

SURVEY OF EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

Consultation for the Review of
Education and Training Programmes in
Early Years

May 2016



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Early Years Practitioner Survey Findings



Introduction

The qualifications profile of staff in the early years sector has changed significantly in recent years. There has been major investment in the quality of provision with an emphasis on upskilling practitioners. The recent provision for the sector in budget 2016 will further drive this agenda.

To meet this demand, the range of courses available at further and higher education levels has increased significantly. The responsibility for ensuring quality assured appropriate provision lies, in the first instance, with the education and training institutions themselves. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has a significant role in quality assurance for many of the institutions which provide qualifications to early years practitioners.

Since the turn of the century, there has been increasing focus on workforce development in the early years sector. In 2002, the Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in ECCE in Ireland¹ was published, and the occupational profiles developed during that process were mapped onto the National Framework of Qualification and set out in the Workforce Development Plan published in 2010². The publication of the national curricular and quality frameworks, Aistear³ and Síolta⁴, in 2009 and 2006 respectively, provide a firm basis for delivery of high quality education to children in the early years sector.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, supported through strong collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills, is driving quality both in practice and in course provision through the qualification requirements it is putting in place through the recently published qualification list, the incentive measures of capitation for settings based on qualification and the Learner Fund. Important quality supports have also been introduced with the establishment of Better Start, the Early Years Specialist Service who provide qualified mentors for quality improvement to support settings. In 2016, education-focussed inspections by the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate are being rolled out across the early years sector. It is important that all of these levers to improve quality are used in a coherent way and reflect the needs of the sector.

It is in this wider context that the Minister for Education and Skills launched a review of the qualifications available and the extent to which they meet the requirements of this rapidly evolving sector.

¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/Model-Framework-for-Education-Training-and-Professional-Development-in-the-Early-Childhood-Care-and-Education-Sector.pdf>

² https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye_workforce_dev_plan.pdf

³ <http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/>

⁴ <http://www.siolta.ie>

The Surveys

As a first step in carrying out the review, two surveys were designed to be completed by early years practitioners and early years employers respectively and a third survey was an open consultation. The aim of the surveys was to seek the views of practitioners, employers and other interested parties on the extent to which current early childhood care and education qualifications provide early years practitioners with the appropriate blend of knowledge and skills to support the educational development of children in early years settings. The surveys were carried out in 2015 and were aimed at both employers and practitioners in both the private and community settings.

Methodology

The early years practitioner survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool. The quantitative data was analysed by SurveyMonkey software and qualitative data was analysed using a thematic approach whereby a sample of surveys was read to identify recurring themes and then these were used to categorise responses throughout the remainder of the survey responses.

There were 531 respondents to the Early Years Practitioners survey, 260 respondents to the survey of employers and owners of early years services and a total of 460 responses to the open submission survey including practitioners, academics, employers, parents, students and other interested parties. This response level compares favourably with other consultations run by the Department of Education and Skills and provides a good base for identifying next steps.

This report sets out the responses of the Early Years practitioners only. Analysis of this data has been prioritised as it reflects the direct experience of the education and training programmes undertaken by those working in the sector today. This report will be made available on the Department of Education and Skills website as will the analysis of the other survey material collected as it becomes available.

Not all respondents answered all questions. The number of respondents who answered each question is indicated where appropriate in the analysis below. It is important to note that the sample of respondents is not a statistically representative sample and those participating did so on a voluntary basis following an open invitation rather than as part of a specifically selected sample. However, the profile of respondents broadly reflects the national profile of service provision. The data is reported in discrete sections as follows;

Section 1 & 2 below provides a brief outline of the characteristics and profile of respondents to the survey and their settings. This is followed by sections that focus on specific aspects of the questionnaire used for the survey.

Section 3 briefly outlines the curriculum and quality thereof used in the settings

Section 4 focuses on respondents' views of and experiences relating to their education and training. This is addressed in some detail in respect of both Further and Higher Education qualifications over a range of specific issues highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of practitioners. The issues relating to practicum placement are also explored in this section.

Section 5 examines respondents' experiences of their induction into the early years profession and any Continuing Personal Development (CPD) they may have undertaken in the past two years.

Section 6 looks at wider issues that impact on the quality of early childhood care and education.

Section 7 examines the additional comments provided by those who responded to the survey.

Section 8 summarises the key findings of the survey.

SECTION 1

Profile of Respondents



1.1 Age and Gender

The vast majority of respondents (n=531) were aged between 20 and 50: 30% were in their twenties, 28% in their thirties, and 26% in their forties. Only 13% were in their fifties, while only 2% of respondents were either aged less than 20 or more than 60.

Reflecting the fact that early years education and care is an overwhelmingly female profession, 98% of respondents were female and 2% male. The majority of respondents were relatively new to the profession, as table 1 demonstrates.

Table 1: Number of years in profession

Number of years in profession	% respondents
Less than 5	29.0
5 to 9	24.9
10 to 19	27.9
20 to 29	16.0
30 or more	2.5

1.2 Location

All counties were represented among the survey responses (n=528). Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) were from Dublin. The other counties with the highest representation were Cork (10%), Kerry (8%), and Galway (7%). The lowest response rate came from Leitrim, Longford, Offaly and Waterford (all less than 1%).

1.3 Professional role

Respondents were asked to describe their specific role in their early years setting. The responses are shown in Table 2. The majority of respondents were working in a leadership capacity in their setting with 71.2% identifying as being in a management position or as room leader.

Table 2: Professional role of respondents

Professional Role (n=510)	% respondents
Centre Manager (supernumerary)	11.6
Centre Manager (working with children)	29.4
Deputy Manager (supernumerary)	0.6
Deputy Manager (working with children)	5.5
Room leader	24.1
Childcare practitioner	21.0
Childcare assistant	6.5
Student placement	6.3
Child-minder	3.1
Other	7.1

