

Wexford County Childcare Committee

Annual Report 2011



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs



pobal

government supporting communities

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Introduction

Looking back, 2011 was a very busy year, but it was also a rewarding year during which WxCCC further consolidated its role as a critical support to childcare providers, childminders and parents leading to more direct contact with all its stakeholders on the ground.

During 2011, Wexford County Childcare Committee (WxCCC) made significant progress in all of the Core Objectives with a small number of actions requiring further development.

In 2011 most of WxCCC's work focused on implementing the three Government funded schemes, supporting the sustainability of childcare providers and supporting the implementation of Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.

Although the learning acquired from the implementation of the ECCE, CCS and CETS Schemes in 2009/2010 resulted in further development of efficient administrative systems in 2011, the increased responsibility and the associated administration involved in the three schemes still posed challenges at certain times during the year.

However, the increased one to one contact resulting from the implementation of the ECCE, CCS and CETS Schemes along with WxCCC's local partnership approach, ensured that WxCCC was proactive in adapting to and addressing local childcare needs. This solidified its role as a crucial local support for both childcare providers and parents in addition to ensuring high levels of engagement with the three Schemes.

Progress in communicating and collaborating with childcare providers was further enhanced through the provision of additional information via text and email. A formal slot on the Boards monthly agenda for Private and Community Provider representatives continues to afford representatives the opportunity to bring the issues of providers on the ground to the attention of Board and staff members, ensuring that the Board was proactive in addressing local childcare needs.

Progression in the provision of support to community childcare providers was also evident through the further development of the CCS Network, and the high level of engagement with the Network. Feedback from providers indicates that the CCS Network, first set up in 2010, is an invaluable source of support in terms of group mentoring and peer support.

In support of quality, WxCCC continued to promote the informal implementation of Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, through the provision of three workshops. Work to support this action involved collaborating with other CCC's, the NVCO's and the Pre-school Services Officer (HSE).

Progress with Childminders continues to be ambiguous in that some training events which WxCCC predicted would be successful had to be cancelled while engagement with other training events was higher than expected.

As always, the long tradition of collaboration and networking in the childcare/community development sector continued to be a cornerstone of WxCCC's work throughout 2011, and the successful implementation of many of the actions was mainly as a result of this collaborative effort. Specific examples of collaborative actions are outlined under Objective 6.

The tabulated report presented in the latter half of this document outlines the specific details of the outputs of the plan which reflect high levels of engagement with the local childcare sector.

The free running narrative section below broadly summarises progress made under the objectives of WxCCC's LIP 2011.

Progress/Priorities

Core Objective 1

Under Core Objective 1, WxCCC aimed to effectively and efficiently implement OMCYA funded schemes/grants in County Wexford.

It is WxCCC's opinion that it progressed and prioritised the actions under this objective by supporting childcare providers to operate effectively under the ECCE, CCS and CETS Schemes, in addition to supporting new providers to enter the schemes and supporting parents to access free or subvented childcare places. Support in the main, has taken the form of one to one meetings, telephone support and general information dissemination via post, SMS texting and e-mail. The success of this objective is evidenced by the high level of participation in all three schemes, namely: 95% of childcare services currently operating in the county are participating in the ECCE Scheme, 35% of services participating in the CETS Scheme and 67% of community providers are participating in the CCS Scheme. In response to this level of participation, WxCCC has continued to be a central contact point for providers and parents to enable them to access information, support and advice on the three schemes. Under this objective, it was also WxCCC's intention to facilitate two ECCE information workshops for childcare providers and parents. However, a decision was taken to cancel the workshop for childcare providers as there was no new information to impart outside of that communicated via post, telephone and email. WxCCC did however, organise an ECCE Information workshop for parents, but despite the event being widely advertised there was no demand for the workshop. In light of this and in an effort to promote the ECCE Scheme, WxCCC diverted the funding allocated to these workshops to advertising the scheme in local papers and on local radio.

In addition, this objective also focussed on further developing the CCS Network. The Network meetings which are arranged to coincide with critical periods such as CCS reporting times have gone from strength to strength. The success of this network is evidenced by the high level of satisfaction recorded on the end of year evaluation forms, which stated that the Network meetings are relevant, practical, topical and up to date.

WxCCC considers that the work carried out under this objective was paramount to the successful operation of the schemes.

