



Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare
Towards a New Funding Model

Working Paper 7:
ELC and SAC Funding Models which Support Provision Quality

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Glossary

<i>Aistear</i>	The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland.
Childcare	Broadly used to mean ELC and/or SAC.
Childminders	See home-based provision.
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Activities designed to develop an individual's skills, knowledge and expertise as an ELC or SAC staff member, leader or head of a setting (or more generally, a professional). These activities are formal and can include courses and workshops, as well as formalised collaboration and participation in professional networks. Professional development activities do not refer to every-day experiences and practice even though they may also be developing staff professionally.
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)	Programme in Ireland providing free hours of ELC for children aged between 2 years, 8 months and 5 years, 6 months.
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	All regulated arrangements to provide care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. Includes ISCED 0 and ECEC services without a defined educational component. Also called Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).
Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)	All regulated arrangements to provide care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. Includes ISCED 0 and ECEC services without a defined educational component. Also called Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
Home-based provision	Arrangements to provide education or childcare within the home. Also called family-based provision, family childcare or childminders.
National <i>Síolta</i> <i>Aistear</i> Initiative (NSAI)	A programme to support the coordinated roll-out of <i>Síolta</i> and <i>Aistear</i> in Ireland.
National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)	Qualification framework used in Ireland equivalent to the ISCED framework.

Quality	Characteristics of ELC and SAC which have effects on children’s development, learning and wellbeing. Includes process quality (the nature of the daily experiences of children) and structural quality (distal factors that are typically regulated, such as children-to-staff ratio, group size and staff training/education, and create the framework for the experiences of children).
School-Age Childcare (SAC)	Arrangements to provide childcare outside of normal school hours for school-going children, whether provided in formal or home-based settings. This includes before school, after school and school holidays, but excludes weekend.
<i>Síolta</i>	The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland.

Executive Summary

Introduction

As part of the First 5 Strategy to improve outcomes for children in Ireland from birth to age five, a commitment has been made by the Irish Government to at least double public spending on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland by 2028. An Expert Group was tasked to deliver a report containing proposals for a new funding model which will help ensure that this additional funding can be used in the best way to deliver safe, high quality, affordable and accessible ELC and SAC. This report is the seventh in a series of working papers delivered by Frontier Economics in the role of Research Partnership to provide research support to the Expert Group.

Improving the quality of ELC¹ and SAC provision in Ireland is a core intent of the new funding model in order to support the improvement of child outcomes, to assure parents that their children are participating in excellent services, and to ensure that additional public funding delivers a higher standard of service. In order to provide a range of options for how provision quality might be supported, the aims of this paper are to:

- Provide a high-level description of the features of high quality ELC and SAC provision, including both structural and process quality measures.
- Identify which features of quality are amenable to being resourced and/or required through a funding model, using evidence on existing funding approaches and the effectiveness of these approaches to improve quality.

The terms “through a funding model” and “funding approaches” are defined here as approaches for paying public funding to settings to influence quality decisions at the setting level rather than public funding used at the broader system level to influence quality.

¹ The term ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) is widely used in the international literature, but the term ELC (Early Learning and Care) is used here in place of ECEC in the original sources. Where the term ELC is used alone, it does not include SAC. The terms “childcare” or “child care” are widely used in the international literature to mean ELC and SAC and the use of the term “childcare” is maintained from original sources in order to avoid any confusion with the meaning.

Methodology

An initial stage reviewed the European Union Quality Framework, *Síolta* and the OECD Quality Beyond Regulations project to identify features of high quality ELC and SAC. This review was used to define the scope of the work within a narrower interpretation of “quality” as those features associated with the learning and care experience for all children rather than access or specialised support for a selection of targeted children.² The scope of the funding approaches under consideration was also defined as those seeking to influence quality decisions at the setting level rather than at the broader system level.

A search of relevant key government, social policy and academic databases was then undertaken for evidence on the use and effectiveness of ELC and SAC funding approaches to support and promote high quality provision in European and OECD countries and jurisdictions. Following this desk-based research, eight telephone interviews with key informants were undertaken to help complete any evidence gaps for selected policies and elicit views on the perceived effectiveness of measures and implementation challenges. Information on funding approaches to support provision quality is presented for a total of 38 policies in 16 countries and jurisdictions.

It should be noted that the research for this report was undertaken prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic and that some information may have subsequently changed as a result.

Types of quality measures

A broad range of policies supporting provision quality were identified and categorised into five groups based on the quality element that they seek to influence:

- (a) **Workforce skills:** policies to improve workforce skills through employment-related training, continuing professional development (CPD) and employment retention.
- (b) **Working conditions:** policies to improve workforce conditions by raising demand for more-qualified staff, increasing wages, and improving career profiles and status.

² This was in part to avoid overlaps with other working papers which focus on access as related to cost (working papers 2 and 4) and on targeted support (working papers 5 and 6), but also reflect a common interpretation of “quality” used in the international literature.

- (c) **Curriculum:** broadly defined as policies to improve practice, including use of approved curricula, inspection requirements and lower child-to-staff ratios.
- (d) **Collaboration:** policies to encourage settings to work with each other, other organisations and parents.
- (e) **Devolved quality choice:** policies which devolve the choice of quality target and policy approach to lower levels of government or administration.

Workforce skills

Funding mechanisms to increase worker skills include: (1) incentivising post-secondary educational courses, which may be combined with (2) retention bonuses for staying in the same job or in the field, and (3) incentivising CPD, which may include (4) on-site specialists in settings.

The following findings emerged from the case studies:

- Incentives for post-secondary courses have been combined with other initiatives, including retention, star ratings and pay grades for staff qualifications.
- Retention bonuses may be relatively effective at decreasing turnover when sector wages are low.
- The aims of the CPD initiative will influence the appropriate design. Some CPD initiatives are targeted at a group that requires special support, such as settings with a high proportion of children from families with a different primary language. Other CPD initiatives are available on an opt-in basis, which may be more accessible to higher quality settings.
- A challenge in designing CPD is ensuring that practitioners can implement the CPD learning in their setting. Embedding mentors or CPD within a setting may help staff to put quality improvements into practice. Embedded CPD may be more tailored to the individual setting, and it may be easier for staff to make changes as an entire group than when acting individually.

Working conditions

Almost all of the identified policies supporting working conditions focused on improving staff qualifications or pay (although policies supporting employment-related training and CPD should also be considered as enhancing working conditions). Very few policies which aimed to improve other elements of conditions, such as work benefits, job security, career profile or social status, were identified. In addition, the policies supporting qualifications and pay were dominated by eligibility requirements or funding premiums for public subsidies or free places; the main exception to this was the use of wage enhancements in a few cases. This reliance on using broader sources of public funding to improve quality in private-dominated ELC and SAC sectors is not surprising; improving qualifications and salary levels has high monetary costs, and sizeable financial levers are required for private providers to be willing and able to make the desired changes. In systems dominated by public provision, more bespoke in-kind support is easier to facilitate and requirements are more straightforward to enforce.

The following findings for raising workforce qualification levels emerged from the case studies:

- It can be difficult to identify impact on qualification levels when there are multiple policies with the same objective or when qualification levels are gradually rising over time for more general reasons. However, the evidence is clearer when training enrolment rates react sharply to a new policy.
- There can be displacement effects from qualified staff moving from uncovered provision if support for higher qualifications is focused on one area of provision.
- To incentivise workers to train, funding for higher qualifications needs to be passed through to higher salaries for more-qualified staff. However, even if not passed through, the funding may create incentives for providers to hire more-qualified staff and increase demand (if not the rewards) for higher qualifications.
- Gradation of support across different rising levels of qualifications (as opposed to a single quality premium) can provide stronger incentives for those providers beginning from a low base to improve and for those at the higher end to continue to

improve. However, the gradation in funding needs to be reasonably matched to the relative costs of moving from one level to the next to avoid “traps” at some levels.

- Support could be refined to reflect the importance of different types of staff roles. For example, the qualifications of directors or managers may carry a higher weight given their impact on overall setting quality.
- The evidence that the benefits of higher qualifications are focused on the rooms where staff actually work suggests that support should be determined on a room-by-room basis. This also creates incentives for settings to incrementally improve qualifications and to be able to expand without risk of losing the additional support if staff cannot be as highly qualified in additional rooms. However, these advantages need to be weighed against the additional administrative burden of support based at the room level.

The following findings for raising workforce pay emerged from the case studies:

- There is a broad view that pay levels are the key driver of quality in the sector and the key barrier to improvements in quality.
- Support to increase workforce pay levels can take the form of wage scale conditions for broader public funding or direct wage enhancements. The wage scale conditions have some advantage in that they set the total amount paid, while wage enhancements run the risk that they may displace pay that would otherwise have been paid by the provider.
- Size matters: wage scales or enhancements will only have an impact on workforce quality if they have “bite” and actually increase pay levels to a sufficient degree. A common theme in many policies is that pay levels are set too low.
- To support retention and experience in the workforce, pay needs to increase with experience. Even if experience does not directly benefit provision quality, other occupations have increasing returns to experience, and the ELC and SAC sectors require similar returns to be able to attract the best workers at older ages as well as at the youngest ages.

There are two broader points of note from these case studies:

- To be effective, policies supporting workforce conditions need to be widely available. Limited numbers of places in higher quality provision potentially conflict with issues of equal access.
- If broader funding sources are reduced (or do not keep pace with rising costs) or other sources of income diminish, providers' responses often affect working conditions, for example by reducing (or not increasing) pay and hiring less-qualified staff (and cutting CPD or training support).

Curriculum

Most of the policies identified as supporting curriculum-related elements of quality are requirements for broader public funding and operate alongside other requirements on staff qualifications or pay. Only one case (in Ireland) was identified as support-in-kind to assist the implementation of specific quality frameworks within services. No evidence was identified on the effectiveness of these approaches in terms of enhanced use of curricula. This may primarily reflect that policies to support the use of curriculum and improve practice are covered in regulations (and outside the scope of this paper), but it may also be due to such policies tending to operate at the system level or being part of approaches supporting workforce skills.

Collaboration

Very few policies explicitly supporting collaborative approaches were identified, possibly because collaboration tends to be supported at the system level rather than by policies that seek to influence the behaviour of individual settings (as with curriculum-related policies).

Nevertheless, the case study which considered networks of settings highlighted the following findings for consideration in developing collaboration between ELC and SAC settings:

- There are some advantages of scale in forming collaborations, particularly in areas such as CPD.

- There may be an optimal number of settings in a collaboration: having too few does not generate any benefits while having too many can be unwieldy to operate and create excessive administrative burden.
- Collaboration may not work well if the settings are geographically spaced: the ability to interact physically is important.
- Collaboration may not work well if the settings have different financial models, such as a mix of private and publicly maintained providers.
- Most importantly, collaboration may not work well if the settings are competitors, as is the case in a predominantly private sector.

The case study which considered the requirement to have parent advisory committees also highlighted the following findings for consideration in establishing such requirements:

- The roles for setting managers, staff and parents will need guidance or even the setting of specific protocols.
- The committees require managers to share some control, but there is an issue over responsibility for outcomes.
- Parental turnover may lead to substantial variation in the value of the committees and create a barrier to the building of good, long-term working relationships.