SECTION 2

Profile of settings



2.1 Type and size of Setting

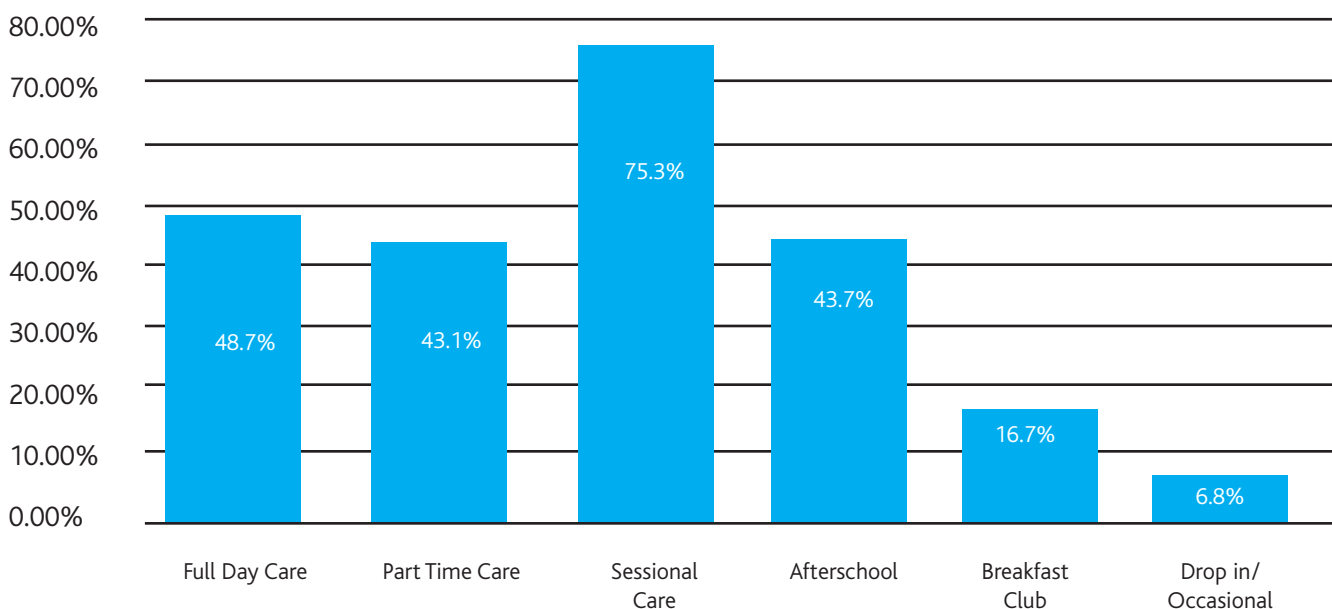
A small majority of respondents (60%) were working in private-for-profit settings, with approximately 40% working in community settings (n=510). Almost a third (30%) of respondents worked in settings with between 20-39 children. There was also a significant proportion of respondents working in settings with less than 20 children (23%) or between 40-59 children (20%). The smallest settings (presumably child-minders) catered for 2 children, while the largest setting catered for 290 children.

Table 3: Size of setting

Number of children (n=485)	% of respondents
less than 20	23.2
20 to 39	29.9
40 to 59	19.8
60 to 79	11.4
80 to 99	5.1
100 to 119	5.5
More than 120	3.6

The majority of respondents (75%) provided sessional care. 49% provided full day care, with 43% providing part-time care and afterschool respectively (n=485).⁵

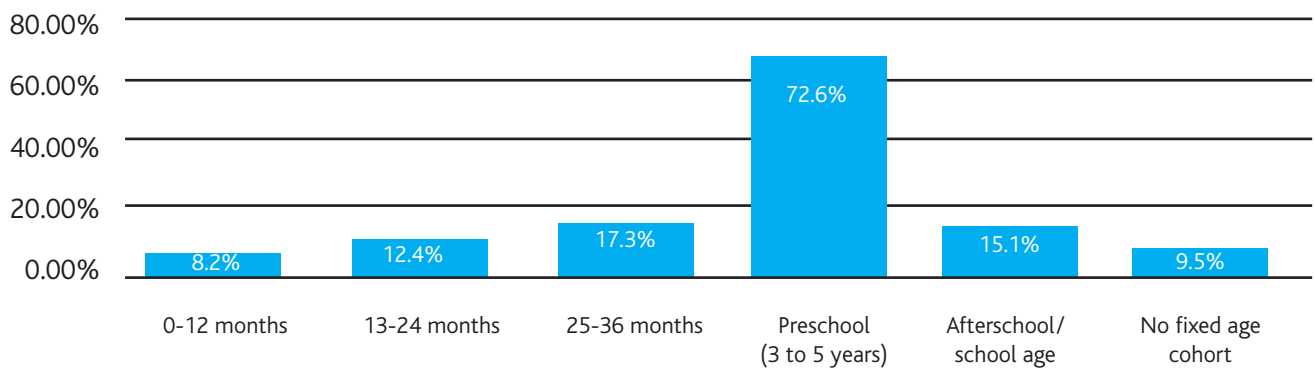
Fig 1: Type of Service



⁵ Respondents were able to tick as many categories as relevant in response to this question.

Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents catered for pre-school children (3-5 age cohort). Some 17% dealt with 2-3 year olds, 15% catered for children of school going age, with 12% dealing with 1-2 year olds. The least represented cohort was children aged 12 months or less. With only 8% of respondents dealing with this age cohort. A further 10% had no fixed cohort of children (n=485).

Fig 2: Age cohort of children



SECTION 3

Education provision in
early years settings



3.1 Curriculum used in setting

Respondents were asked to specify which curriculum is used in their settings. Some confusion was evident in the responses as to what constitutes a curriculum; for example, the most frequently identified 'curriculum' was Aistear, which is a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum. It is evidence, however, of the extent to which Aistear has permeated the vocabulary of early years education. Similarly, the fourth most frequently mentioned curriculum was Síolta, which is a quality framework rather than a curriculum.

The actual curricula that were identified most frequently were Montessori, play-based curriculum and Highscope.

Table 4: Curriculum used

Curriculum used	Number of respondents (597)	% of total
Aistear	271	45%
Montessori	116	19%
Play	85	14%
Síolta	74	12%
Highscope	51	9%

3.2 Quality of Education provided to children in settings

There was a positive response from practitioners when asked to rate the quality of education provision in their setting with 81% rating the quality as 'excellent' or 'very good'. Early years practitioners were asked to rate the quality of the education provided to all of the children in their settings on a scale of 1 ('very poor') to 5 ('excellent'). Less than half of respondents (45%) rated the quality of the education provided to all of the children in their settings as being 'excellent'. A further 36% rated the education provided as 'very good'. However, 14% rated the provision as only being the middle rating, with approximately 3% rating it as either 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Table 5: Quality rating of education provision

Rating (1= very poor, 5= excellent)	% respondents (n=409)
1 (very poor)	0.7%
2 (poor)	2.2%
3 (good)	14.4%
4 (very good)	35.9%
5 (excellent)	45.0%
Don't know	1.7%

SECTION

4

Education and training
programmes



4.1 Overview of respondents' attainment

Approximately 87% of respondents held at least a Level 6 major award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The highest award most commonly held was a Level 7 award on the NFQ. Approximately 31% of respondents were in this category. Some 30% had a level 6 award as their highest qualification, while a further 22% held a level 8 award. A small proportion (4%) of those who responded to the survey held a master's degree or a PhD.

The vast majority of the qualifications specified were relevant to early childhood care and education but some of the qualifications listed related to other areas such as family studies, social studies, and psychology. In some instances respondents were still pursuing their qualification but most had completed it.

The vast majority of respondents were currently undertaking their education programme or had qualified in the last ten years (82%), reflecting the significant emphasis on workforce development since the introduction of the ECCE programme.

