A Crowded Space:

The Policy Development Landscape in Early Childhood Education

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Thomas.walsh@nuim.ie
Outline of presentation

- Background and context
- Provide an overview of key departments and organisations with responsibility for ECE policy and practice
- Explore the roles and responsibilities of each of these departments/ agencies
- Propose implications and recommendations for the future
Key influences on ECE policy

Early Childhood Education and Care

DCYA
DES
TUSLA
Other government departments
NCOs
International influences

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Background and Context

- Historical state reluctance to intervene in family matters
  - Reliance on private, voluntary and community providers
- Split system between ‘care’ and ‘education’
- White Paper recommended establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency
- Policy direction and interest driven by:
  - Recognition of value of ECE
  - Increased participation of women in workforce
- Rapid policy development, especially in last 10 years
  - Filled previous legislative and policy vacuum
- Varied locus of policy development
  - Responsibility transferred across a range of departments and agencies

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
ECE Policy Responsibility

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)

Other Government Departments

Department of Education and Skills (DES)

TUSLA, The Child and Family Agency

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Department of Education and Skills

- Early Start/Infant Classes
- Education-focused Inspections
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Síolta

Early Years Advisory Group

- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)/SEN
- Review of Training Programmes
- Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP)

Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU)

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
TUSLA, The Child and Family Agency

Pre-School Inspectorate

Registration System

Child Protection Training

Publication of Inspection Reports

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Wider Government Departments and Agencies

- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
- Department of Finance
- Department of Justice and Equality
- Department of Health
- Health Service Executive (HSE)
- Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
- Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Who is ultimately responsible for ECE policy?
Cohesion and integration

Period 1995 to 2012 “…rapid policy change without transformation.” (Hayes et al., 2013:4)

“These new schemes [education-focused inspections], coupled with the introduction of new standards and regulations are leading to confusion and will burden the system with extra administration and interaction with multiple agencies... It is essential that the full range of welcome Government initiatives in this sector are strategically complementary.”


“The scattered provisions for childcare support are complicated and difficult to navigate.”

Implications and recommendations

- Centralised responsibility for policy development within one department
  - Ensure ECE policy co-ordination across departments
  - Greater practice and policy flow between ECE and other sectors of education
- A strong, long-term vision for ECE articulated through a National Early Years Strategy
- One set of centralised requirements for the sector as opposed to settings responding to multiple initiatives
  - A cohesive inspection system that focuses on all aspects of quality in ECE provision – and complements settings’ self-evaluation processes
- Policy audit followed by implementation plans for the range of the worthwhile existing policy initiatives in the sector
- A strategic investment for next 5 years to raise expenditure on ECE to 0.8% of GDP
- Move towards more progressive universalism – reduce complexity of targeting services
- Invest in people in sector
  - CPD, non-contact hours, salary structures, extend Learner Fund to higher qualification levels

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University
Questions and Discussion

Thomas.walsh@nuim.ie

Dr Thomas Walsh
Maynooth University