Devolved quality choice

There are relatively few cases where decisions about supporting quality are devolved and there is no evidence on whether devolving these choices leads to better support approaches. The identified cases have shown that these responsibilities may be devolved to regional or local authorities or to individual settings themselves.

The following findings emerged from the case studies:

- Given the choice, local authorities may allocate only a small part of funding to quality supplements. However, this may depend upon the level of overall funding and the flexibility offered in the amount of available funding over and above that needed to ensure a sufficient base rate.

- Regional or local authorities may have a preference for using quality measures related to staff qualifications or inspection ratings. There are various potential reasons for this: the workforce may be seen as the most important driver of quality; workforce measures may be the easiest ones to achieve improvements; or the workforce may be the area most in need of improvement.
- There are dual pressures between the demands of improving quality and enhancing affordability at regional and local government levels as well as national government levels.
- One example reported here suggests that generously funding and allowing settings to have complete flexibility in the choice of methods may substantially improve process quality, with lasting impacts. However, this evidence is based on a small sample of settings in one particular context, and further research on the possibilities such an approach might offer could be valuable.

Lessons for Ireland

The quality features which appear to be most amenable to being resourced and/or required through funding models are elements relating to staff, including (in order of amenability) qualification levels, CPD/training and pay. However, the question of effectiveness cannot be unequivocally answered due to a lack of robust evidence on impact, both in absolute terms and in terms of assessment of the *relative* effectiveness of different approaches.

In addition to the specific findings contained within the chapters for each quality element, some overarching lessons can be drawn for the Irish context:

- Policy examples from Ireland include those supporting workforce qualifications and use of curricula, but there is no robust evidence on their effectiveness.
- Permanent direct policies to address workforce pay are currently absent in Ireland,³ but workforce pay may be the key barrier to achieving higher quality provision, no

³ At the time of writing, the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) provides some support during the COVID-19 pandemic. See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/17507b-information-on-covid-19-measures-for-providers-and-staff-of-early-le/>

matter what other policies are in place. Approaches to address the pay issue can only be successful if sufficient funding is used to create a *substantial* financial lever which both encourages and *enables* providers to increase pay levels to the point where they can attract better and more-qualified staff.

- The design of funding incentives and requirements should take into consideration that the current level of workforce qualifications will limit the speed of progress in achieving workforce qualification goals.
- By design, a funding model with financial incentives for settings to improve quality will deny resources to those settings with the lowest quality and greatest need of support. Fundamentally, funding conditions or premiums offer incentives for change but no upfront funding for settings to improve quality. Hence, there may be a need for additional mechanisms to support those at the lower end of the quality measures to kickstart progress or to jump to a level which can then be sustained through the funding model.
- There is a risk that additional funding attached to particular quality measures could distort how settings would best deliver ELC and SAC. Hence, there is a need to be aware of potential adverse consequences (such as drawing the best staff away from some types of provision) in designing policy options.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives

As part of the First 5 Strategy to improve outcomes for children in Ireland from birth to age five, a commitment has been made by the Irish Government to at least double public spending on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland by 2028. A new funding model is required to help ensure that this additional funding is used in the best way to deliver safe, high quality, affordable and accessible ELC and SAC which meets families' diverse needs. An Expert Group was tasked to deliver a report containing proposals for a new funding model which includes the costs, risks and implementation plans for different options.⁴

Frontier Economics was appointed as the Research Partnership for this Expert Group to provide research support and advice to the group. This report is the seventh in a series of working papers summarising the evidence in several key areas.

Improving the quality of ELC⁵ and SAC provision in Ireland is a core intent of the new funding model to support the improvement of child outcomes, to assure parents that their children are participating in excellent services, and to ensure that additional public funding delivers a higher standard of service. To provide a range of options for how provision quality might be supported, the aims of this paper are to:

- Provide a high-level description of the features of high quality ELC and SAC provision, including both structural and process quality measures.

⁴ The terms of reference for the Expert Group are available at <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Terms-of-Reference-1.pdf>

⁵ The term ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) is widely used in the international literature, but the term ELC (Early Learning and Care) is used here in place of ECEC in the original sources. Where the term ELC is used alone, it does not include SAC. The terms "childcare" or "child care" are widely used in the international literature to mean ELC and SAC and the use of the term "childcare" is maintained from original sources in order to avoid any confusion with the meaning.

- Identify which features are amenable to being resourced and/or required through a funding model, using evidence on existing funding approaches and the effectiveness of these approaches to improve quality.

1.2 Methodology

An initial stage reviewed the European Union Quality Framework, *Síolta* and the OECD Quality Beyond Regulations project to identify features of high quality ELC and SAC. This review was used to define the scope of the work within a narrower interpretation of “quality” as those features associated with the learning and care experience for all children rather than access or specialised support for a selection of targeted children.⁶ The scope of the funding approaches under consideration was also defined as those seeking to influence quality decisions at the setting level rather than at the broader system level (see section 2.2 for further explanation).

A search of relevant key government, social policy and academic databases was then undertaken for evidence on the use and effectiveness of ELC and SAC funding approaches to support and promote high quality provision in European and OECD countries and jurisdictions. These searches were constructed to seek references to “(Term for ECEC) (term for incentive payment) (area of quality)” where:

- The terms used for ECEC were ECEC, ECE, early years, pre-school and childcare.
- The terms used for incentive payment were bonus, wage bonus, performance bonus, pay for performance, payment, bonus payment, incentive, subsidy, wage subsidy, grant, funding and fund.
- The terms used for area of quality were [omitted],⁷ CPD, training, qualification, capital, materials, space and equipment.

⁶ This was in part to avoid overlaps with other working papers which focus on access as related to cost (working papers 2 and 4) and on targeted support (working papers 5 and 6), but also reflect a common interpretation of “quality” used in the international literature.

⁷ This means that the terms for ECEC and incentive payment were used without any term for area of quality.

The search focused on eight case study countries (Canada, England, France,⁸ Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand), in line with evidence presented in earlier working papers. Further searches were undertaken using the format described above, adding the name of a particular case study country to ensure completeness for this set of countries. In addition to Ireland, the seven comparison jurisdictions were selected on the basis that their early education systems include some form of childcare market. They were also selected to cover a range of contexts, including public and private provision; split and integrated systems; centralised and decentralised governance structures; and levels of public funding and regulation.

The evidence was analysed in several ways:

- Identification of which quality features have received support in funding models;
- Categorisation of the funding approaches used to support each quality feature, including funding to support operational running costs and funding for capital investment;
- Assessment of the evidence on how effectively each type of approach has improved the quality of provision, including consideration of the regulatory burden; and
- Selection of the most useful examples to explore in greater depth.

Following this desk-based research, eight telephone interviews with key informants were undertaken to help complete any evidence gaps for specific policies and elicit views on the perceived effectiveness of the measures and implementation challenges. These interviews lasted between 40 and 65 minutes and all were with academics except for one, which was with a programme coordinator.

Information on funding approaches to support provision quality is presented for a total of 38 policies in 16 countries and jurisdictions.

⁸ No relevant policies were identified for France.

1.3 Caveats on the evidence

It should be noted that as the objective of this paper is to inform on the potential application of funding models to support provision quality to the Irish context, this means that:

- The summary should not be considered a comprehensive summary of all applications of such funding models. The focus was on the use of models in European and OECD countries, the evidence for which may be most useful for the Irish context.
- The information presented is the most up-to-date evidence identified, but it is possible that current policies may now differ from this. In terms of learning for the Irish case, evidence on mechanisms which are no longer operating is still useful.
- The limited nature and robustness of the evidence on effectiveness meant that it was challenging to draw strong conclusions, and the focus has been on drawing together a framework of key considerations for any application in Ireland.

It should be noted that the research for this report was undertaken prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic and that some information may have subsequently changed as a result.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** describes the scope of this paper in terms of quality features and policy approaches and presents the categorisation of policies used to support quality in provision. **Chapters 3 to 6** review the evidence on policies related to workforce skills, working conditions, curriculum and collaboration. **Chapter 7** explores how policies which devolve choices over quality measures and approaches have been implemented, while **chapter 8** offers some conclusions on the potential use of different approaches in Ireland.

2. Overview of quality measures and policy approaches

This chapter describes the quality measures and types of policies considered in this report. The first section summarises which elements are drawn from the European Union (EU) Quality Framework and draws some comparisons with other frameworks. The second section describes how the scope for policy approaches is focused on those that use funding to influence setting quality. The final section explains how policies have been categorised by the quality measure they seek to influence.

2.1 Scope of quality measures

The EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the OECD Quality Beyond Regulations project and *Síolta* (the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland)⁹ were reviewed to identify the features of high quality ELC and SAC. The selected scope is presented with reference to the EU framework.

The EU Quality Framework for ECEC has 10 statements, each covering a range of ECEC outputs (see Figure 1 in the Annex). The framework has a broad range of objectives covering access and inclusion which are not included in more narrowly defined definitions of “quality” as the type of ECEC experiences which improve child outcomes (for example, good quality ELC and SAC has been summarised as that “which best advances children’s cognitive, social and behavioural development” (Gambaro et al. 2015).

Policies related to access (as related to cost) were considered in working papers two and four, and policies related to inclusion were considered in working papers five and six. For these reasons, the scope of this paper does not cover the following three statements in the EU framework:

- Statement 1: that provision is available and affordable to all families and their children.¹⁰

⁹ See Council of the European Union (2019), OECD (2018) and Department of Education and Skills (2017).

¹⁰ Statement 1 also includes flexibility in opening hours, which can be seen as a characteristic of access or quality. The searches included flexibility in hours as a quality, but no relevant policies related to funding models for payments to settings were identified.

- Second part of statement 2: that provision access strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.
- Statement 10: that legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to high quality affordable ECEC.

The remaining elements in the EU framework were considered in four groups of quality outputs:

- **Workforce:** includes attractive career prospects, high qualification levels, good initial education programmes, regular CPD and staff knowledge of child protection (statement 3); and good working conditions and wages, appropriate child-adult ratios and group sizes, support for joint staff working, and induction mentoring and supervision (statement 4).
- **Curriculum:** includes a coherent framework for care, education and socialisation based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential (statement 5).
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** includes the collection of information in a timely and regular manner to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice (statements 7 and 8).
- **Collaboration:** includes the involvement of parents, families and carers in decision-making (statement 2); curriculum elements requiring staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and guidelines on liaising with school staff for transitions to school (statement 6); and collaboration with all services working for children including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders (statement 9).

These groups differ from the EU framework in that elements of collaboration across the statements have been collected together, reflecting areas of behaviour for settings rather than policy approaches.

The consensus is that quality can be divided into two broad dimensions which are critical facilitators of children's development and learning: **process quality**, which includes the

quality of the curriculum and pedagogical practices and how they support positive relationships and children's emotional development; and **structural quality**, which includes such factors as adult-to-child ratios, caregiver qualifications, group size and characteristics of the physical space. The curriculum group described above corresponds most closely to the process dimension, while the remaining three groups are closer to the structural dimension of quality.

