



**National Children's
Nurseries Association**

Towards Efficient Management of the ECCE Scheme in your Childcare Service



The Early Childhood Care & Education Scheme (ECCE) provides one year of free pre-school education to every child in Ireland aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months on 1st September each year. The ECCE Scheme was announced by the government in April 2009.

The introduction of the free pre-school year is a major development in the area of early childhood care and education. As a universal scheme, it is hoped that all children will be able to benefit from a pre-school place in this highly important developmental year before they commence national school. All voluntary and commercial pre-school services are being invited to participate in the scheme. For more details on the terms and conditions of the Scheme, go to www.ncna.ie or www.omcya.ie.

This leaflet sets out some questions which you, the childcare provider could think about when preparing your service to apply for the new ECCE Scheme. It has been developed in consultation with NCNA members using the contents of your emails, phonecalls and your expertise as childcare providers working on the ground. The suggestions put forward some ways that the ECCE Scheme might work for your service within the current restrictions and limitations of the Scheme.

Topics are presented to think about in order that your service can maximise the ECCE Scheme to deliver good outcomes for your service, the children attending the service and their families.



Thinkabout.....The number of funded places you will offer?

How many funded places will be optimal for your service? Establish the pattern of attendance in your service over the last number of years, and take a look at your waiting list.

It probably is not a good idea to allow your service to become over dependent on the ECCE Scheme or to change the nature of your service entirely and offer a service which solely offers the free Scheme.



Thinkabout.....Room Layout?

Could you move your space around in order to accommodate the children using your service in a different way, and in order to maximise the ratios? Do you currently have a room which operates as a sessional service in the morning and is vacant in the afternoon? If so, consider operating another sessional service in that space in the afternoons.



Thinkabout.....Service expansion?

The table on the back page lists the approximate numbers of children entitled to the ECCE Scheme, broken down on a county by county basis. NCNA has added the most up to date information available to us about existing services, broken down on a county by county basis. Are there parts of the country that might not have the required capacity to deliver the ECCE Scheme? Would the local City/County Childcare Committee be able to advise you about this? Could you outreach from your existing service to other areas and address some of these gaps in service provision? Could you open new services in some of these areas? If you are planning to provide this scheme in your service, we would advise you to advertise the fact early and

target the children you need to make this scheme work for your service.



Thinkabout.....Possible income from the Scheme?

The expected income for a childcare provider providing two sessional services (10 children per session) is as follows:

10 children	9am-12pm	€645 per week
10 children	1pm-4pm	€645 per week
Weekly total		€1,290
Over 38 weeks		€49,020

The income is payable in advance in 3 instalments (or 4 if the ECCE Scheme is provided over 50 weeks). This income will be used to cover the salary costs of one staff member.

As a full time member of the staff team s/he will be entitled to 20 days annual leave. Would this staff member be available to work on summer or Easter camps? or to relieve other staff members on annual leave?



Thinkabout.....Charges for Additional Time?

Most services charge on a per week or on a per month rate. It is very important that you now calculate the price of your service on a per hour basis. When completing this calculation, make sure that all extras are removed, including food, outings and any additional programme activities. Do you collect or drop off any children in this group? This will be additional.

If a child wants to access the service for 3.5 hours, you can calculate the cost of that half hour on the basis of your current price or any increased price in the future.



Thinkabout.....Overall pricing structure of your service?

It is common for childcare services to offer some price reduction when children age up, e.g. a €10 per week reduction when a child becomes 1 and a further €10 reduction when the child becomes 2. If the income from the pre-school room is affected because of the ECCE Scheme, it may mean that a review of all pricing is required.



Thinkabout.....Voluntary Donations?

Could you organise an annual barbecue, sponsored walk, family sports day, sponsored tea party etc to generate funds for the service that could be used to buy outdoor equipment, new toys, garden plants etc?



Thinkabout.....Driving down your own cost base?

All suppliers are being asked to offer reductions now so that businesses can stay afloat. This is true for all types of operators. Have you thought about seeking reductions from your suppliers? Arts & Crafts materials & equipment? Hygiene products? Waste disposal? Energy? Phone? Insurance? Accountants fees? Rent/leases? Bank Fees?



Thinkabout.....Cash flow?

Funding from the OMCYA for the ECCE Scheme is due to be paid on a term by term basis, in September, January and April, (for full year) in advance. What impact will this have on your other bills? Should you change the way utility bills or wages are paid to keep cash flow moving?

The following payment schedule will apply to the scheme:

January	12 weeks payment	April	11 weeks payment
July	12 weeks payment (for full-time services only)	September	15 weeks payment



Thinkabout.....Administration fees?

Do you currently charge an administration fee to cover enrolment costs?



Thinkabout.....Recycling Arts & Crafts materials & equipment?

Have you considered using recycled materials? NCNA organise trips to the recycling centre in Belfast biannually, where you can stock up on art materials at reduced rates and get recycled materials free. A recycling/creative resource centre is also available in Castlebar.



Thinkabout.....How will you advertise your Free Places?

Do you still have details of children who may have left the service over the last number of years? Are any of these possibly in the age cohort for the scheme? Or might they have younger or older siblings, or relations who may qualify for the scheme? Could you include extra leaflets in your mailout which could be passed on to neighbours or friends?

Can you advertise through local papers or through leaflet drops? Will the local school let you use their newsletter or waiting lists? Could you use local parish newsletters to advertise?

Ensure that your advertising materials explain clearly to parents the type of educational programme you have available. This will give parents confidence in the quality of your service.