Table 6: Qualification level of practitioners

Level of award (n=425)	No. of respondents	% of respondents
Level 5	55	13.0
Level 6	127	29.9
Level 7	132	31.1
Level 8	94	22.1
Level 9 / Masters	16	3.7
Level 10 / PhD	1	0.2

The majority (60%) of respondents had received their major award in the period 2010 to 2015. Approximately 11% of practitioners are still completing their programme of education and training. An equal proportion had received their award in the period 2005 to 2009. Smaller proportions of respondents had received their awards in the period 2000 to 2004 (8%) and prior to 2000 (9%)

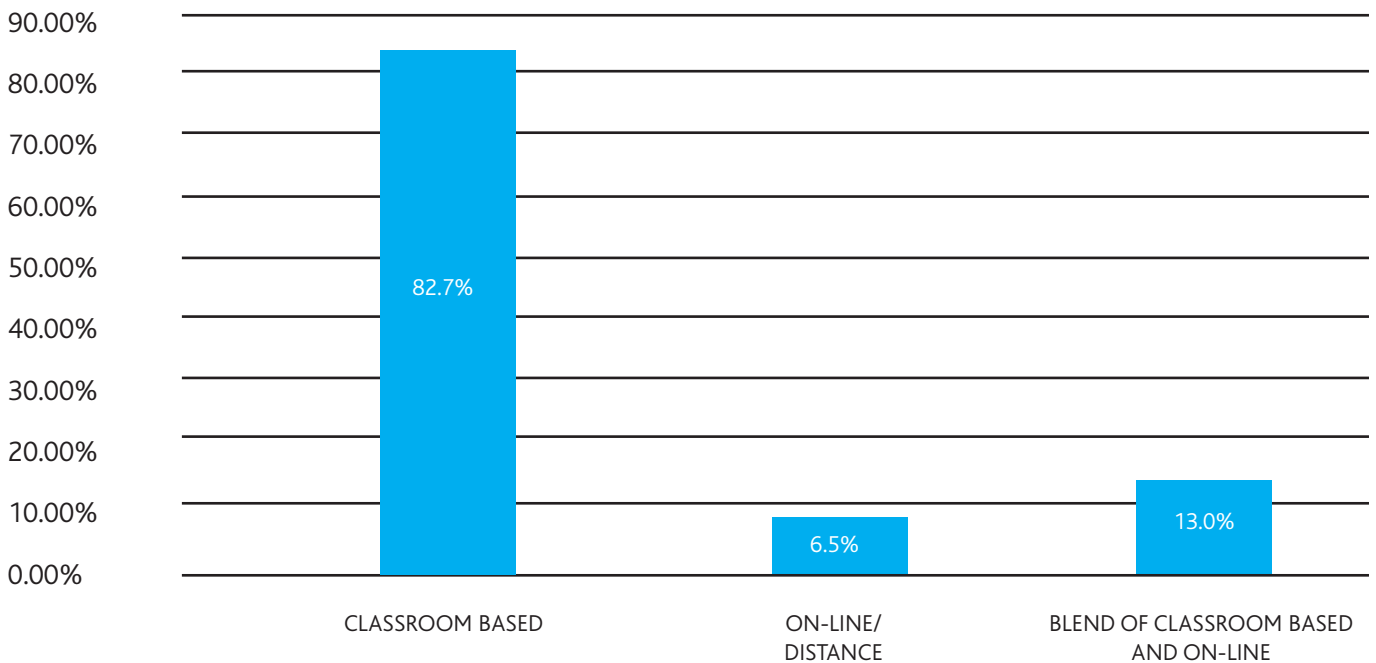
Table 7: Year of major award

Year of major award (n=392)	% of respondents
Ongoing	11
2010-2015	60
2005-2009	11
2000-2004	8
Prior to 2000	9

4.2 Delivery and funding of education programme

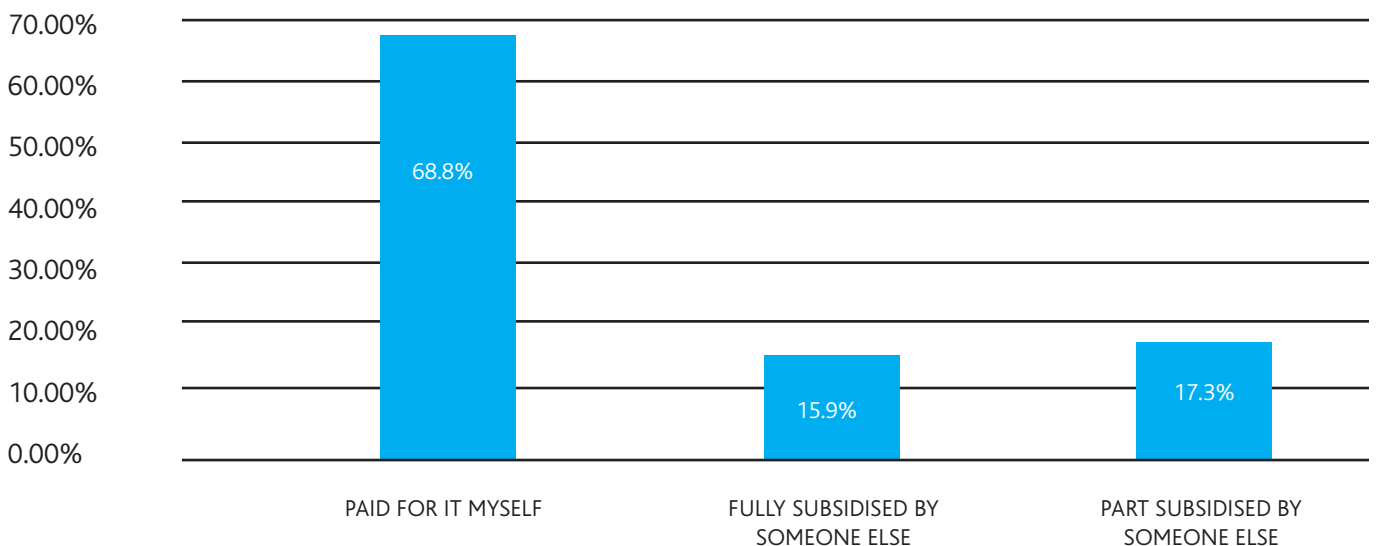
Two thirds (66%) of respondents had attended their education and training programme on a part-time basis, while 34% attended full-time (n=390). Approximately 77% attended classroom-based programmes, 12% attended an on-line or distance programme, while 13% attended a blended mixture. (n=390)

Fig 3: Mode of delivery of education programme



More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) paid for their education and training programme themselves, compared to 15% who had their programme fully subsidised by someone else, while 17% had their programme part-subsidised (n=372).