2.2 Scope of policy approaches

In order to focus on evidence most relevant to the development of a new funding model for Ireland, this review considers two types of policies:

- Funding mechanisms (including for free places) where the funding (or level of funding) paid to settings is conditional on the setting fulfilling quality-related conditions that are over and above any regulation or requirements for all provision in the sector; and
- Funding or resources which support quality *within identifiable settings* (but are not dependent on the setting delivering funded hours).

This scope *excludes* some approaches to support quality at the system rather than the setting level, such as:

- Regulations or requirements which apply to all registered ELC or SAC provision, including those applying to funded provision in a jurisdiction where all provision is publicly delivered or funded (and hence applies to all provision);
- Support for initial workforce training prior to individuals joining a specific setting (other than when it involves support from specific settings such as apprenticeships or work experience);
- Support for the development of the curriculum (but support for settings to use the curriculum is within scope); and
- Support for the development of monitoring and evaluation (but support for settings to use monitoring and evaluation is within scope).

The review of the evidence on the effectiveness of policies will focus on how well each approach leads settings to improve their quality outputs. This means that two substantial areas are not within the scope:

- Any assessment of whether and how much the supported quality outputs lead to better child outcomes. For example, a policy may effectively lead to settings having lower child-to-staff ratios but no assessment will be made on whether the lower ratio has improved child wellbeing or development.
- Relatedly, any assessment of how well increased use of policy tools by settings leads to improved quality outputs. Specifically, this means that changes *in the use of* qualified staff, curricula and monitoring and evaluation are within scope, but no assessment will be made of the *effectiveness of the design* of initial staff training, curricula, and monitoring and evaluation.

As before, these restrictions allow a focus on evidence that is most relevant to the development of a new funding model for Ireland, but also recognises that these issues are independent areas requiring specialised reviews.

2.3 Summary of approaches

A broad range of policies were identified that fall within this scope of quality measures and use approaches which could influence setting behaviour through a funding model. Following a review of their common characteristics, these were categorised into five groups, primarily based on the quality element that they seek to influence, as follows:

- (f) **Workforce skills:** policies to improve workforce skills through employment-related training, CPD and employment retention.
- (g) **Working conditions:** policies to improve workforce conditions by raising demand for more-qualified staff, increasing wages and improving career profiles and status.
- (h) **Curriculum:** broadly defined as policies to improve practice, including use of approved curricula, inspection requirements and lower child-to-staff ratios.
- (i) **Collaboration:** policies to encourage settings to work with each other, other organisations and parents.

- (j) **Devolved quality choice:** policies which devolve the choice of quality target and policy approach to lower levels of government or administration.

There are several points to note about this categorisation:

- The workforce policies have been divided into the two categories of skills and conditions, partly reflecting the mix of policy objectives within the identified policies, but there are overlaps between these categories, including that improved training and CPD could be considered part of better working conditions and that better working conditions are an important element in improving work retention.
- Policies involving funding subsidies or funding for free places often contained conditions or funding premiums both to support staff qualifications in category (b) and to support curriculum (category (c)) and/or collaboration (category (d)). There was little overlap between policies supporting workforce skills (category (a)) and other categories.
- No explicit policies were identified which directly related to settings' behaviour with regards to monitoring and evaluation. This may be because monitoring and evaluation tends to be implemented at a system level rather than at an individual setting level or to be required by regulation rather than incentivised. The most closely related policies were those requiring some type of inspection rating within the curriculum category (category (c)).

The five categories of policies and evidence on their effectiveness are explored in the following five chapters.

3. Workforce skills

This chapter describes policies to improve workforce skills through employment-related training, CPD and employment retention. The first section presents examples of these policies and their key features, while the subsequent sections explore several selected policies in greater depth and the evidence on their effectiveness. The final section summarises and discusses the findings.

3.1 Policies to support workforce skills

Workforce skills are a key factor in the delivery of high quality provision:

“Staff that are equipped to follow the developmental needs, interests and potential of young children and able to detect potential development and learning problems can more actively support child development and learning. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 19)

In addition, CPD is noted as being of particular importance to support those from minority language backgrounds:

“Appropriate continuous professional development also prepares staff to welcome and support bilingual children.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p 18)

Examples of policies that support employment-related training include:

- **Ontario Qualifications Upgrade Programme and Leadership Certification.** This programme provides grants for tuition fees, travel, living expenses and other costs for staff in ECEC to study (full time or part time) for a recognised ECE diploma within Ontario colleges. Grants are also available for supervisors and those intending to become supervisors, for tuition fees and travel related to recognised programmes in ECE management in Ontario colleges. (Ontario Ministry of Education 2020a, 2020b)
- **Sweden paid leave for postgraduate research degrees.** In 2011 in Sweden, pre-school became part of the school system. At this time, Sweden introduced a new teacher education programme which focused on content areas (e.g. language, mathematics, evaluation, didactical issues) to encourage more pedagogical practice

in pre-schools. The state also funded paid educational leave for pre-school teachers to engage in postgraduate research degrees and set requirements for pre-school teacher credentials in order to be employed without a time limit. (Garvis 2018)

- **England employer incentive for early years initial teacher training (EYITT).** The UK Department for Education (DfE) funds EYITT through two types of practitioners. First, there is funding for graduates in paid employment in an early years setting who need part-time training and further experience to demonstrate the teacher's standards for early years. Importantly, this programme includes incentive funding to providers to cover the training and salary costs of the graduate. Second, DfE provides bursaries to trainees registered on a graduate entry course which will award Early Years Teacher Status. (Department for Education 2019)
- **Alberta Leadership Bursary.** ALIGN Leadership bursaries are available to agencies for purposes of leadership development. Applicants must work in a supervisory leadership role for a non-government organisation that contracts with Children Services. (Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta 2020)
- **Prince Edward Island Early Childhood Education Grants.** These grants are available to employees of licensed centre- and home-based providers to cover the tuition of post-secondary courses in ECE at PEI colleges. (Government of Prince Edward Island 2020)
- **Germany Language Daycare Centres.** Funding was introduced in 2011 to provide language specialists to day-care centres. The programme was targeted towards centres with above average special language needs. This is discussed in the case study in section 3.2.
- **Ireland Learner Fund, Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) programme and Graduate Bursaries.** Introduced in 2014, the Learner Fund is available to practitioners seeking to upskill qualification levels to NFQ 5 and 6. The LINC programme, introduced in 2016, is an NFQ Level 6 Special Purpose award which aims to support the inclusion of children with a disability in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. There is also additional capitation paid to ECCE providers with a

qualified LINC inclusion coordinator. Graduate Bursaries are provided retrospectively to (recent) ELC graduates working in the ELC sector. (Branigan and Madden 2020; Pobal 2019)

Other policies that support employment-related training but include an element to encourage employment retention after training are as follows:

- **Alberta Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) career scholarship.** This scholarship is awarded to recent high school graduates for attending a full-time post-secondary programme in early learning and childcare. Recipients must sign a service commitment to working in a licensed or approved childcare programme in Alberta for one year after completion of the programme. (Government of Alberta 2020b)
- **Wisconsin T.E.A.C.H scholarship programme.** This programme funds tuition fees and expenses for post-secondary early childhood and child development courses. It also includes a bonus on completion of the scholarship. This is discussed in the case study in section 3.3.
- **California's Child-care Retention Incentive (CRI) programme.** CRI offers wage incentives to encourage in-service training and reduce job turnover. This is discussed in the case study in section 3.4.

Examples of policies that support CPD include:

- **Netherlands *Oog voor interactie* and TINK.** Between 2015 and 2018, the Dutch government subsidised two CPD courses. *Oog voor interactie* (Eye for interaction) CPD is a pedagogical training for early years and school-aged education and care. TINK CPD is a pedagogical training for staff to improve language and interaction skills. These are discussed in the case study in section 3.5.
- **Italy annual salary bonus for CPD.** In 2015, the Italian government passed a new law (Law 107/2015 *La Buona Scuola*) which introduced an annual €500 bonus for teachers, to be spent on accredited CPD activities. This represented a substantial change from the previous lower level of centralised professional development funding in state schools (Oberhuemer and Schreyer 2018). Under the new law,

teacher training from kindergarten to secondary school is mandatory, and the CPD bonus can be spent on attending conferences, training, buying books and software or participating in cultural events. (Bulgarelli 2019)

- **Slovakia salary bonus for CPD.** In 2009, Slovakia passed the Act on Pedagogical Employees, which guarantees teachers' rights for continual education and professional development (Mentel and Pokorny 2012). It also created a salary system based on qualifications and career level, and salary bonuses based on credits gained from professional development training and performance (Eurydice 2019).
- **Spain salary bonuses for CPD.** ECE teachers in public settings and publicly funded private schools in Spain receive a salary bonus in several parts: a salary bonus for every three-year period in service, a productivity bonus and a bonus for CPD (Oberhuemer and Schreyer 2018).
- **New Zealand Professional Learning and Development.** The New Zealand Ministry of Education funds CPD that is targeted at disadvantaged groups, and funds CPD through its Communities of Learning (*Kāhui Ako*) clusters of schools. These programmes are discussed in the case study in section 3.6.

3.2 Germany Language Daycare Centres

This case study includes two related policies which supported language development in day-care centres in Germany:

- *Focus on Language and Integration Daycare Centres.* Over the period 2011 to 2015, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs provided funding to support day-care centres. The funds provided additional specialist language experts in order to improve language education, with a focus on children under age three, children from educationally disadvantaged families and from families with a primary language other than German (BMFSFJ 2020b). In the programme, day-care teams were supported through two pathways: (1) by specialists with expertise in language education who advised, accompanied and supported the day-care teams, and (2) specialist advice within a network of 10-15 day-care centres.

- *Language Daycare Centres*. Building on the previous programme, over the period 2016-2020, a second programme funded language specialists to provide advice to support quality development to day-care centres. As in the previous programme, specialists were either embedded in day-care centres or working within networks of centres. The policy focused on centres with above average special language needs.

These programmes prioritised (1) integration of language education into everyday life and natural language development, and (2) inclusive language education.

The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs conducted an evaluation of the 2011-2015 policy. It found that participating centres had more frequent training activities and more intensive professional exchange amongst staff (BMFSFJ 2020b). A study found that within this programme regular professional exchange on the topic of language education was positively associated with the development of language-related process quality (Resa et al. 2018). Anders et al. (2016) noted some limitations of the ministry evaluation, which are shared with other ECEC evaluations, such as the autonomy given to settings and professionals in implementing initiatives, establishing suitable control groups and the interpretation of effect sizes.

The ministry reported interim evaluation findings for the 2016-2020 policy. It found that the programme improved worker qualifications and skills, and quality of interactions in the facilities. It also found that conferences, training courses, additional publications and newspapers had a positive effect on the transfer of programme content (BMFSFJ 2020b).

3.3 Wisconsin T.E.A.C.H scholarship programme¹¹

Since 1999, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development has funded T.E.A.C.H scholarships, which:

- fund a major share of tuition, book expenses and credential fees;

¹¹ This section draws on Adams et al. (2003), Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (2020) and a key informant interview.