Have a look at the Central Statistics Office figures on the back page which will show you the number of children in your county who can access the free scheme. If you decide to participate in the scheme, could you target these children through an early media campaign?



Thinkabout.....Packages?

Could you put n together an opt in/opt out package that would suit your service? Could you put this package together with other services in the area? Packages could involve outings, trips to the dentist, trips to the barber, birthday parties etc. Could you deliver a different type of service over the summer months, a service that might involve summer camp type activities, that would be charged at your normal rate?



Thinkabout.....Offering the ECCE scheme on both a Sessional and full time/part time basis?

There will be children in your service who wish to participate in the scheme on the 38 basis

and others on a 50 week basis. There may be other arrangements within the parameters of the scheme that you may choose to offer.

The following table will help you to figure out what suits you and your families best and shows the educational component which must be provided in order to meet the requirements of the ECCE Scheme.

For sessional services:

3 hours per day	5 days a week	38 weeks a year
3.75 hours per day	4 days a week	38 weeks a year

For full day care services:

2.25 hours per day	5 days a week	50 weeks a year
3.75 hours per day	3 days a week	50 weeks a year
2.75 hours per day	4 days a week	50 weeks a year

There is so much change at the moment in the full day childcare sector that careful planning about these issues is very important.



Thinkabout.....Length of sessions?

What timeframe do your families usually look for? If you currently offer a 3 hour session, would a 3.5 hour session better meet the needs of your families?

Have you thought about offering afternoon sessions as well as morning sessions? If your service has a good reputation, parents may well seek out your afternoon session. As an educator of preschool children we must constantly promote the educational nature of our services, informing parents of the benefits of ECCE at every opportunity.

Parents will be attracted to services with a reputation for providing a quality childcare service.



Thinkabout.....Needs of Working Families?

All time outside the 38 weeks of the ECCE Scheme can be charged at the normal rate. We are indeed in recessionary times, and NCNA members are seeing a change in the nature of their business, but working families will still need childcare over the summer. This can still be charged at the existing price. Children accessing the preschool service who are not entitled to the free preschool place will pay the fees as outlined by the provider.



Thinkabout.....Ratios?

How can you best manage the Scheme in relation to staffing costs? The staffing ratios as set out in the Pre-school Regulations are:

1-10	sessional services
1-8	full day care services

A stand alone sessional service within a full day care service operates at the sessional ratio above. Some full day care children may attend the sessional service - how will that affect the

ratios? The sessional ratio would apply to the session, and spaces would be created in the full day care area. For example:

The room within your full day care service which is allocated to the ECCE Scheme may accommodate 14 children on a fulltime basis, or 17 children on a sessional basis. Even though you operate a full day care service, you could also offer some sessional places within your service. Think about offering a sessional service to 17 children for the length of the session. The ratios for this service are the sessional ratios. When these children leave the sessional service, the ratios must revert back to the full day care ratios, as outlined on page 45 of the Pre-School childcare regulations recommendations. "Where a full day care service also caters for children who do not attend on a full day basis, the adult/child ratio and group size for sessional services should apply, as appropriate".



Think about.....Staff Contracts?

If you are hiring new staff to deliver the ECCE Scheme, could you offer term time or part time contracts? Many working parents like to have term time contracts as they enjoy the flexibility of having the summer available with their own children.

Inform parents that in order to be in a position to offer the scheme, your staff must have a Level 5 FETAC qualification. This is another way of reassuring parents that they are receiving quality ECCE for their children.



Think about.....Compliance with the ECCE requirements?

Do you have an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate? Are you satisfied that your current HSE Inspection Report accurately reflects the quality of your service? What training requirements do your staff have? Have you contacted the NCNA Training Department (01 4601138, ext 2) regarding accessing accredited training, or the NCNA Childcare Skillnet (01 4097028) re access to subsidised accredited training?

Are you familiar with the requirements of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for childcare services? Details are available on www.omcya.ie or www.cecde.ie. Do you have information on Aistear, the new pre-school curriculum devised by the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment? For details go to www.ncca.ie.



We hope that you find some of this information useful. If you intend to apply to participate in the scheme, you may wish to advise parents currently using your service, or who contact you over the coming months, that you expect to be in a position to offer the pre-school year from January 2010. All services meeting the terms and conditions of the scheme will be accepted for entry.

If you have other ideas that you would be willing to share please contact NCNA at 01 4601138, ext 6; call your Regional Support Worker; email info@ncna.ie, or www.ncna.ie.

County	CSO Census Figures Aged Under 1 in 2006	Number of Notified Services
Carlow	713	45
Cavan	919	76
Clare	1663	218
Cork City	1213	98
Cork County	5673	318
Donegal	2214	171
Dublin City	5723	417
Dublin South	3951	258
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	2276	186
Fingal	4330	292
Galway City/County	3272	297
Kerry	1692	136
Kildare	3129	241
Kilkenny	1253	102
Laois	1013	77
Leitrim	395	37
Limerick City	686	162
Limerick County	1833	142
Longford	499	33
Louth	1786	125
Mayo	1657	120
Meath	2843	212
Monaghan	810	58
Offaly	1066	68
Roscommon	828	64
Sligo	760	80
Tipperary North	921	70
Tipperary South	1181	72
Waterford City	667	46
Waterford County	927	61
Westmeath	1207	80
Wexford	2003	140
Wicklow	1973	145
Total Number of Children	61076	4647

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Transforming Ireland



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