WxCCC's work in relation to the three Government funded Schemes links to and supports the achievement of the outcomes of Objective 1 of the National Strategic Plan (2011-2013): To Develop Comprehensive ECCE Supports, Infrastructure and Services where the Holistic Well-Being of Children and Families are Fundamental.

Core Objective 2

Under *Core Objective 2*, WxCCC aimed to facilitate and co-ordinate the local development of quality childcare services, promoting their sustainability and extending the capacity of the sector.

Broadly speaking, WxCCC's main priority under this objective was to support the sustainability and development of the childcare infrastructure within the county. It was WxCCC's experience, through direct contact with providers during 2011 that the economic downturn continued to raise issues of sustainability across all areas of the sector, particularly in relation to changes in the numbers attending and the pattern of service uptake. WxCCC also found that supports in relation to business skills and management took on a far greater significance in its work than ever before. In response to these needs, WxCCC provided one to one support meetings, facilitated a Business Workshop and offered business mentoring sessions on a needs basis.

2011 saw WxCCC take over the facilitation of the Providers Network¹. The first Network meeting, held in March, was hosted jointly by WxCCC and Childcare Network Loch Garman (CNLG) with 16 participants attending. The second Network meeting, held in June, and hosted by WxCCC was a resounding success with 85 participants attending. The third Network meeting, held in November was facilitated by Ms. Caroline French with 14 participants attending. The Network events continue to be an invaluable source of support for providers as they afford providers the opportunity to access peer support, share information, in addition to providing them with a platform from which to voice their issues. The Network events in 2011 were also attended by WxCCC staff, enabling them to further develop one to one relationships with providers and to keep up to date with real issues being experienced at ground level.

WxCCC also focussed on further developing the Childminder's Network, as the economic downturn has seen an increase in demand for childminding services. This has resulted in a greater need for quality service provision. With a view to promoting the quality of childminding service provision, WxCCC collaborated with Childminding Ireland in the delivery of a Siolta workshop. During the latter end of 2010 and early 2011, WxCCC made a concerted effort to involve parents in childminding events/training with the objective of increasing the numbers of childminders engaging with WxCCC services. However, this action did not prove to be as effective as predicted.

In a continued effort to promote awareness of the existence and role of the parent representatives on the Board of WxCCC and to bring parent related issues to the WxCCC Board, the parent representatives attended a number of Parent Network events during 2011. WxCCC continues to support the Parents Network through supporting the work of CNLG. The Parents Network is an invaluable asset to parents as it affords them the opportunity to share information and seek support and advice on childcare related issues.

The facilitation of a workshop entitled '*Transition from Pre-School to Primary School*' was attended by 30 participants and again this event contributed to further progressing the aims of this objective. In an effort to further promote the services available to parents, WxCCC organised two workshops and facilitated an information stand during National Parents Week (October 2011).

¹ CNLG was funded by WxCCC to facilitate the Provider's Network. However, a reduction in CNLG's funding deemed it necessary for them to discontinue this strand of work.

WxCCC also progressed the actions of this objective through the expansion of its Parents Information Pack during the first half of 2011 to include, among other things, 'A Parent's Guide to Choosing Childcare', A Parent's Guide to the ECCE Scheme', WxCCC's Parent's Guide to Choosing a Childminder, What, Why, How (NCCA), National Parents Council Homework Leaflet, Parenting Positively and Learning Together (Barnardos), Play it Safe (HSE)...

Finally, it is WxCCC's opinion that the continual promotion of its Information Centre as a drop in support and information service for early childhood education and care needs underpins and progresses all the actions under this objective.

WxCCC's work in relation to sustainability links and supports the achievement of the outcomes of Objective 3 of the National Strategic Plan (2011-2013): *To consolidate investment in the sector in order to support the continuing development of a stable, integrated and sustainable infrastructure.*

Core Objective 3

Under Core Objective 3, WxCCC's priority was to support the enhancement of quality in early childhood care and education and school age provision and support on-going professional development of the local workforce.

It is WxCCC's opinion that it progressed the actions under this objective by supporting the ongoing development of quality service provision to meet the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders. In order to meet these needs, WxCCC focussed on providing support across a broad spectrum of quality components such as training/qualifications and curriculum development. In particular WxCCC staff collaborated on an ongoing basis with the Pre-School Service Officer in identifying, addressing and co-facilitating a number of training events.