- provide 15 hours of paid release time every semester to attend classes and complete coursework;
- include a bonus or raise when the contract is completed (in most cases) which is commensurate with the number of credits completed; and
- include counselling and administrative support.

Scholarship recipients commit to attending classes, completing their ECEC course and remaining with the employer or in a regulated childcare programme for six months to a year after completion of the course.

The programme addresses workforce skills through three key causal routes: (1) subsidising training to increase qualifications, (2) increasing wages to attract more skilled workers, and (3) reducing staff turnover to retain trained staff.

An early evaluation of the programme (Adams et al. 2003) found that the initiative had increased the number of completed college-level courses in early childhood education and child development among childcare providers. It also found that the wages of T.E.A.C.H recipients had risen substantially, and that the turnover rate for T.E.A.C.H. recipients was less than one-third the turnover rate of the childcare workforce. The retention bonus may have been particularly effective in the initiative due to the low wages in the sector. A limitation of this study is that it did not control for self-selection of practitioners into the programme.

The T.E.A.C.H. programme has been complemented by a five star quality ratings programme for ECE settings. These quality ratings are in part based on staff qualifications. This has increased the demand among settings for qualified staff and thereby helped to increase take-up of T.E.A.C.H.

3.4 California's Child-care Retention Incentive (CRI) programme

Since starting in 2000, California's CRI programme has offered wage incentives to encourage in-service training and to reduce job turnover. The programme is implemented at a county level, and counties define a set of policy details (Bridges et al. 2011) for:

- the level of wage incentives;

- contingency on staying in the same centre or the field;¹² and
- the intensity of professional development requirements.

From 2001 to 2004, California also ran an incentive programme called the Matching Funds for Child-care Retention Incentive Program for Early Care and Education Staff. This policy had the following components:

- wage incentives;
- matching grants from the state commission to counties, which shaped county-level implementation within state-level guidelines; and
- a requirement that staff worked at the same centre for 9 to 12 months in order to enter the programme.

These policies targeted workforce skills through multiple channels: wage incentives to attract a skilled workforce, subsidies for training to increase qualifications among staff, and retention requirements to increase workforce experience.

Bridges et al. (2011) evaluated the CRI programme and examined the effects of programme components using the variation in county-level implementation. The study found that participation in CRI had a modest but consistent association with the completion of college units, and that the effect was strongest for lower paid staff and Latina aides and teachers. They also found significantly lower centre and field exit rates among CRI participants than sector figures had previously reported. However the CRI participants self-selected into the programme and may not have been representative of all ECE staff in California (the study did not have a matched control group). Additionally, the study found that the programme was a relatively expensive and gradual means of raising overall training levels of ECE staff.

3.5 Netherlands *Oog voor interactie* and TINK

Between 2015 and 2018, the Dutch government subsidised two CPD courses. *Oog voor interactie* (Eye for interaction) CPD is a pedagogical training for early years and school-aged

¹² Most counties require that staff work at the same center for 9 to 12 months in order to enter the programme.

education and care. It is a train-the-trainer course for staff members to train their own employees (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut 2020). TINK CPD is a pedagogical training for staff to improve language and interaction skills (Sardes 2015). The courses were qualitatively evaluated on their pedagogical effectiveness (Henrichs et al. 2017). The study found that the CPD increased awareness of the importance of strong interaction skills, but that improvements could be made to ensure the practices were embedded in settings and therefore sustainable, and that the training was equally accessible to childminders and to centre-based settings.

3.6 New Zealand Professional Learning and Development

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) has played a key role in providing CPD since the introduction of the EC curriculum *Te Whāriki* in 1996. From 1997 to 2010, the MOE's CPD funding was based on each EC service accessing in-depth CPD every three years. This CPD was focused on curriculum assessment and self-review (Cherrington 2017).

In 2010, the Strengthening Early Learning Opportunities (SELO) initiative and a reduction in ECE CPD budgets introduced a more targeted approach. Under the SELO initiative, CPD investment was focused on services that would support the goal of improved ECE participation among Māori and Pasifika children and children from low-income backgrounds, with smaller funds available for other groups on specific topics (Cherrington 2017).

Since starting in 2014, the Investing in Educational Success initiative has provided funding for up to 250 Communities of Learning (COL, or *Kāhui Ako*, discussed in section 6.3), which provide CPD funding. The initiative also has a Teacher-led Innovation Fund for teachers in schools to develop innovative teaching practices. Although these two programmes were designed with schools rather than the ECE sector in mind, they are playing an increasingly important role in the direction of early childhood CPD policy (Cherrington 2017).

In 2017, a revised ECE curriculum was launched, accompanied by a CPD package to support implementation. This funding emphasised workshops and web-based resources.

Cherrington (2017) identified a set of limitations in New Zealand's post-2010 approach to ECE CPD. These include:

- The MoE's approach is targeted at services identified as having low performance, rather than seeking to broadly promote quality in the sector.
- Short-term CPD programmes may be insufficient to significantly impact staff skills in a setting, and sustained engagement (for example through the COL) may create greater benefits.
- Three-quarters of EC centres reported that staff CPD and learning have been affected by the CPD funding cuts in 2010.
- There are disparities in CPD access, particularly for services located in rural areas.
- Greater local coordination is required to address local CPD needs and find resources, and to take advantage of developments in ECEC CPD.

3.7 Summary and findings

Funding mechanisms to increase worker skills include: (1) incentivising post-secondary educational courses, which may be combined with (2) retention bonuses for staying in the same job or in the field, and (3) incentivising CPD, which may include (4) on-site specialists in settings.

The following findings emerged from the case studies:

- Incentives for post-secondary courses have been combined with other initiatives, including retention, star ratings and pay grades for staff qualifications.
- Retention bonuses may be relatively effective at decreasing turnover when sector wages are low.
- The aims of the CPD initiative will influence the appropriate design. Some CPD initiatives are targeted at a group that requires special support, such as settings with a high proportion of children from families with a different primary language. Other CPD initiatives are available on an opt-in basis, which may be more accessible to higher quality settings.
- A challenge in designing CPD is ensuring that practitioners can implement the CPD learning in their setting. Embedding mentors or CPD within a setting may help staff

to put quality improvements into practice. Embedded CPD may be more tailored to the individual setting, and it may be easier for staff to make changes as an entire group than when acting individually.

4. Working conditions

This chapter describes policies to improve workforce conditions by raising demand for more-qualified staff, increasing wages and improving career profiles and status. The first section presents examples of these policies and their key features, while the subsequent sections explore several selected policies in greater depth and the evidence on their effectiveness. The final section summarises and discusses the findings.

4.1 Policies to support working conditions

In order to attract a high quality workforce, employment in ELC and SAC needs to be supported by suitable remuneration and working conditions:

“Early childhood education and care systems that aim at improved working conditions, including more adequate wage levels, can make employment in early childhood education and care a more attractive option for better-qualified staff, looking for proper careers.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 20)

Social status and rewards for higher qualifications and more work experience are also important for attracting staff and encouraging the accumulation of skills to raise the quality of provision:

“Effective early childhood education and care systems consider raising the professional status of staff, which is widely acknowledged as one of the key factors of quality, by raising qualification levels, offering attractive professional status and flexible career prospects and alternative pathways for assistants.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 19)

Examples of policies which aim to raise demand for more-qualified staff¹³ include specific funding for more-qualified staff:

¹³ Salary scales related to qualifications and/or experience are commonly used for public employees working in publicly delivered ELC but are not considered here as they would have limited applicability to the context in Ireland where ELC is privately delivered.

- **England Graduate Leader Fund.** The Graduate Leader Fund provided funding between 2008 and 2011 for full day-care private and voluntary sector providers to employ a graduate or early years professional (EYP) whose role was to support and mentor others, as well as to model skills and good practice to support high quality provision. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.2.

Other approaches include minimum staff requirements for the receipt of public funding which are greater than standard regulations:

- **Ireland ECCE Qualification Conditions.** Funding for the ECCE programme of free hours of ELC for children aged 2 years and 8 months to primary school age has a minimum Room Leader qualification of NFQ Level 6 (compared to NFQ Level 5 for all staff). (Branigan and Madden 2020; Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2020)

Relatedly, some public funding offers higher hourly funding rates (higher capitation) for provision with higher staff qualifications:

- **Ireland ECCE Higher Capitation for Qualifications.** There is a higher capitation rate for the ECCE programme if the Room Leader has a recognised and validated NFQ 7 (graduate) ELC qualification and a minimum of three years' experience working in the ELC sector. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.3.
- **Ireland ECCE Higher Capitation for LINC Qualification.** There is higher capitation for the ECCE programme for settings that employ LINC (Leadership for Inclusion) graduates as Inclusion Coordinators under the Access and Inclusion Model (Branigan and Madden 2020).
- **England Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) Quality Supplements.** In England, national funding for free entitlement places is allocated to settings by local authorities according to a national EYNFF. This formula allows local authorities to pay a supplement to support workforce qualifications. Local authorities have the freedom to choose the appropriate metric but must be transparent about the metric chosen and the total value of all funding supplements must not be more than 10% of the total value of funding to providers. (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2019; West and Noden 2019)

- **New Zealand Early Childhood Education (ECE) Subsidy and 20 Hours ECE Qualification Premiums.** The hourly funding rates for the ECE Subsidy and 20 Hours ECE for teacher-led services depend upon the proportion of certified teachers among regulated (ratio for frontline) staff, while there is a single quality premium for home-based services and parent-led services. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.4.
- **Wisconsin Five Star Rating System.** The Five Star Rating System determines reimbursement rates for public funding with just under half of the points setting the star rating being determined by staff qualifications. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.5.

These requirements for higher qualifications (either as a condition of funding or to be eligible for higher funding rates) often come with requirements in other areas of quality, including those relating to curriculum and collaboration, which are covered in chapters 5 and 6.¹⁴

Examples of policies which aim to increase wages include:

- **Alberta Child Care Grant Funding.** Under the Alberta Child Care Grant Funding introduced in April 2020, all licensed day care, out-of-school care, group family childcare, and approved family day home care, agencies can apply for grant funding to support the recruitment, retention and professional development of their staff. The wage top-up element provides funding to top-up certified childcare staff and family day home care providers over and above the base wage paid by the employer. Staff must be paid at least the minimum wage before the wage top-up, and top-up rates increase with certification level from \$2.14 for child development assistants to \$4.05 for child development workers and to \$6.62 for child development supervisors. (Government of Alberta 2020a)

¹⁴ Specifically, the Ireland ECCE programme conditions have curriculum-related elements described in the case study in section 5.3, and the England EYNFF funding premiums have a collaborative element described in chapter 6. The New Zealand ECE and 20 Hours ECE funding have wage-related and curriculum-related elements, and the Wisconsin Five Star Rating system has curriculum-related elements, both of which are described in the case studies in this chapter.