Fig 4: Funding of education programme

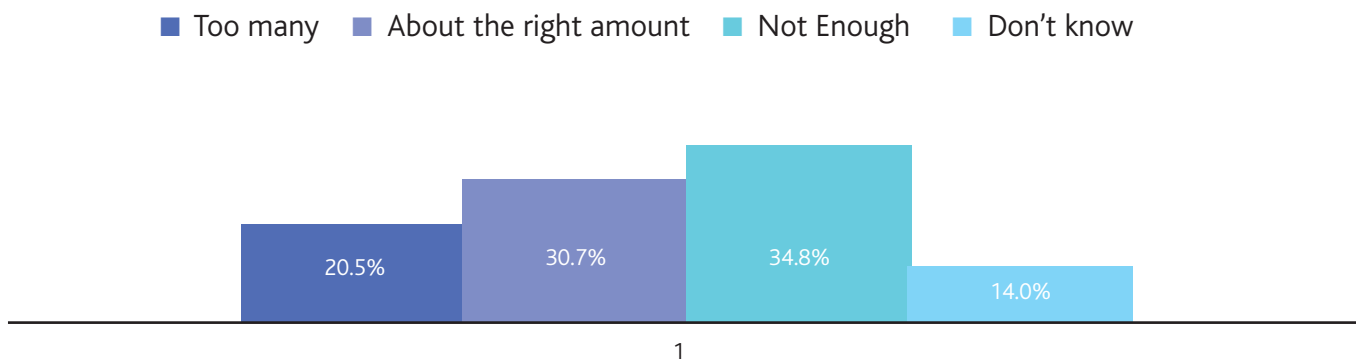


4.3 Access to education and training

Only one third of respondents (34%) indicated that their education and training providers offered a facility for recognition of prior learning (RPL); 39% did not. A further 28% of respondents were not sure (n=387).

Only 31% of early years practitioners felt that the number of early years education and training programmes available was 'about right'. 21% felt there are not enough. 35% felt there were too many (n=342)

Fig 5: Number of programmes



4.4 Motivation for education and training

Respondents had a variety of different reasons for pursuing their most recent qualification in early childhood care and education.

Table 8: Motivation for education and training

Motivation for pursuing qualification	Number of respondents	% of total (n=360)
Improve skills to benefit children	121	34%
Wanted to work in childcare or learn more about children's learning	93	26%
Meet minimum requirements	59	16%
Further career	54	15%
Personal development	33	9%

The dedication of practitioners to improving outcomes for the children in their care is reflected in the primary motivation cited by many for pursuing further qualifications. The most common factor was the desire to improve their skillset and knowledge with a view to benefiting the children in their setting:

For a number of respondents their most recent qualification had been undertaken as a means of initial entrance into the early years workforce or, in the case of those already working in the sector, to learn more about children's learning and development.



'I WANTED TO FURTHER MY OWN EDUCATION INITIALLY BUT I CAN SEE HOW MY M.A. IS BENEFITTING MY EVERYDAY WORK ALSO WHICH I BELIEVE IS EXTREMELY BENEFICIAL FOR THE CHILDREN. I HAVE RAISED THE STANDARDS THAT I EXPECT MY STAFF TO ACHIEVE ALSO AND THIS HAS TURNED AROUND HOW THE CENTRE OPERATES'.

A significant number of respondents had engaged in a programme of education and training in response to specific developments. This included the introduction, or raising, of minimum requirements for working in the sector, or the introduction of a higher capitation grant under the ECCE scheme for settings where the early years practitioners meet a higher minimum qualification threshold.

A cohort of respondents were motivated to further their career prospects within the sector, and thereby potentially improve their wage earning potential. Another motivation was the desire for personal development in a more general sense.

4.5 Future education and training – progression routes

60% of respondents indicated that they intend to undertake further formal education and training in early childhood care and education in the future. 14% said they did not intend to do so, while a further 26% were not sure at this point in time (n=379). 67% of those who responded to the survey were aware of the progression routes available to them if they wished to take up further studies in early childhood care and education, with 23% being unaware. A further 9% did not know whether options were available or not (n=386).

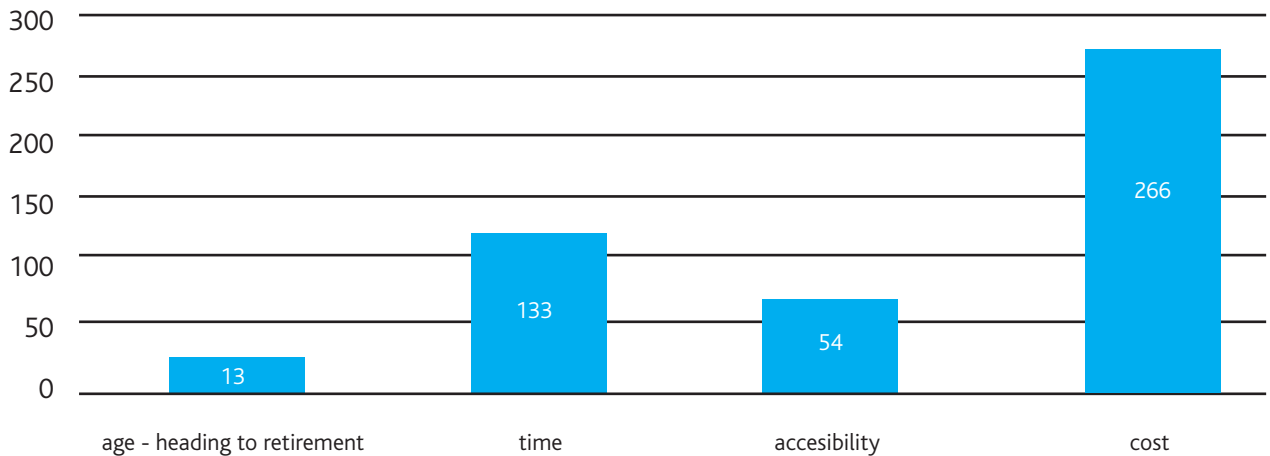
4.6 Barriers and obstacle to further study

Respondents were asked to identify potential obstacles that would prevent them from undertaking further study. The cost of education and training programmes was identified by 266 respondents as the single most significant obstacle. The second most common obstacle was identified as the time constraint (133 respondents). The other most frequently identified obstacle was difficulties in accessing suitable programmes. This was mentioned by 54 respondents.



MY MAIN AIM IS TO IMPROVE MY PRACTICE, I BELIEVE CPD ENABLES ME TO BE AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATOR AND MORE EFFECTIVE MANAGER

Fig 6: Identified barriers to future education and training



Many responses highlighted the close links between the barriers relating to time, accessibility and cost constraints.

The cost of full-time programmes was highlighted as often prohibitive, particularly in light of remuneration levels in the early years sector, and it is difficult to pursue full-time studies while working during the day.

Part-time or online options are a more attractive option for many in allowing them to complete part of the course from home. However, respondents pointed to the often higher costs associated with online programmes and the fact that the challenge remained of combining studies with long working hours and the demands of family life.

The other obstacle that was identified - but not as prominently - was age. A cohort of respondents indicated that they were too close to retirement age to contemplate undertaking further study (section 1.1 also refers).

Survey responses contained a degree of frustration as to what was perceived as a lack of recognition, in terms of respect or remuneration, afforded to early years practitioners who invested their own time and money in upskilling.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

'Time and money is the obstacle I am working full-time, supporting my family, and going to college to finish my level 7.'

'Class based courses are time consuming and go on for long period of time. On-line courses would be better but too expensive.'

'I don't see the point.'

'I'm am not respected for what I have done so far so why should I work harder for nothing in return.'