To this end WxCCC also facilitated a group of providers to complete a full FETAC Level 5 Award and facilitated the delivery of a FETAC Level 6 Childcare Course which began in September 2011.

Childcare provider's willingness to engage in ongoing training and with the informal implementation of Siolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, was evident by the high number of providers attending the three Siolta workshops facilitated during the year.

High attendance at CNLG's many tailored training events for childcare providers also provided evidence of provider's willingness to engage in ongoing training and professional development.

In further support of the quality agenda WxCCC's annual conference took place on 15th October, 2011, with 101 participants attending on the day.

As the level of attendance at the School Age Childcare Network Training events was disappointing WxCCC will need to consider the benefits of continuing with such specific training, particularly in terms of value for money.

WxCCC also continued to impact on the professional development of the sector through its ongoing consultative relationship with Wexford Campus (Carlow IT). In 2010 WxCCC was involved in the Campus's HETAC Review, and in 2011 WxCCC participated in the External Examination process of the BA Honours in Early Childhood Education and Care.

WxCCC continues to support both accredited and non accredited training for Childminders, through the delivery in particular of First Aid, Manual Handling, FETAC Level 5 and the QAP. However, the uptake from Childminders for FETAC Level 5 has been disappointing.

WxCCC's work in relation to quality links and supports the achievement of the outcomes of Objective 2 of the National Strategic Plan (2011-2013): To Enhance Quality Early Childhood Care and Education and School-Age Provision. While its work with supporting the ongoing professional development of childcare providers links with and supports Objective 4 of the National Strategic Plan (2011-2013): Through Ongoing Professional Development, To Build On The Capacity Of The ECCE Sector To Enhance and Develop Quality ECCE Services For Children and Their Families.

Core Objective 6

Under Core Objective 6, WxCCC's priority was to participate in relevant structures towards ensuring effective collaboration, communication and consultation by stakeholders on early childhood education and care and school-age agenda.

The long tradition of collaboration and networking in the childcare/community development sector continued throughout 2011. Such a collaborative approach clearly leads to a sharing of expertise, knowledge and resources to the benefit of all organisations/ agencies and the number of collaborative actions carried out to date is a testament to the success of this collaborative process.

Some of the collaborative actions completed in 2011 include:

- Facilitation of a Children's Play Day in collaboration with Wexford County Council, Wexford Borough Council, RAPID and Wexford Library Services.
- Collaboration with DESSA in the delivery of two workshops for childcare providers entitled 'Childcare Inclusive Policy and Practice'.
- Collaboration with the FDYS Bunclody Project in the facilitation of a workshop for parents of Traveller children, which focussed on promoting open ended play using everyday materials that have a minimum cost.
- Collaboration with IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation in the delivery of a number of workshops for childcare providers
- Collaboration with NCNA and Childminding Ireland in the delivery of Siolta workshops
- Collaboration with the Pre-School Services Officer in the delivery of two workshops: 'Observation and 'Regulation 5' of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (no 2) Regulations 2006 and 'Curriculum Planning'.
- Collaboration with Childcare Network Loch Garman in the delivery of training to childcare providers and the Parents Network.
- Collaboration with CTEC in the delivery of the FETAC Level 5 and FETAC Level 6 Childcare Courses.

WxCCC also prioritised attendance at national and regional network peer group meetings along with workshops and information sessions held by Pobal and the OMCYA.

WxCCC's ethos of collaborative working links to and supports the achievement of the outcomes of Objective 5 of the National Strategic Plan (2011-2013): To Ensure Effective and Transparent Collaboration, Communication and Consultation and Optimum Use of Resources by All Stakeholders in Early Childhood Care and Education.

In terms of significant changes the ongoing recession resulting in increased levels of unemployment continued to pose serious challenges in terms of sustainability within the childcare sector. This context, coupled with the implementation of the three government

funded schemes influenced most of WxCCC's work over the last twelve months. Therefore, the bulk of WxCCC's work during 2011 focused on supporting the sustainability of childcare services. Although supporting the financial sustainability of services appears on the surface to be solely an economic matter, it has been WxCCC's experience that issues of sustainability often highlight other concerns. These include: managerial and HR challenges, which require intensive one-to-one targeted support from the staff of WxCCC. This one-to-one support, although time consuming, was necessary but required efficient and effective use of staff resources particularly in terms of staff time. In addition, the Schemes while welcomed by all for their contribution to the sector also brought an additional workload for childcare services and CCC's due to the high level of administrative support required by participants of the Schemes to meet contractual and compliance issues. Community childcare based services also found themselves under pressure in terms of governance demands and many voluntary committees found themselves below capacity in terms of financial and HR requirements.