- **Ontario Provincial Wage Enhancement.** In Toronto, the Ontario Provincial Wage Enhancement pays a wage enhancement to those who care for children in licensed childcare (regardless of qualification) at a rate of \$2 per hour up to a maximum total wage of \$27.75. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.6.
- **Norway Kindergarten Funding.** In Norway, public and private kindergartens are financed by municipalities in accordance with national regulations. These funding regulations include a condition that private kindergartens cannot have “substantially lower staffing costs per full-time place” than those which are common in comparable municipal kindergartens. (Ministry of Education and Research 2020, section 14a)
- **New Zealand 20 Hours ECE Salary Conditions.** Funding for 20 Hours ECE in teacher-led services is conditional on all certified teachers being paid at least at the entry levels in the current Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement of Aotearoa New Zealand. This policy is discussed in the case study in section 4.4.
- **Prince Edward Island Early Years Centres.** Early Years Centres in Prince Edward Island are required to set staff wages and benefits according to a provincial salary scale as a condition for receipt of public funding to help bridge the difference between regulated parent fees and operating costs. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.7 (and a different aspect of the centres in the case study in section 6.4).

Examples of policies which aim to improve career profiles or status include:

- **Sweden Strengthening of Pre-school Teachers.** In Sweden, the School Law of 2011 strengthened the position of pre-school teachers by pre-school becoming part of the school system and the inclusion of pre-school teacher education as one of the four programmes in the new teacher education programme. This is discussed in the case study in section 4.8.
- **Norway Media Campaign.** A national media recruitment campaign named “The Best Job in the World is Vacant” was run between 2012 and 2014 with the aim of raising the status and public recognition of ELC work and attracting new staff. The campaign established regional networks tasked with developing local measures. As part of the

national initiative, the local networks also ran education fairs and organised career days for trainee ELC teachers across all regions. (Example of Oslo and Arkeshus in OECD 2019)

4.2 England Graduate Leader Fund

The Graduate Leader Fund provided funding between 2008 and 2011 for full day-care private and voluntary sector providers to employ a graduate or early years professional (EYP). From 2011, local authorities have provided similar support from local funds. The role of these EYPs is to support and mentor others, as well as to model skills and good practice to support high quality provision. A national evaluation of the fund (Mathers et al. 2011) found that settings which had gained a graduate leader made significant improvements in quality for pre-school children (30 months to five years) and improvements related most strongly to direct work with children such as support for learning, communication and individual needs. However, there was little evidence of an impact on quality for younger children and the impacts were strongest in the rooms that the EYP worked in. The study also found that the success of the EYP depended upon three interrelated components: the leadership and skills of the EYP, the EYP's position within the setting, and the extent to which the role and remit of the EYP was defined and agreed.

4.3 Ireland ECCE Higher Capitation

Funding for the ECCE programme of free hours of ELC for children aged 2 years and 8 months to primary school age has a minimum Room Leader qualification of NFQ Level 6, but there is a higher capitation rate if the Room Leader has a recognised and validated NFQ 7 (graduate) ELC qualification and a minimum of three years' experience working in the ELC sector. The aim of the higher capitation is to incentivise services to recruit and retain greater numbers of higher-qualified and experienced Room Leaders and to encourage the pursuit of graduate ELC qualifications through the signal that there will be consistent demand for this higher level of qualification.

An evaluation of the Higher Capitation (Branigan and Madden 2020) reports that the proportion of ECCE services receiving higher capitation rose from 20% of all ECCE services to 53% between 2012/13 and 2018/19 and that the proportion of the ELC workforce with

graduate qualifications rose from 13% in 2013 to almost 25% in 2019. The higher growth rate in the higher capitation uptake over graduate numbers suggests that it may have been an effective incentive in increasing the proportion of graduate-led ECCE sessions. In addition, there is a positive relationship between higher capitation and better process quality (as measured in the Early Years Education-Focused Inspection ratings), although the direction of causation is ambiguous (those with better process quality could also be more likely to use more qualified staff). However, while the proportion of graduates working with non-ECCE children has also grown, the proportion working with infants, toddlers or children in afterschool care has declined, possibly exacerbated by displacement of the higher capitation. In addition, the evidence suggests that only a small proportion of the higher capitation payment is passed on to graduate Room Leaders with higher salaries¹⁵ (the funding cannot require this), blunting the incentive for staff to pursue the higher qualification. Finally, the higher capitation is awarded at the session level rather than the whole service level, and it has been suggested that administration could be further simplified by removing the per-room payment model. However, this would remove the incentive for settings to improve staffing in an incremental manner across rooms and could create a disincentive to expansion in the number of sessions if higher-qualified staff are not available or affordable for the entire service.

4.4 New Zealand ECE Subsidy and 20 Hours ECE¹⁶

The ECE Funding Subsidy contributes to the cost of ELC for all children for up to a maximum of 30 hours per week, while the 20 Hours ECE provides the first 20 of these hours at no direct charge for three-, four- and five-year-old children. Hourly funding rates are higher for the 20 Hours ECE than the ECE Funding Subsidy because they are intended to meet the full average cost of provision, whereas the ECE Funding Subsidy is intended only to be a contribution towards cost. Both funding levels depend upon staff qualifications. For teacher-led services, the rate increases with the proportion of certified teachers among regulated

¹⁵ It should be noted that this evidence is based on quite approximate headline calculations drawn from average pay levels which cannot take account of the complexities of pay and cost structures.

¹⁶ This section draws from New Zealand Ministry of Education (2020), McLachlan et al. (2018) and a key informant interview.

(ratio or frontline) staff across four bands (the four band being 0-24%, 25-49%, 50-79% and 80% or more of regulated staff who are certified teachers). From January 2021, the top rate band of 80% or more will be split into two bands of 80-99% and 100%. For home-based services and parent-led services, there is a single quality premium for higher staff qualifications. Funding for 20 Hours ECE has additional requirements: in teacher-led services, all certified teachers must be paid at least at the entry levels in the current Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement of Aotearoa New Zealand; home-based services must have coordinators who are locally based and be on duty for the specified times; and parent-led services must have enhanced child-to-staff ratio requirements.

When originally introduced in 2002, the graduation in funding rates reflected that the policy was starting from a low base in terms of the proportions of certified teachers and a top 100% band reflected that the aspiration was to have 100% certified teachers in teacher-led services. There was initially a substantial impact on numbers in training and becoming qualified, supported by existing mechanisms for staff already in work to undertake training. It is also argued that the funding allowed providers to achieve the more-qualified workforce that they wanted. Progress slowed down after the removal of the top 100% in 2011, although the proportion of certified teachers in teacher-led services rose from just over 60% in late 2008 to 69% in 2017. The slowdown in progress could also reflect that those settings remaining in the lower funding bands simply do not find the funding incentives sufficient to increase the proportion of certified teachers.

It has been argued that there are several weaknesses in the current policy. First, controls may not be strong enough to ensure that additional funding goes to additional quality rather than profits. Second, the salary conditions for teacher-led services are weak because there is substantial variation in salary levels above the prescribed minimums and the minimums make no allowance for experience or seniority. Third, the enhanced ratios for parent-led services are based on the argument that lower staff qualifications are compensated for by better ratios. Fourth, concerns that staff move around too much and child-to-staff ratios are too high in big corporate services are not being addressed. Finally,

there is evidence that the stagnation in per-child subsidy rates following 2011 has had a negative impact on the quality of ECE services.¹⁷

4.5 Wisconsin Five Star Rating System¹⁸

The Five Star Rating System in Wisconsin determines reimbursement rates for public funding. Just under half (14 of the available 30) of the points that set the star rating are determined by staff qualifications. In childcare centres, seven of these points are determined by a formula based on the percentage of classrooms staffed by qualified teachers and their levels of education, and the other seven points are determined by the qualification level of the centre director (acknowledging the critical role played by the director). For family childcare, all 14 points are determined by the childcare provider's qualifications. Of the remaining 16 points for both types of providers, 10 points are determined by the learning environment and curriculum, covering equipment, lesson plans, annual quality assessments and improvement plans (with additional points if administered by an external expert). A full 10 points can be immediately achieved if the provider has accreditation from a recognised association. The remaining six points can be achieved through professional practices. For childcare centres, this covers professional development, staff benefits and parental involvement in equal measure, and, for family childcare, it covers business practices (including professional development), provider and staff benefits, and parental involvement in equal measure. Reimbursement rates are at the standard rate for providers with three stars and +10% and +25% for providers with four and five stars respectively, while providers with two stars and one star receive -5% and -30% respectively.

It is reported that enrolments in childcare administration increased substantially even before the system was fully rolled out, possibly reflecting the easiest (and most efficient) way for providers to improve their star ratings.

¹⁷ For example, McLachlan et al. (2018) cite evidence from the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) Te Riu Roa's survey of members following the 2016 budget, which found that services were coping with the lack of increased funding through a "combination of teacher pay cuts, increased reliance on untrained staff, reduction of children's time with qualified teachers, and a steady increase in the fees asked of parents".

¹⁸ This section draws on Edie et al. (2005) and a key informant interview. Edie et al. (2005) provide a full discussion of the evidence and reasoning behind the design of the five star rating system.

4.6 Ontario Provincial Wage Enhancement¹⁹

In 2014, the Government of Ontario Budget included funding for a wage enhancement in the licensed childcare sector, which is administered by the City of Toronto with the stated aim that: “This program helps to retain the best possible child care professionals and it helps to close the wage gap between registered early childhood educators working in schools and those working in licensed child care programs.” The programme pays a wage enhancement to those who care for children in licensed childcare (regardless of qualification) at a rate of \$2 per hour up to a maximum total wage of \$27.75. Additional funding is paid for benefits of 17.5% and a supplement grant of \$150.00 per funded full-time equivalent (FTE) to cover shortfalls due to additional days worked, sick days and training hours.

Take-up of the wage enhancement was widespread, although there were some concerns about the administrative burden (such as the counting of contact hours) and the fairness of eligibility being purely determined by contact time. A survey of professionals in the sector conducted by Malatest (2017) reported high levels of agreement with statements that the wage enhancements contributed to decisions to stay in the current job and to continue to work in the childcare sector, and to job satisfaction (although the profile of respondents suggested a bias towards directors and supervisors). There is no evidence that the wage enhancement had any impact on the quality of the workforce, but this was not the key policy objective. Rather, the primary goal was to stabilise provision by addressing the loss of staff from licensed childcare programmes to schools when the introduction of full-time kindergarten for four-and five-year-olds increased demand for early childhood educators in schools at substantially higher levels of pay. However, even with the wage enhancement, Cleveland (2018) showed that childcare wages are competitive with other occupations when workers are aged 15-24, but are distinctly uncompetitive for older workers, leading to the conclusion that wage levels need to rise further to recruit capable well-qualified staff who will decide to stay in the sector.

¹⁹ This section draws on Toronto Children’s Services (2019), Cleveland (2018), Malatest (2017) and a key informant interview.

4.7 Prince Edward Island Early Years Centres – Wage Grid²⁰

Early Years Centres (EYCs) were launched in 2010 as part of the Preschool Excellence Initiative in Prince Edward Island. EYCs receive funding to help bridge the difference between regulated parent fees and operating costs. In return for this investment, the centres are governed by additional provincial policies, including provincially set parent fees and formula-based unit funding. EYCs are also required to have spaces for infants and toddlers, include children with special needs, have parent advisory committees,²¹ set staff wages and benefits according to a provincial salary scale, use a mandated early learning curriculum framework, and have revised certification and training requirements.