'I have put over €12,000 into my education over the last six years and am barely earning more than minimum wage.'

'Unfortunately the only way to progress to is get off the floor'

away from the children which is a shame as I love my job but need and want more money.'

'In order to take up a degree level course I would have to cut back on hours worked to have time to complete the course but also there is little or no return on the investment put in to up skilling to degree level.'

20

4.7 Views of practitioners on the quality of education and training they received

96% of respondents rated the overall quality of their most recent education and training programme in early childhood care and education as either 'very good' (54%) or 'good' (42%). Only 4% said it was 'poor' and less than 1% rating it as 'very poor' (n=353)

Fig 7: Views on quality of education and training

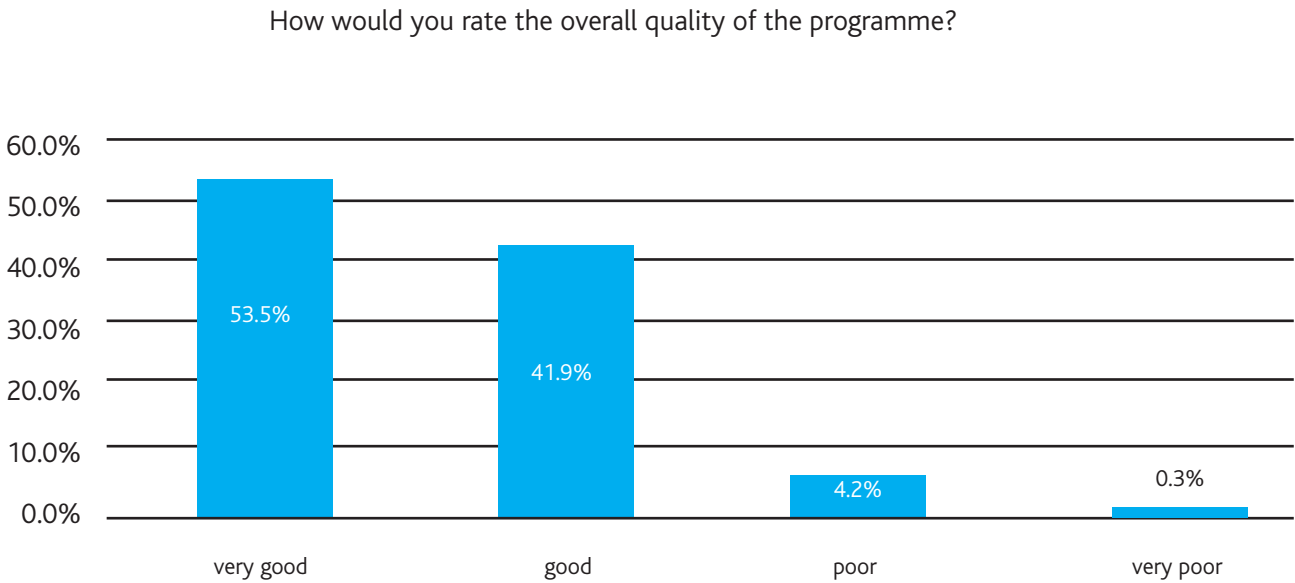
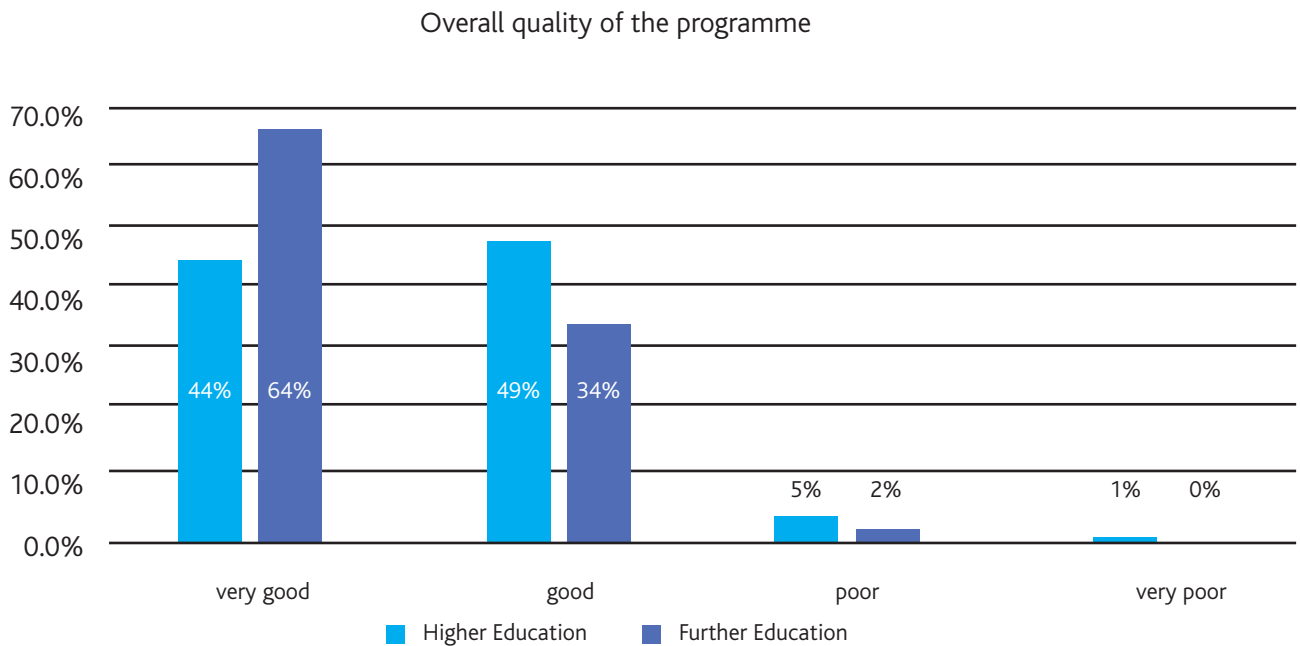


