Online]. Pobal. Available: <https://www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx>.

HAYES, N. 2007. Perspectives on the relationship between education and care in early childhood – a background paper. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

HAYES, N., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I., KEEGAN, S. & GOULDING, E. 2013. *Evaluation of the 'Early Years' programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*, Childhood Development Initiative, Dublin.

HECKMAN, J. J. & LAFONTAINE, P. A. 2010. The American high school graduation rate: Trends and levels. *The review of economics and statistics*, 92, 244-262.

HERMAN, R. D. & RENZ, D. O. 1999. Theses on nonprofit organizational effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28, 107-126.

HEUNG-LING, Y. 2003. Mentoring student-teacher case studies. *Early Child Development and Care*, 173, 8.

HIMMELMAN, A. 1995. Collaboration for a Change. *University of Minnesota, Minneapolis*.

HOLLOWAY, J. H. 2001. *The benefits of mentoring: Educational Leadership*.

JOHNSON, R. B. & ONWUEGBUZIE, A. J. 2004. Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational researcher*, 33, 14-26.

KATZ, L. G. Talk with early years educators. National Association for the Education of Young Children., 1977 Washington, DC.

LAZAR, J. & PREECE, J. 1999. Designing and implementing Web-based surveys. *Journal of computer information systems*, 39, 63-67.

MCKEOWN, K., HAASE, T. & PRATSCHKE, J. 2014. Evaluation of NEYAI & Siolta QAP: A study of Child Outcomes in Pres-School.

MELHUIISH, E. 2004. A literature review of the impact of early years provision on young children. London: National Audit Office.

MELHUISH, E. 2011. Preschool Matters. *Science*, 333, 1.

MELHUISH, E. C., QUINN, L., SYLVA, K., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I. & TAGGART, B. 2013. Preschool affects longer term literacy and numeracy: results from a general population longitudinal study in Northern Ireland. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 24, 234-250.

MELHUISH, E. C., SYLVA, K., SAMMONS, P., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I., TAGGART, B., PHAN, M. B. & MALIN, A. 2008. Preschool influences on mathematics achievement. *Science*, 321, 1161-1162.

MOORE, K. A. & VANDIVIERE, S. 2000. *Turbulence and child well-being*, Washington DC, Urban Institute.

MOSS, P. & DAHLBERG, G. 2008. Beyond quality in early childhood care and education - languages of evaluation. *New Zealand Journal of Early years educators' Work* 5, 3-12.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT 2009. Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

OBERHUEMER, P. 2005. Conceptualising the early childhood pedagogue: policy approaches and issues of professionalism *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13, 5-16.

OECD 2001. Starting Strong: Early childhood education and care. Paris, France: OECD.

OECD 2006a. Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care. Paris: OECD.

OECD 2006b. Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care. Paris, France: OECD.

OECD 2010. PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming social background: Equity in learning opportunities and outcomes. Paris: OECD.

OECD. 2012. *Education: quality standards essential to boost child learning and development* [Online]. Paris: OECD. [Accessed 28 May 2014].

OIREACHTAS LIBRARY & RESEARCH SERVICE 2012. Early Childhood Education and Care. Dublin: Library & Research Service.

OLIVER, C., MOONEY, A. & STATHAM, J. 2010. Integrated working: a review of the evidence.

PAVIA, L., NISSEN, J., HAWKINS, C., MONROE, M. E. & FILIMON-DEMYEN, D. 2003. Mentoring Early Childhood professionals. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17, 10.

PERCYDSMITH, J. 2006. What works in strategic partnerships for children: a research review. *Children & Society*, 20, 313-323.

PERERA, R., HENEGHAN, C. & YUDKIN, P. 2007. A graphical method for depicting randomised trials of complex interventions. *British Medical Journal*, 334, 3.

PUIG, V. I. & RECCHIA, S. L. 2008. The Early Childhood Professional Mentoring Group: a forum for parallel learning. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 29, 14.

RITCHIE, J. & LEWIS, J. 2003. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, Sage.

ROBINSON, M., ATKINSON, M. & DOWNING, D. 2008. *Supporting Theory Building in Integrated Services Research*, ERIC.

- ROWLEY, J. B. 1999. *The good mentor. Educational Leadership*.
- RYAN, S. & HORNBECK, A. 2004. Mentoring for Quality Improvement: A Case Study of a Mentor Teacher in the Reform Process. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 19, 79-96.
- SHEEHAN, K. B. & HOY, M. G. 1999. Using eMail to survey Internet users in the United States: Methodology and assessment. *Journal of ComputerDMediated Communication*, 4, 0-0.
- SLATHAM, J. 2011. A review of international evidence on interagency working, to inform the development of Children's Services Committees in Ireland. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- SLOPER, P. 2004. Facilitators and barriers for coDordinated multiDagency services. *Child: care, health and development*, 30, 571-580.
- SOUTH DUBLIN NEYAI CONSORTIUM 2014a. Mentoring for Quality Practice in Early Years Education and Care: An Implementation Guide.
- SOUTH DUBLIN NEYAI CONSORTIUM 2014b. Model of Work Placement for Early Years Educators.
- SUCHMAN, E. 1967. *Evaluative Research: Principles and practice in public service and social action programs*, New York, Russell Sage.
- SQW 2012. Evaluation of the 3, 4, 5 Learning Years Service. youngballymun.
- SYLVA, K., MELHUIISH, E., SAMMONS, P., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I. & TAGGART, B. 2004. *The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: Final Report: A longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997-2004*, Institute of Education, University of London/Department for Education and Skills/Sure Start.
- THALHEIMER, W. & COOK, S. 2002. How to calculate effect sizes from published research: A simplified methodology. *Work-Learning Research*.
- TONG, A., SAINSBURY, P. & CRAIG, J. 2007. Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19, 349-357.
- UTTLEY, C. M. & HORM, D. M. 2008. Mentoring in Early Childhood Professional Development: Evaluation of the Rhode Island Child Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 29, 15.
- VANDELL, D. L., BELSKY, J., BURCHINAL, M., STEINBERG, L. & VANDERGRIFT, N. 2010. Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD study of early child care and youth development. *Child Dev*, 81, 737-56.
- VANDENBROECK, M., PEETERS, J., VAN LAERE, K., URBAN, M. & LAZZARI, A. 2011. CoRe Study on Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care. London: University of East London, University of Ghent.
- WATT, J. H. 1999. Internet systems for evaluation research. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 1999, 23-43.
- WHITEHEAD, J. & FITZGERALD, B. 2007. Experiencing and evidencing learning through self-study: New ways of working with mentors and trainees in a training school partnership. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 1-12.
- WHO. 2000. *The World Health Report 2000* [Online]. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available: [http://www.who.int/whr/2000/en/whr00\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/whr/2000/en/whr00_en.pdf).
- YUN, G. W. & TRUMBO, C. W. 2000. Comparative Response to a Survey Executed by Post, EMail, & Web Form. *Journal of ComputerDMediated Communication*, 6, 0-0.





For further information on the South Dublin NEYA Consortium -  
Addressing Gaps Between Training and Practice Contact:

Manager Children and Families  
South Dublin County Partnership  
T: 01 4508748  
E: [sbrocklesby@sdcpartnership.ie](mailto:sbrocklesby@sdcpartnership.ie)