A baseline evaluation study found that the directors in the centres' EYCs had more administrative work; most EYCs (and some private centres) reported wage increases; private centres found staff recruitment harder; and half of staff felt that development opportunities had increased. The introduction of the wage grid and improved staff morale were the most significant early impacts, but there was some concern that there was no corresponding wage grid for staff working with children with special/exceptional needs (Government of Prince Edward Island 2013). Ongoing assessments or evaluations are internal to government and not publicly reported.

Although the wage grid initially brought significant increases to many early childhood educators (there was a 43% increase in wages between 1998 and 2013), the scale has been stagnant and the current wage grid is not competitive. In addition, it does not provide increments for years of seniority at the director level (Flanagan 2018). Although there was a small recent increase in the pay scale, the low level of pay is considered a key weakness for EYCs and a driver of continuing high staff turnover.

Most centre directors appreciate the benefits of the subsidies in becoming an EYC, but the government only appoints a limited number and there is a shortage of places.

²⁰ This section draws on Education and Early Childhood Development, PEI (2010), Government of Prince Edward Island (2013), Flanagan (2018), Friendly et al. (2018) and a key informant interview.

²¹ See section 6.4 for more information on the parent advisory committees.

4.8 Sweden Strengthening of Pre-school Teachers²²

In Sweden, the School Law of 2011 strengthened the position of pre-school teachers in several ways. Pre-school became part of the school system, which meant that pre-school teachers could join the Teachers Union. Pre-school teacher education was one of the four programmes in the new teacher education programme, and graduate degrees allowed teachers to work in pre-school with children aged one to five years and also in pre-school classes (for six-year-olds). These changes, together with a revised curriculum in 2018, marked a major shift in pre-school to be more pedagogical in the sense that it was more oriented to teaching and learning.

The impact of these changes on pre-school teacher status is not clear. Pre-school teachers and assistants in Sweden are generally well respected, with high levels of public trust in pre-schools, which may be partly due to pre-school teachers and assistants having regular communication with families and working with other agencies in the municipality. Pre-school teachers also have career opportunities to become directors, and university training programmes in leadership are available. Moreover, there have been some negative outcomes from the changes. There is evidence of increased work-related stress, which can be linked to the shift in focus from being a provider of quality care to teaching environments with different pedagogic aims, in combination with increases in group size due to population growth (and weak planning by municipalities, which are obliged to place a child within four months but do not face any regulation around pre-school group sizes). The shift into the school system meant more administration for pre-school staff and disrupted the teams that pre-school staff were used to working in. There has also been some concern that the new 2018 curriculum may have moved too far towards learning.

4.9 Summary and findings

Almost all of the identified policies supporting working conditions focused on improving staff qualifications or pay (although policies supporting employment-related training and CPD in the previous chapter should also be considered as enhancing working conditions).

²² This section draws on Garvis (2018) and a key informant interview.

Very few policies which aimed to improve other elements of conditions, such as work benefits, job security, career profile or social status, were identified. In addition, the policies supporting qualifications and pay were dominated by eligibility requirements or funding premiums for public subsidies or free places; the main exception to this was the use of wage enhancements in a few cases. This reliance on using broader sources of public funding to improve quality in private-dominated ELC and SAC sectors is not surprising: improving qualifications and salary levels has high monetary costs and sizeable financial levers are required for private providers to be willing and able to make the desired changes. In systems dominated by public provision, more bespoke in-kind support is easier to facilitate and requirements are more straightforward to enforce.

The following findings for raising workforce qualification levels emerged from the case studies:

- It can be difficult to identify impact on qualification levels when there are multiple policies with the same objective or when qualification levels are gradually rising over time for more general reasons. However, the evidence is clearer when training enrolment rates react sharply to a new policy.
- There can be displacement effects from qualified staff moving from uncovered provision if support for higher qualifications is focused on one area of provision.
- To incentivise workers to train, funding for higher qualifications needs to be passed through to higher salaries for more-qualified staff. However, even if not passed through, the funding may create incentives for providers to hire more-qualified staff and increase demand (if not the rewards) for higher qualifications.
- Gradation of support across different rising levels of qualifications (as opposed to a single quality premium) can provide stronger incentives for those providers beginning from a low base to improve and for those at the higher end to continue to improve. However, the gradation in funding needs to be reasonably matched to the relative costs of moving from one level to the next to avoid “traps” at some levels.

- Support could be refined to reflect the importance of different types of staff roles. For example, the qualifications of directors or managers may carry a higher weight given their impact on overall setting quality.
- The evidence that the benefits of higher qualifications are focused on the rooms where staff actually work suggests that support should be determined on a room-by-room basis. This also creates incentives for settings to incrementally improve qualifications and to be able to expand without risk of losing the additional support if staff cannot be as highly qualified in additional rooms. However, these advantages need to be weighed against the additional administrative burden of support based at the room level.

The following findings for raising workforce pay emerged from the case studies:

- There is a broad view that pay levels are the key driver of quality in the sector and the key barrier to improvements in quality.
- Support to increase workforce pay levels can take the form of wage scale conditions for broader public funding or direct wage enhancements. The wage scale conditions have some advantage in that they set the total amount paid, while wage enhancements run the risk that they may displace pay that would otherwise have been paid by the provider.
- Size matters: wage scales or enhancements will only have an impact on workforce quality if they have “bite” and actually increase pay levels to a sufficient degree. A common theme in many policies is that pay levels are set too low.
- To support retention and experience in the workforce, pay needs to increase with experience. Even if experience does not directly benefit provision quality, other occupations have increasing returns to experience, and the ELC and SAC sectors require similar returns to be able to attract the best workers at older ages as well as at the youngest ages.

There was little evidence relating to policies to support workforce career structure and status and only one finding:

- Professionalisation and movements towards a more educational approach may be stressful for an existing workforce embedded in practices more related to caring.

Finally, there are two broader points of note from these case studies:

- To be effective, policies supporting workforce conditions need to be widely available. Limited numbers of places in higher quality provision potentially conflict with issues of equal access.
- If broader funding sources are reduced (or do not keep pace with rising costs) or other sources of income diminish, providers' responses often affect working conditions such as reducing (or not increasing) pay and hiring less-qualified staff (and cutting CPD or training support).

5. Curriculum

This chapter describes policies to improve curriculum, broadly defined as those aiming to improve practice including use of approved curricula, inspection requirements and lower child-to-staff ratios. The first section presents examples of these policies and their key features, while the subsequent sections explore several selected policies in greater depth and the evidence on their effectiveness. The final section summarises and discusses the findings.

5.1 Policies to support curriculum

The use of a curriculum framework is associated with higher quality provision and better child outcomes:

“Curriculum is a powerful tool to improve well-being, development and learning of children. A broad pedagogical framework sets out the principles for sustaining children’s development and learning through educational and care practices that meet children’s interests, needs and potentialities.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 20)

Suitable child-to-staff ratios are also highlighted in the EU Quality Framework as an important factor:

“Adult-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children, as younger children require more attention and care.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 20)

Examples of policies which aim to improve curriculum and other areas of practice include:

- **Ireland National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative (NSAI).** Two frameworks that address quality within early years settings have been recently published in Ireland: *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (published in 2006) and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (published in 2009). The NSAI was established in 2017 to support the implementation and use of these two frameworks. This is discussed in the case study in section 5.2.

- **Prince Edward Island Early Years Centres.** The Early Years Centres are required to use a mandated early learning curriculum framework as a condition for receipt of public funding to help bridge the difference between regulated parent fees and operating costs. This policy is discussed in the case studies in sections 4.7 and 6.4.
- **Ireland ECCE Curriculum Conditions.** Funding for the ECCE programme of free hours of ELC for children aged 2 years and 8 months to primary school age requires services to adhere to the principles of the *Síolta* quality and *Aistear* curriculum frameworks and rules relating to consistency of child attendance. In 2016, Early Years Education-Focused Inspections (EYEI), focused on measuring process quality, were introduced for the ECCE programme. This is discussed in the case study in section 5.3.
- **England Free Early Education Entitlement Inspection Rating Conditions.** In England, free places for two-year-old children can only be funded in Ofsted-rated “satisfactory”²³ or “requires improvement” providers where there is not sufficient, accessible “good” or “outstanding” provision. (Department for Education 2018)
- **New Zealand 20 Hours ECE Additional Conditions.** In New Zealand, funding for 20 Hours ECE in home-based services is conditional on additional requirements for coordinators. In addition to regulations that each home-based ECE service must have its own named coordinator or coordinators who are ECE-qualified certificated teachers, the 20 Hours ECE requires that coordinators must be locally based and must be on duty for the specified times. For parent-led services, the 20 Hours ECE funding rate is conditional on enhanced child-to-staff ratio requirements. This policy is discussed in the case study in section 4.4.
- **Wisconsin Five Star Rating System.** In the Five Star Rating System, which determines reimbursement rates for public funding, six of the available 30 points which set the star rating are determined by the learning environment and curriculum, covering equipment, lesson plans, annual quality assessments and improvement plans (with

²³ The “satisfactory” rating was replaced with “requires improvement” in 2014, but this guidance cites both as settings may still have been classified using the old term at the time of publication.

additional points if administered by an external expert). This is discussed in the case study in section 4.5.

5.2 Ireland National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative (NSAI)²⁴

Ireland has two frameworks which address quality within early years settings:

- *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (published in 2006); and
- *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (published in 2009).

Initially, there was relatively little centralised support for implementing these frameworks. In 2015, the Department of Education identified preparedness in implementing *Síolta* and *Aistear* as an area requiring additional support. The NSAI was established in 2016 to address this gap. The NSAI plays a number of roles to support the coordinated rollout of *Síolta* and *Aistear* nationally through:

- Resource development group: national approval and quality assurance of materials to ensure coherent and consistent messaging;
- Oversight of the work of mentors: mentors are drawn from a number of early years organisations and provide training and mentoring support to enhance the implementation of the frameworks; and
- The *Aistear* and Play CPD and on-site support programme: workshops and on-site support visits with early years specialists, delivered by Better Start Quality Early Years Specialists on behalf of NSAI.

In 2018, the Department of Education and Skills found that NSAI had made good progress in developing CPD and training resources for ELC settings, increasing consistency across organisations delivering training and mentoring supports, and improving cohesion across key organisations delivering quality improvement measures. The funding allocated for *Aistear* and Play CPD from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (now the

²⁴ The section draws on Department of Education and Skills (2018) and a key informant interview.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)) has been a key element in improving implementation in settings.

During its development, the NSAI has confronted several challenges related to:

- Developing measures to ensure the consistency and quality assurance of CPD and mentoring supports;
- Developing a longer-term plan to continue to improve and increase implementation and streamlining of the CPD delivery model;
- Providing national coverage of CPD and mentoring supports to ensure access across all regions; and
- Administrative difficulties with efficient reporting and invoicing.