Members of the childcare sector itself were another major influencing factor on WxCCC's work during 2011. WxCCC, needed to bear in mind, the pressures and demands being experienced by providers. Acknowledging these demands meant that WxCCC had to deliver worthwhile and focussed support and training to the sector.

The publication of the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020,)*, marked a milestone within the early years sector. To which, WxCCC responded by facilitating the delivery of two workshops on Literacy. The first workshop was delivered in collaboration with Wexford Library Services. The Strategy also influenced planned actions within WxCCC's 2012 LIP.

The introduction of the inspection of Regulation 5, and the continuation of the informal implementation of Siolta and Aistear also impacted on WxCCC's work and on the sector. In response to this, WxCCC collaborated with the NVCO's and the HSE in the delivery of number of tailored workshops for the sector.

The extent of local partnership and resulting collaboration involved in Wexford CCC's work has always been valued by WxCCC in terms of better use of resources, unnecessary duplication and value for money. However, in 2011, after much process, WxCCC also realised the contribution true collaboration makes in terms of enhanced capacity and a common purpose for all.

In general these processing sessions (S&E Co-ordinators Network) caused a mind shift to take place, in that CCC's as a whole realised that although they have a local remit individual to their own city/county, there was also a need to be identifiable as a national group through which much learning can be shared and many actions delivered from a national perspective thereby enhancing the use of limited resources with maximum impact. In particular CCC's are proposing to work on developing a national identity through a national branding process, with the aim of increasing their profile and reducing costs. Part of the national identity and hence the streamlining of services along with consistency of provision will involve creating more strategic and active working groups from within the National Co-ordinators Network. Other collaborative CCC actions such as a regional approach to promoting voluntary notification and cost effective reductions with all four Dublin CCC's can be found within the Action Plan itself.

Challenges

Challenges *during 2011 included:*

- Coping with the increased workload associated with the administration of the ECCE, CCS and CETS Schemes, which was challenging in terms of balancing the level of service delivery required on one side with the level of staff and financial resources available on the other side.
- CCS - shortfall in funding experienced by a significant proportion of Community Providers due to the escalating economic situation.
- Low number of Childminders voluntarily notifying WxCCC and attending training continues to be a challenge.
- The level of support required in relation to business skills and management of childcare services
- To maintain the level of service delivery required within the allocated budget. Although this was a challenge it was also rewarding to develop practical cost saving methods. In particular the use of SMS text messaging and emails have greatly reduced postage costs and feedback from providers on the use of these methods to relay information has been very positive.
- Due to a reduction in funding, CNLG discontinued its work with the Providers Network. Following the results of a survey conducted, which confirmed the value of the Network, WxCCC decided to take over the running of the Network. This was new territory for WxCCC and proved challenging in terms of the additional time required and also in taking over an existing network that had been facilitated by another childcare organisation for many years. The reduction in funding to CNLG also resulted in WxCCC administering the KHF P&T Grants and organising events for National Parents Week. All of these additional actions although very rewarding, placed an additional workload on WxCCC.

Highlights

Highlights during 2011 include:

- The successful implementation and high level of participation and uptake of the ECCE, CCS and CETS Schemes, with 95% of services participating in the ECCE Scheme; 67% of community services participating in the CCS Scheme and 35% of services participating in the CETS Scheme. The work with these Schemes has been rewarding for WxCCC as it solidified our role as a critical support to childcare providers and parents leading to more direct contact with providers and in particular parents on the ground.
- The enhanced relationship with private providers within the County who previously felt aggrieved by the perceived level of funding received by community childcare groups has been further developed. In 2011, WxCCC again made a conscious effort to address the private sectors emerging issues through one-to-one meetings and at group network meetings. As a result, feedback has indicated that this relationship has been even further strengthened as is evidenced by the increased contact made by private providers.
- Continued provision of accessible, targeted and affordable training for childcare providers and childminders.
- WxCCC's Annual Conference with in excess of a hundred delegates attending on the day.
- The continued level of collaboration and support amongst agencies, including:
 - Facilitation of a Children's Play Day in collaboration with Wexford County Council, Wexford Borough Council, RAPID and Wexford Library Services.
 - Collaboration with DESSA in the delivery of two workshops for childcare providers entitled 'Childcare Inclusive Policy and Practice'.
 - Collaboration with the FDYS Bunclody Project, in the facilitation of a workshop for parents of Traveller children, which focussed on promoting open ended play using everyday materials that have a minimum cost.
 - Collaboration with IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation in the delivery of a number of workshops for childcare providers
 - Collaboration with NCNA and Childminding Ireland in the delivery of Siolta workshops
 - Collaboration with the Pre-School Services Officer in the delivery of an Observation Workshop and 'Regulation 5' of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (no 2) Regulations 2006.
 - Collaboration with Childcare Network Loch Garman in the delivery of training to childcare providers and the Parents Network.
 - Collaboration with CTEC in the delivery of the FETAC Level 5 and FETAC Level 6 Childcare Courses.