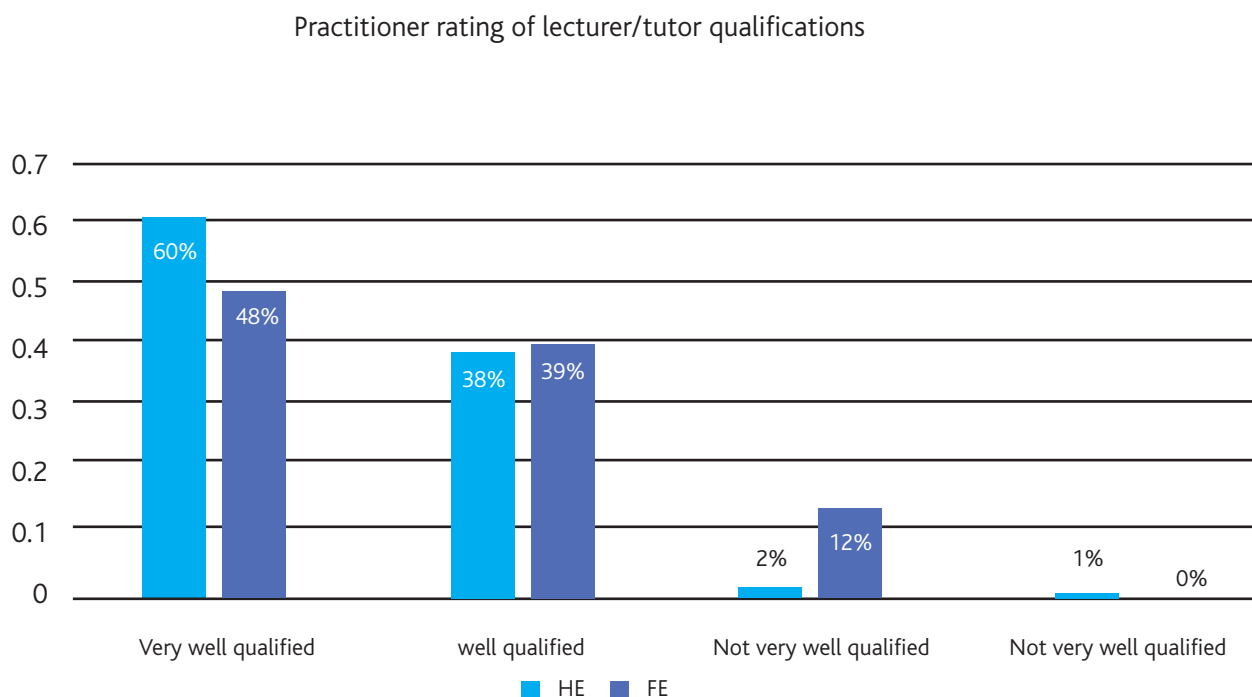
Fig 8: Breakdown of view on quality



When asked whether they felt challenged by the content of the programmes, 89% of respondents felt challenged by their programme: 65% thought it was 'challenging', with a further 24% considering it to have been 'very challenging'. However, almost one in ten (9.4%) of respondents felt that their course was 'not very challenging' and a further 1% felt that their programme was 'not all challenging' (n=383).

Respondents were generally positive about the extent to which they felt those delivering their initial education and training programme were qualified in early childhood care and education. Overall, 92% said that their lecturers / tutors were either 'very well' qualified (53%) or 'well' qualified (39%). Only 7% indicated their lecturing staff were 'not very well qualified' with 1% rating them as 'not at all qualified' (n=351).

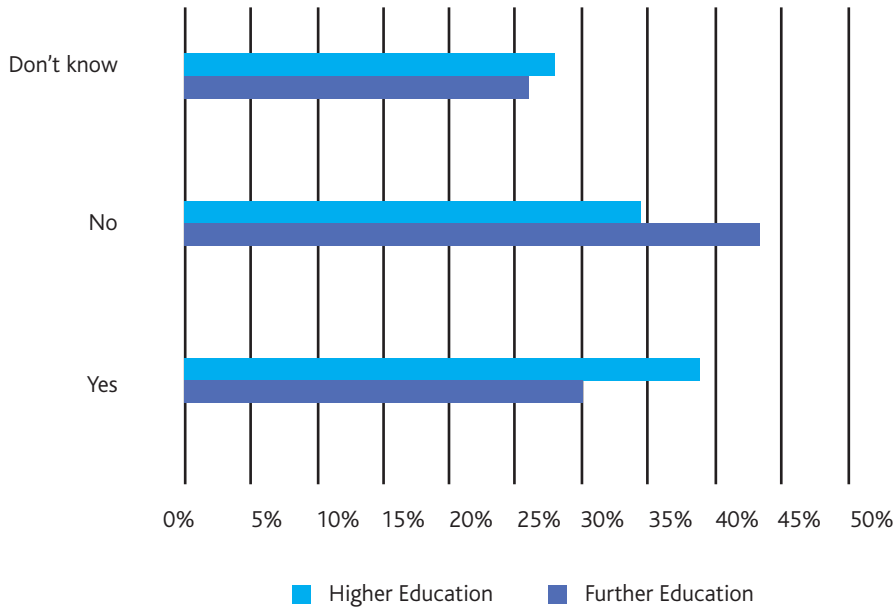
Fig 9: Qualifications of lecturers/tutors



Respondents also felt that their lecturing staff were well informed on recent developments in the early years sector. 48% felt they were 'very well informed', with 39% thinking they were 'well informed'. However, 13% felt that they were 'not very well informed' (11%) or 'not at all informed' (2%) (n=351).

Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) indicated that their provider gave them an opportunity to provide feedback on their programme; 27% did not provide such an opportunity (n=351).

Fig 10: Recognition of Prior Learning



4.8 Work preparedness of practitioners

9 out of 10 respondents (88%) indicated that their qualification in early childhood care and education had prepared them 'well' (48%) or 'very well' (40%) for working in early years settings. However, a significant proportion felt that they were not 'very well' (1/10) or 'at all prepared' (less than 2%) by their education and training programme (n=386)

Fig 11: Preparedness for work by education and training programme

In overall terms how well did your highest qualification in early childhood care and education prepare you to work in early years settings?