5.3 Ireland ECCE programme conditions²⁵

The ECCE programme offers 15 free weekly hours of ELC (delivered as three-hour sessions over five days) across 38 weeks of the year for children aged 2 years and 8 months to primary school age, with a take-up rate estimated as being within a range of 94% to 96% of all age-eligible children. The programme requires service providers to register with Tusla²⁶ and includes quality-based policy levers as conditions of funding. There is a minimum Room Leader qualification of NFQ Level 6 (compared to NFQ Level 5 for all staff), and services taking part must provide an appropriate pre-school educational programme which adheres to the principles and standards of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, the national practice frameworks for early learning and care. There are also rules relating to consistency of child attendance: if a child has not attended, the service provider should contact the parent or guardian to establish the cause of the child's absence within the first week of the absence commencing. In 2016, Early Years Education-focused Inspections (EYEI) were introduced for the ECCE programme. These inspections measure process quality and are conducted according to a framework which incorporates elements of practice under four key areas: the quality of the

²⁵ This section draws on Branigan and Madden (2020) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020).

²⁶ Tusla is an agency that provides services to support child and family protection and welfare, including the monitoring and inspection of ELC settings.

context to support children's learning and development; the quality of the processes to support children's learning and development; the quality of children's learning experiences and achievements; and the quality of management and leadership for learning.

5.4 Summary and discussion

Most of the policies identified as supporting curriculum-related elements of quality are requirements for broader public funding and operate alongside other requirements on staff qualifications or pay. Only one case (in Ireland) was identified as support-in-kind to assist the implementation of specific (and relatively new) quality frameworks within services. No evidence was identified on the effectiveness of these approaches in terms of enhanced use of curricula. This may primarily reflect that policies to support the use of curriculum and improve practice are covered in regulations (and outside the scope of this paper), but may also be due to such policies tending to operate at the system level or being part of approaches supporting workforce skills (covered in chapter 3).

6. Collaboration

This chapter describes policies to encourage settings to work with each other, other organisations and parents. The first section presents examples of these policies and their key features, while the subsequent sections explore several selected policies in greater depth and the evidence on their effectiveness. The final section summarises and discusses the findings.

6.1 Policies to support collaboration

The quality of provision can be supported by active collaboration between settings, with other organisations and with parents:

“Professional learning communities, where they exist within and across settings, have shown a positive impact through assigning time and space for staff collegial practices and joint work.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 20)

“Early childhood education and care provision benefits from close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 23)

“Early childhood education and care settings can actively encourage participation by involving parents, families and carers in decision-making processes (e.g. in parental committees). Reaching out to families – especially to single-parent and disadvantaged or minority or migrant families – with targeted initiatives allows them to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities.” (Council of the European Union 2019, p. 18)

Examples of policies to encourage collaboration include:

- **Ontario Centres of Excellence.** Ontario established three Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Childcare in 2018. These were designed to support professional learning and to connect practitioners, educational institutions and providers through specialised networks. This is discussed in the case study in section 6.2.

- **New Zealand *Kāhui Ako* Networks.** The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced *Kāhui Ako* (Communities of Learning) in 2018. *Kāhui Ako* are clusters of schools, from early childhood through secondary schools, that collaborate, pool resources and share best practices. This is discussed in the case study in section 6.3.
- **England Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) Quality Supplements.** In England, national funding for free entitlement places is allocated to settings by local authorities according to a national EYNFF. This formula allows local authorities to pay a supplement to support system leadership, defined as high quality providers leading other providers in the local area. As with workforce qualifications, local authorities have the freedom to choose the appropriate metric for system leadership, but must be transparent about the metric chosen. In addition, the total value of all funding supplements must not be more than 10% of the total value of funding to providers. (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2019; West and Noden 2019)
- **Prince Edward Island Early Years Centres.** The centres are required to have parent advisory committees as a condition for receipt of public funding to help bridge the difference between regulated parent fees and operating costs. This is discussed in the case study in section 6.4 (and other aspects of the centres are discussed in section 4.7).

6.2 Ontario Centres of Excellence²⁷

Ontario established three Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Childcare in 2018 (Provincial, Indigenous and Francophone). These were designed to support professional learning and to connect practitioners, educational institutions and providers through specialised networks. The centres were also designed to:

- offer CPD which is aligned with Ontario’s pedagogical framework in all regions of Ontario;

²⁷ This section draws on Ontario Ministry of Education (2019) and a key informant interview.

- train their staff to lead networks of services, to build pedagogical leadership in the early years sector; and
- develop and use professional learning resources, accessible online through a Centre of Excellence portal.

The three centres took independent approaches, but they were organised under a secretariat. The case study information below reflects the approach of the Provincial Centre.

The Provincial Centre focused on interventions at the level of the setting to encourage settings to become more educational. The centre created a pedagogist role and trained a set of pedagogists who worked in ECE centres in Ontario. The pedagogist worked with a set of educators, and key elements of the strategy include:

- embedding the pedagogist into the setting to sustain quality, even during staff turnover;
- guiding practitioners' collaboration and curriculum work within a setting;
- reducing isolation among practitioners; and
- ensuring that professional development was fit for purpose for the particular setting.

After two years of operation, the Centres of Excellence were discontinued following a change of provincial government, and information on effectiveness is therefore limited. The Provincial Centre shared its pedagogist approach with the British Columbia Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, begun in 2019, and is currently ongoing.

6.3 New Zealand *Kāhui Ako* Networks²⁸

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced *Kāhui Ako* (Communities of Learning) in 2018. *Kāhui Ako* are clusters of schools, from early childhood through secondary schools, that collaborate, pool resources and share best practices. Funding is available in three bands (up to 5 schools, 6-10 schools and 11 or more schools).

²⁸ This section draws on Ministry of Education (2018) and a key informant interview.

Geographic clusters of schools approved by the MoE can apply for joint funding to become a *Kāhui Ako*. In the application, the cluster specifies two fixed core areas of focus (example areas include literacy, mathematics or leadership), how the funding will be used and how the funding will be administered. Each *Kāhui Ako* has a salaried leader position and a separate expert partner to guide administration of funds (but who themselves did not deliver CPD at their own *Kāhui Ako*).

In the first year of the programme, *Kāhui Ako* received substantial funding for CPD. This was subsequently reduced, with the rationale that the network of practitioners would self-sustain after the initial establishment. There is anecdotal evidence that this was successful: teachers who would not have known one another but for their *Kāhui Ako* have continued to hold meetings and share methods.

As the policy is new, there is limited information currently available that formally assesses effectiveness. However, it is reported that a key advantage of the *Kāhui Ako* was in organising large-scale CPD days. The scale meant that CPD fees could be spread among many participants, every teacher could experience the material first hand and teachers could mix across schools for small group work.

Kāhui Ako are also reported to have faced some barriers to collaboration related to the composition of the network:

- If the *Kāhui Ako* included many schools, they could be challenging to coordinate.
- *Kāhui Ako* could find it difficult to meet if they were based in rural areas or where schools were spaced far apart geographically.
- Schools that typically competed with one another could face barriers to collaboration.

Additionally, there was anecdotal evidence of challenges that were specific to early childhood settings:

- Collaboration with schools could be challenging for early childhood settings that need different specialised resources from schools, for example, a different kind of CPD training.

- It could be difficult for early childhood settings to collaborate if they had different funding models (e.g. kindergartens versus education and care services).

There is also anecdotal evidence that *Kāhui Ako* have faced difficulties maintaining their earlier level of collaboration during the COVID-19 crisis.

6.4 Prince Edward Island Early Years Centres – Parent Advisory Committees²⁹

Early Years Centres (EYC) were launched in 2010 as part of the Preschool Excellence Initiative in Prince Edward Island. EYCs receive funding to help bridge the difference between regulated parent fees and operating costs. In return for this investment, the centres were required to have parent advisory committees. This requirement has had mixed success. Although teams from the Department of Education provided some useful guidance, it took time for centres and parents to work out their roles, and stronger protocols on the running of the committees would be helpful. There are also inherent challenges in managers sharing decision-making (while remaining responsible for outcomes) and the turnover in parent cohorts.

6.5 Summary and discussion

Very few policies explicitly supporting collaborative approaches were identified, possibly because (as with curriculum-related policies) collaboration tends to be supported at the system level rather than by policies seeking to influence the behaviour of individual settings.

Nevertheless, the case study which considered networks of settings highlighted the following findings for consideration in developing collaboration between ELC and SAC settings:

- There are some advantages of scale in forming collaborations, particularly in areas such as CPD.

²⁹ See section 4.7 for more information on other aspects of the Early Years Centres. This section draws on Friendly et al. (2018) and a key informant interview.

- There may be an optimal number of settings in a collaboration: having too few does not generate any benefits while having too many can be unwieldy to operate and create excessive administrative burden.
- Collaboration may not work well if the settings are geographically spaced: the ability to interact physically is important.
- Collaboration may not work well if the settings have different financial models, such as a mix of private and publicly maintained providers.
- Most importantly, collaboration may not work well if the settings are competitors, as is the case in a predominantly private sector.

The case study which considered the requirement to have parent advisory committees also highlighted the following findings for consideration in establishing such requirements:

- The roles for setting managers, staff and parents will need guidance or even the setting of specific protocols.
- The committees require managers to share some control, but there is an issue over responsibility for outcomes.
- Parental turnover may lead to substantial variation in the value of the committees and create a barrier to the building of good, long-term working relationships.

7. Devolved quality choice

This chapter describes policies which devolve the choice of quality target to lower levels of government or administration. The first section presents examples of these policies and their key features, while the subsequent sections explore several selected policies in greater depth and the evidence on their effectiveness. The final section summarises and discusses the findings.

7.1 Policies which devolve quality choice

The purpose of this chapter is to present evidence on the diversity in choices over quality measures and policy approaches when local governments, administrations or individual settings are given discretion in how to support quality.

Examples of policies which allow devolved quality choices include:

- **England Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF).** Between 2011 and 2017, national funding for free entitlement places was allocated to settings by local authorities according to a national EYSFF. This formula allowed local authorities to vary the base rate and pay a quality supplement according to their selected criteria. This is discussed in the case study in section 7.2.
- **Germany Good Daycare Facilities Act.** The Good Daycare Facilities Act (*Gute-KiTa-Gesetz*) will provide over €5.5 billion from 2019 to 2022 to improve quality and participation in early childhood education and child day care across 10 quality-related fields (and an 11th to improve participation by relieving parents of fees). *Länder* are free to choose in which fields they will use the funding. This is discussed in the case study in section 7.3.
- **Ontario Fee Subsidies.** In Ontario, fee subsidies are locally managed and administered by municipalities. All regulated services can receive subsidised children unless the local service system manager stipulates otherwise, and some municipalities set their own criteria such as minimum quality ratings, meeting identified targets such as a salary scale, or having non-profit incorporation. (Friendly et al. 2018)

- **Wisconsin Early Childhood Initiative.** The Wisconsin Early Childhood Initiative provided substantial funding for 28 centres to improve classroom quality within one year, with freedom to adopt their own approaches. This is discussed in the case study in section 7.4.