An additional highlight for WxCCC in 2011 was the continued success of the needs based support provided through the CCS Network, where providers accessed information on the CCS Scheme and availed of peer support. The Network facilitated by WxCCC staff met at critical periods of CCS administration. The agenda for the Network meeting was always needs lead by the group themselves for instance in response to the need for support on developing Fees Policies, WxCCC subcontracted a training organisation specialising in this area to deliver a workshop which concentrated on the development of appropriate Fee Policies. WxCCC also gave one-to-one support to the majority of CCS providers in the

development of their Fee Policies. This support culminated in significantly reducing the deficit some groups were experiencing. One-to-one support was also provided to individual services at the end of the Network meetings. The Network was and continues to be beneficial to all in many ways. In terms of information sharing all services were receiving the same information at the same time and had an opportunity there and then to clarify issues. In terms of staff time it meant that WxCCC staff were able to support providers in a group situation thereby maximising the use of their time. The Network also provided a platform for much needed peer support. WxCCC would be happy to share the learning from and benefits of setting up such a Network.

Conclusion

In this, its tenth Annual Report, WxCCC looks back on what was again a very successful year and considers that significant progress has been made in all of the Core Objectives and related actions, which reflect high levels of engagement with the local childcare sector.

The strength of the Plan again, lay in its broad range of actions and the fact that it was sufficiently flexible from the outset to respond to changing local needs while at the same time managing to maintain a strong focus on national objectives and emerging policy developments.

2011 was a year where a lot of learning and information sharing took place between CCC's. The platform for this was provided by the Co-ordinators Network meetings, where a lot of time was also invested by the CCC's in further developing meaningful collaboration in an effort to develop enhanced capacity and a common purpose for all. This process ultimately resulted in a high level of collaborative actions within the 2012 LIP.

Although WxCCC's work over the last twelve months has been challenging in terms of workload and limited resources the mood remains positive amongst staff. The last couple of years have proved rewarding in terms of acquiring new skills, greater levels of expertise and building many positive relationships with members of the sector. The added workload has also had positive outcomes on other staff members such as the Administrators who now have increased contact with providers, such as supporting some of them with their financial returns. Administrative staff have also widened their role to include administration of the CETS scheme. This level of commitment and flexibility amongst the staff team is one of WxCCC's greatest assets and is well recognised and acknowledged at Board level.

However, this positive climate and mutual respect would not be possible without the buy in, commitment and leadership of the Board, clearly evidenced by the low turnover of Board members, consistent high attendance at Board meetings and strategic leadership provided by the Sub Committees.

Under the National Childcare Strategy (2011-2013), Wexford CCC considers itself to be well placed to implement its 2012 LIP and to meet the challenges ahead. In an effort to way lay some of these challenges, WxCCC proposes, that Pobal and the DCYA provide, in advance and where practical, a 'Time-line' of specific dates relating to the implementation of the three Government Schemes (ECCE, CCS and CETS). This would support CCC's to strategically manage the information flow during critical administrative periods and enable them to give providers more notice of Scheme requirements.

In addition, to the above, it is also WxCCC's opinion, that it would be better equipped to approve Fee Payment Policies, if WxCCC staff had access to services Financial Impact Returns. Prompt access to such Returns would allow WxCCC address critical sustainability issues with a view to speedy resolutions.

Finally, WxCCC propose that CCC's be permitted to include contingency funding when planning their annual Local Implementation Plans.

WxCCC looks forward with enthusiasm to applying the learning and development acquired during 2011 to 2012.