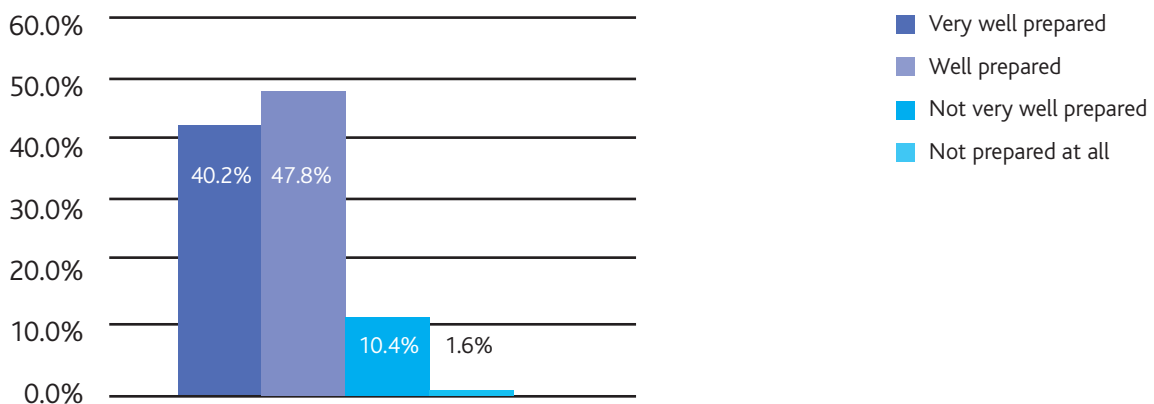


Fig 12: Preparedness for work in the sector

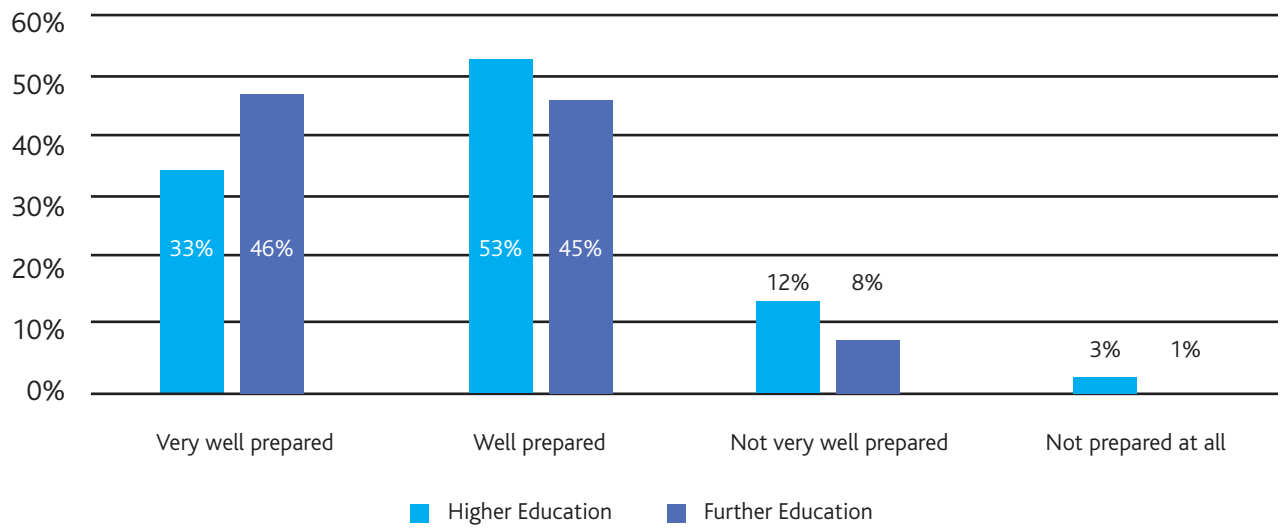
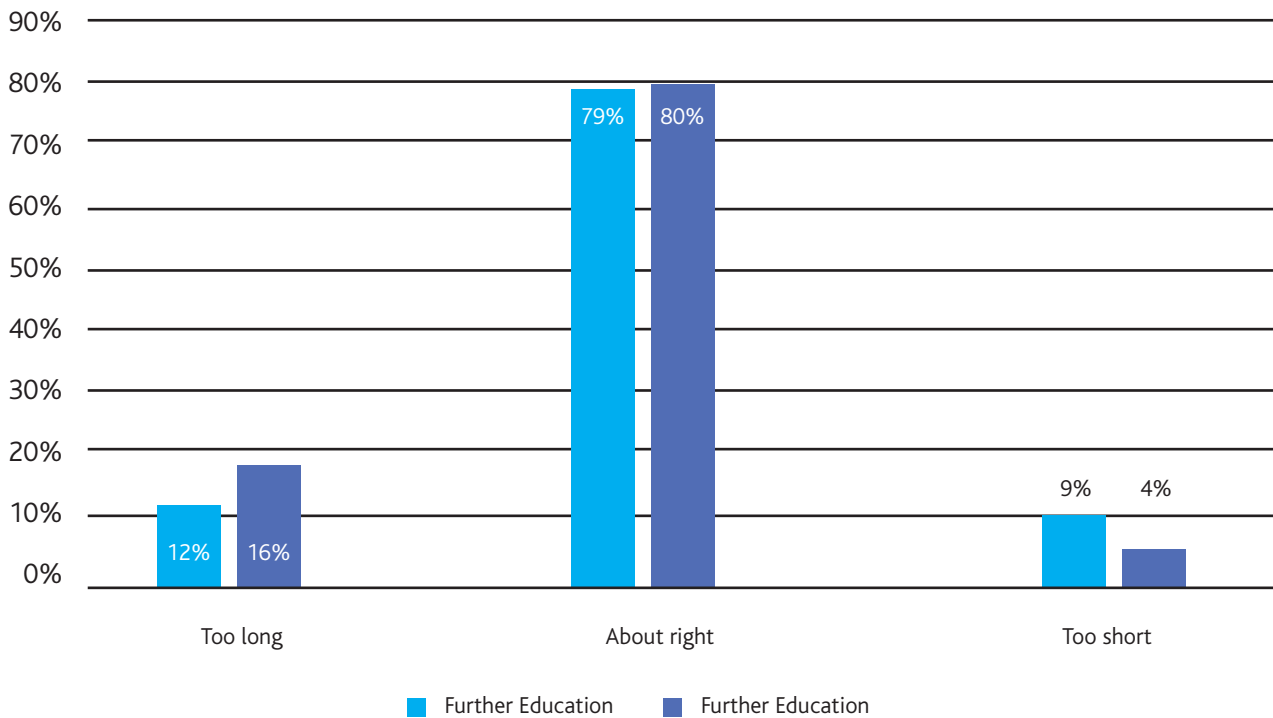


Fig 13: Length of Programme



The vast majority of respondents (79%) felt that their programme was the right length. 14% felt it was too long, while just 7% felt it was too short (n=383).

Respondents were also asked about how well their education and training programme prepared them in relation to a number of key areas relevant to early childhood care and education, namely:

- Child development
- Education and play
- Health and wellbeing
- Social environment
- Personal professional development
- Communication, management and administration