7.2 England EYSFF quality supplements

In England, national funding for free entitlement places is allocated to settings by local authorities. From 2011 (until 2017), the EYSFF required local authorities to have a standardised basic funding rate which could vary according to the type of provider but which could be supplemented with additional payments for quality, flexibility and sustainability of provision (West and Noden 2016). Using data for 2014-15, Noden and West (2016) showed that 70 of the 150 local authorities had a quality supplement and that spending on quality supplements amounted to 2% of all allocated funding. Local authorities were roughly equally divided between using a quality criterion relating to staff qualifications and one relating to Ofsted judgements (inspection ratings). Around 90% of funding was allocated through the base rate, but the average base rate for nursery schools was notably higher than for other provider types (justified by the schools' strong reputation for high quality). A small number of local authorities included a qualification criterion to determine levels of base rates.

7.3 Germany Good Daycare Facilities Act

The Good Daycare Facilities Act will provide over €5.5 billion from 2019 to 2022 to improve quality and participation in early childhood education and child day care (BMFSFJ 2020a, 2020c). All 16 *Länder* have signed contracts with the federal government stipulating in which of the 10 quality-related fields (and an 11th to improve participation by relieving parents of fees) they will spend funding. The most commonly selected field relates most closely to the broad category of curriculum "Good supervision: ensuring there is sufficient time for every child and professional" (selected by 11 *Länder*), but other fields relating to

curriculum were selected by very few *Länder*.³⁰ Several of the more commonly selected fields relate to workforce skills and conditions,³¹ while the management and collaboration fields were also chosen by several *Länder*.³² Fewer *Länder* selected fields focused on diversity or meeting parental needs³³. Most *Länder* (11 of the 16) selected the 11th field of “Less fees: improve participation for all children through fee reliefs”, indicating dual pressures of affordability and quality in local choices. Prior to the COVID pandemic, an evaluation of the implementation of the policy was expected in 2021 and an evaluation of impact in 2023.

7.4 Wisconsin Early Childhood Excellence Initiative

Wisconsin’s Early Childhood Excellence Initiative was a one-biennium (1999-2001), \$15 million intervention designed to improve the quality of care in programmes that served high numbers of state-subsidised children from low-income families. Grants, which averaged \$1,460 per child per year over a two-year period, were provided to 28 selected Centers for Excellence, significantly raising total funding but not to the level received for first-grade children in the public schools. The challenges for the centres were to provide comprehensive, collaborative, high quality experiences for children; to serve as models of innovation based on best research in child development; and to increase classroom quality within approximately one year. Each centre was free to adopt its own curriculum, daily schedule, resource materials, programmes, and activities, as long as it remained committed to following national Accreditation and/or Head Start performance standards. The initiative

³⁰ “Child-friendly rooms: outdoor and indoor areas meet the needs of children and staff” was selected by two *Länder* and “Growing up healthy: supports a balanced diet, exercise promotion and health education” was not selected by any *Länder*.

³¹ “Qualified professionals: recruiting and qualifying staff and improving working conditions” was selected by 10 *Länder*, “Strong child day care: professional qualification and better working conditions for childminders” was selected by six *Länder* and “Language education: document language development and qualify language specialists” was selected by four *Länder*.

³² “Strong Kita management: ensuring managers are well qualified and have sufficient time” was selected by eight *Länder* and “Networks: strengthen cooperation across organisations and management efficiency” was selected by four *Länder*.

³³ “Diverse educational work (4): inclusion, parental participation and child protection” was selected by four *Länder* and “Needs-based offers: care meets family needs such as extended opening hours” was selected by two *Länder*.

encouraged local flexibility, recognised geographical and cultural diversity, and encouraged individualised creativity.

An evaluation conducted after the first 15 months of the initiative using a comparison group of non-participating centres indicated significant improvement in classroom quality, the quality of caregiver interaction and caregivers' beliefs about children (as measured in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) scores) (Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership 2002). A later study considered the quality in the same classrooms three years after the funding had been substantially reduced. Quality of care in Centers for Excellence classrooms remained significantly higher in 2004 than it had been in 2000 and was significantly higher in Centers for Excellence than in randomly-selected comparison centre classrooms. Despite a significant reduction in public funding, Centers for Excellence maintained their earlier gains in classroom quality for the three-year follow-up assessment. (Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership 2005; Roach et al. 2006)

7.5 Summary and discussion

There are relatively few cases where decisions about supporting quality are devolved and there is no evidence on whether devolving these choices leads to better support approaches. The identified cases have shown that these responsibilities may be devolved to regional or local authorities or to individual settings themselves.

The following findings emerged from the case studies:

- Given the choice, local authorities may allocate only a small part of funding to quality supplements. However, this may depend upon the level of overall funding and the flexibility offered in the amount of available funding over and above that needed to ensure a sufficient base rate.
- Regional or local authorities may have a preference for using quality measures related to staff qualifications or inspection ratings. There are various potential reasons for this: the workforce may be seen as the most important driver of quality; workforce measures may be the easiest ones to achieve improvements; or the workforce may be the area most in need of improvement.

- There are dual pressures between the demands of improving quality and enhancing affordability at regional and local government levels as well as national government levels.
- One example reported here suggests that generously funding and allowing settings to have complete flexibility in the choice of methods may substantially improve process quality with lasting impacts. However, this evidence is based on a small sample of settings in one particular context, and further research on the possibilities such an approach might offer could be valuable.

8. Application to Ireland

This chapter considers the strength of the evidence base on the effectiveness of the funding models to support provision quality and draws out the key lessons for Ireland.

8.1 Strength of the evidence base

There are a wide range and variety of policy approaches to support and incentivise ELC and SAC settings to improve quality, defined as the type of experiences which improve child outcomes. Robust evidence on their effectiveness is, however, limited, with relatively few evaluations and few of these afforded useful comparison groups to measure impact.

As an addition to the desk-based research, the key informant interviews were primarily useful in reporting views around the strengths and weaknesses of the identified policies, implicitly relaying (sometimes commonly held) beliefs on their impacts. They were also helpful in terms of signposting relevant contextual factors or other related policies. As such, the main value of the interviews lay in providing useful guidance on important factors to consider for the development of a future funding model rather than providing specific evidence on the effectiveness of existing policies.

8.2 Lessons for Ireland

The key aim of this paper was to:

- Identify which features [of quality] are amenable to being resourced and/or required through a funding model, using evidence on existing funding approaches and the effectiveness of these approaches to improve quality.

The quality features which appear to be most amenable to being resourced and/or required through funding models are elements relating to staff, including (in order of amenability): qualification levels, CPD/training and pay. However, the question of effectiveness cannot be unequivocally answered due to a lack of robust evidence on impact, both in absolute terms and in terms of assessment of the *relative* effectiveness of different approaches.

In addition to the specific findings contained within the chapters for each quality element, some overarching lessons can be drawn for the Irish context:

- Policy examples from Ireland include those supporting workforce qualifications and use of curricula, primarily through the ECCE programme (with the assistance of NSAI). While there is some circumstantial evidence that higher capitation for qualifications in ECCE funding has supported some increases in average qualification levels, the benefits of the other approaches have not been tested.
- Permanent direct policies to address workforce pay are currently absent in Ireland.³⁴ Yet workforce pay may be the key barrier to achieving higher quality provision, no matter what other policies are in place. Approaches to address the pay issue can only be successful if sufficient funding is used to create a *substantial* financial lever which both encourages and *enables* providers to increase pay levels to the point where they can attract better and more-qualified staff. This does not mean that additional public funding should be directly spent on pay as it could be a conditional element of funding used for other purposes. But overall total funding levels need to be sufficient to support the desired level of a better-paid higher quality workforce.
- The design of funding incentives and requirements should take into consideration that the current level of workforce qualifications will limit the speed of progress in achieving workforce qualification goals. While new curricula or CPD requirements may be implemented relatively quickly, upskilling a large proportion of the workforce will require more time.
- By design, a funding model with financial incentives for settings to improve quality will deny resources to those settings with the lowest quality and in greatest need of support. Fundamentally, funding conditions or premiums offer incentives for change but no upfront funding for settings to improve quality. Hence, there may be a need for additional mechanisms to support those at the lower end of the quality measures to kickstart progress or to jump to a level which can then be sustained through the funding model.

³⁴ At the time of writing, the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) provides some support during the COVID-19 pandemic. See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/17507b-information-on-covid-19-measures-for-providers-and-staff-of-early-le/>

- There is a risk that additional funding attached to particular quality measures could distort how settings would best deliver ELC and SAC. Hence, there is a need to be aware of potential adverse consequences (such as drawing the best staff away from some types of provision) in designing policy options.

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Annex: Summary of the European Union Quality Framework for ECEC

Figure 1 presents a summary of the European Union Quality Framework for ECEC, highlighting in italics those elements which are not covered in this report.

Figure 1: Summary of the European Union Quality Framework for ECEC

Statements	Types of outputs
Access	
<i>(1) Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Universal legal entitlement</i> • <i>Adaptation of requested fees</i> • <i>Flexibility in opening hours</i> • <i>Equal geographic availability (by rurality, affluence and region)</i>
<i>(2) Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Involvement of parents, families and carers in decision-making</i> • <i>Initiatives to foster high levels of parent participation</i> • <i>Inclusive environment for children</i> • <i>Recruitment of staff from marginalised, migrant or minority groups</i> • <i>CPD for staff to support bilingual children</i>
Workforce	
<i>(3) Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enables them to fulfil their professional role.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Attractive and flexible career prospects</i> • <i>Higher qualification levels</i> • <i>Pedagogical staff have full professional specialist qualification in ECE</i> • <i>Initial education programmes have a good balance between theory and practice, prepare for collective working, enhance reflective competences and training to work with diverse groups</i> • <i>Regular and tailor-made CPD for all staff to meet the needs of young children</i> • <i>Staff should have knowledge of child protection systems and the rights of the child</i>
<i>(4) Supportive working conditions including professional leadership, which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improved working conditions and wages to attract more-qualified staff</i> • <i>Appropriate child-to-adult ratios and group sizes</i> • <i>Professional learning opportunities to support staff collegial practices and joint work</i> • <i>Mentoring and supervision for new staff during induction</i>
Curriculum	

Statements	Types of outputs
(5) A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit curriculum to provide a coherent framework for care, education and socialisation, ideally enabling educators to personalise their approach to meet individual child needs • Curriculum gives consideration to the availability of books and other print materials • Curriculum should promote diversity, equality and linguistic awareness
(6) A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum can define roles and processes for staff to regularly collaborate with parents and colleagues in other children’s services • Curriculum provides guidelines on liaising with school staff to support transitions into school
Monitoring and evaluation	
(7) Monitoring and evaluation produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC leaders should collect information in a timely and regular manner
(8) Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interests of the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed robust child protection / child safeguarding policies in the ECEC system • Mix of monitoring methods (e.g. observation, documentation, narrative assessments of children’s experiences and learning) • Creation of monitoring tools and participatory evaluation procedures
Governance and financing	
(9) Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC has close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders
<i>(10) Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to high quality affordable ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to relevant stakeholders.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Building up of universal legal entitlement</i> • <i>Promotion of participation in ECEC from an early age</i> • <i>Actions to address unequal access or lower quality for disadvantaged children</i>

Source: Council of the European Union (2019)

Notes: Italics indicate areas reflecting access and inclusion which are not covered in this report.