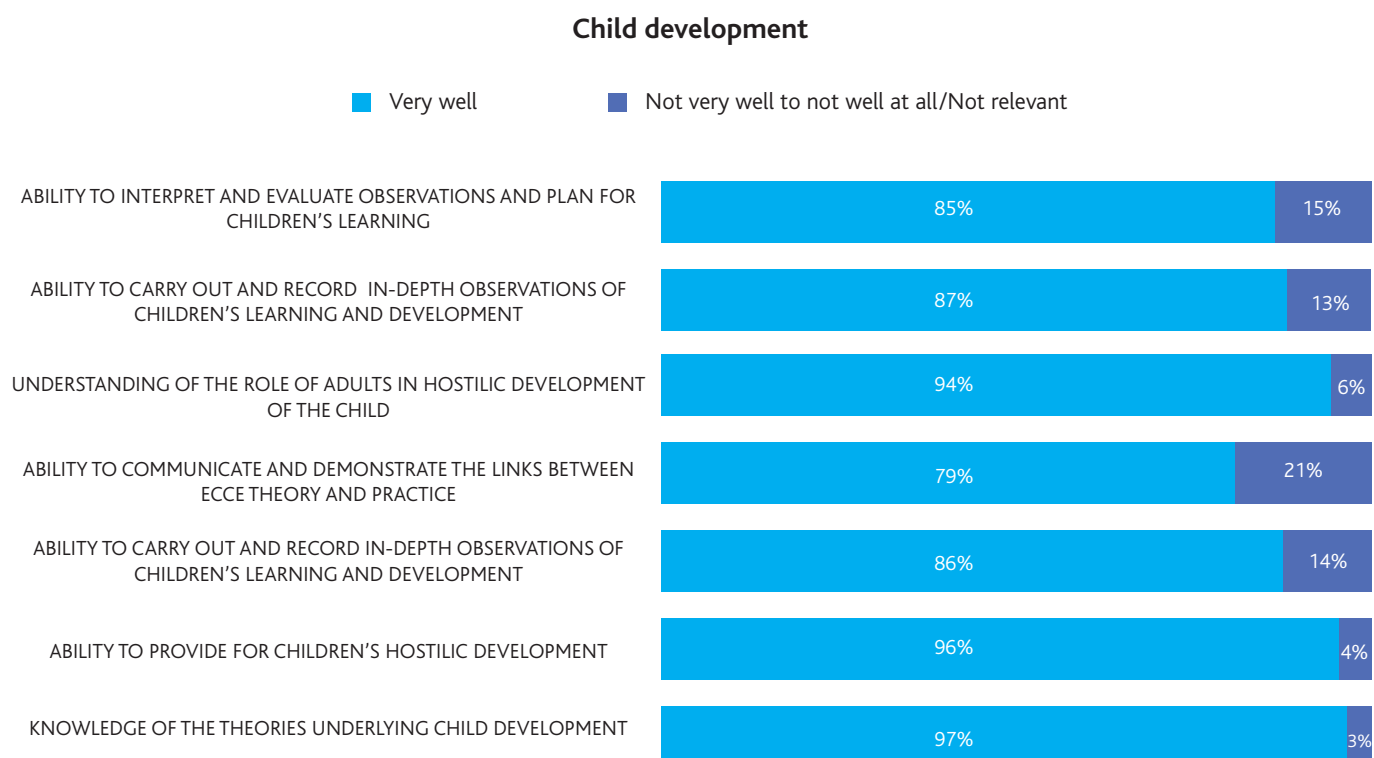
The following sections summarise the responses of practitioners with Further Education qualifications (4.9) and Higher Education qualifications (4.10) in relation to their preparedness in those key areas.

4.9 Further Education Qualifications

4.9.1 Child Development

In respect of child development, further education respondents felt they were best prepared in relation to their knowledge of the theories behind child development (97%), being able to provide for children’s holistic development (96%), and understanding the role of adults in children’s development. More than 94% of respondents felt either ‘well’ or ‘very well’ prepared in these areas.

Fig 14: Child Development



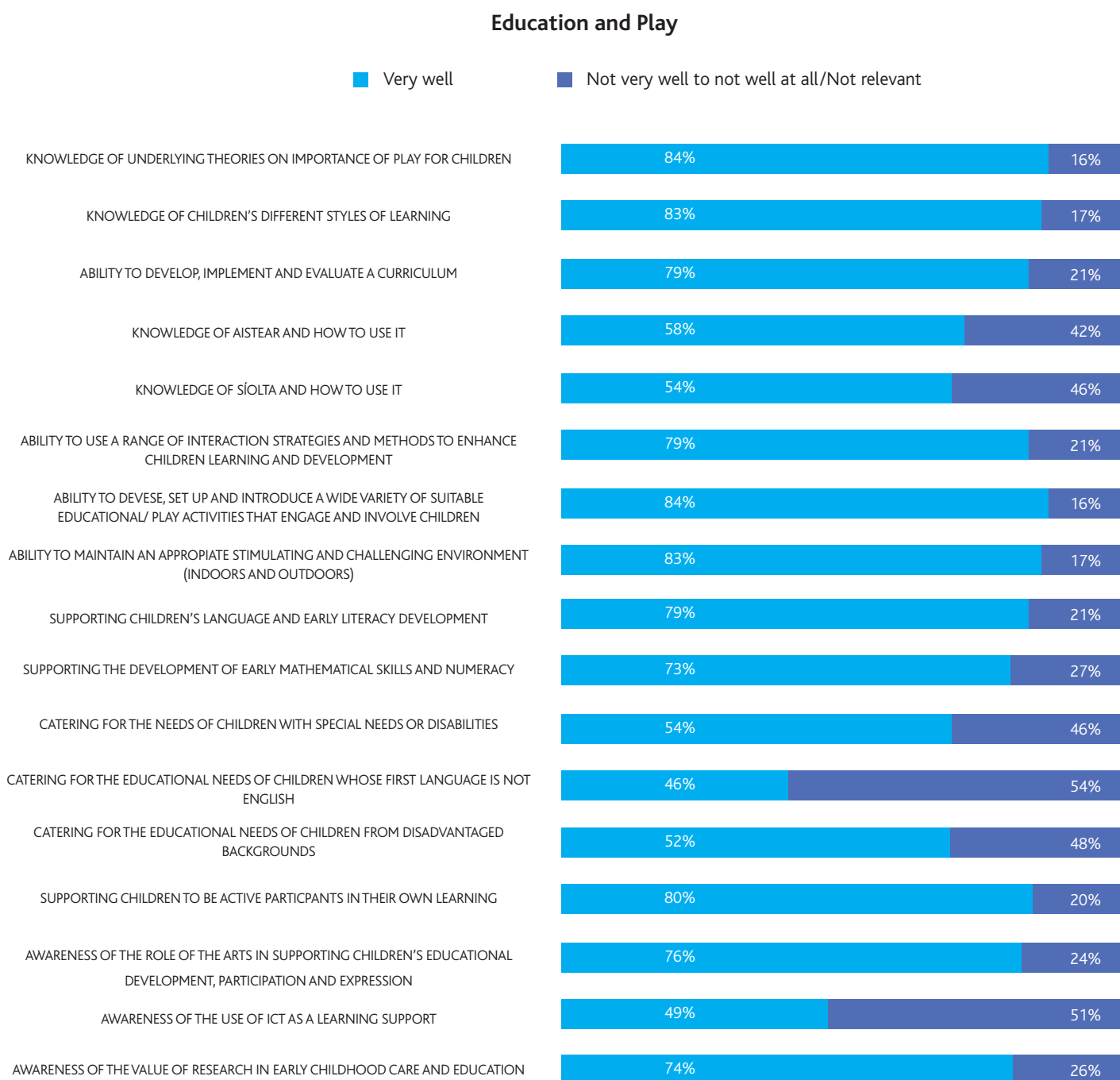
Approximately 84% of respondents felt adequately prepared to plan a child-centred learning environment, and to undertake, record and interpret observations of children's learning (87%). The area where respondents felt least prepared was in relation to communicating and demonstrating the links between theory and practice in relation to early childhood education. Perhaps worryingly, over 20% of respondents felt that they weren't 'able' to communicate/demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice.

4.9.2 Education and Play

Respondents felt most prepared in relation to understanding the theory behind the importance of play for children's learning. More than 84% of respondents felt that their education and training programme had adequately prepared them in this area.

Approximately 85% of respondents felt adequately prepared in four other areas relating to education and play. These were an understanding of children's different learning styles (83%), ability to design suitable educational and play based activities to engage children (84%), the ability to maintain an appropriately stimulating environment for children (83%), and supporting children to be active participants in their own learning (80%).

Fig 15: Education and Play



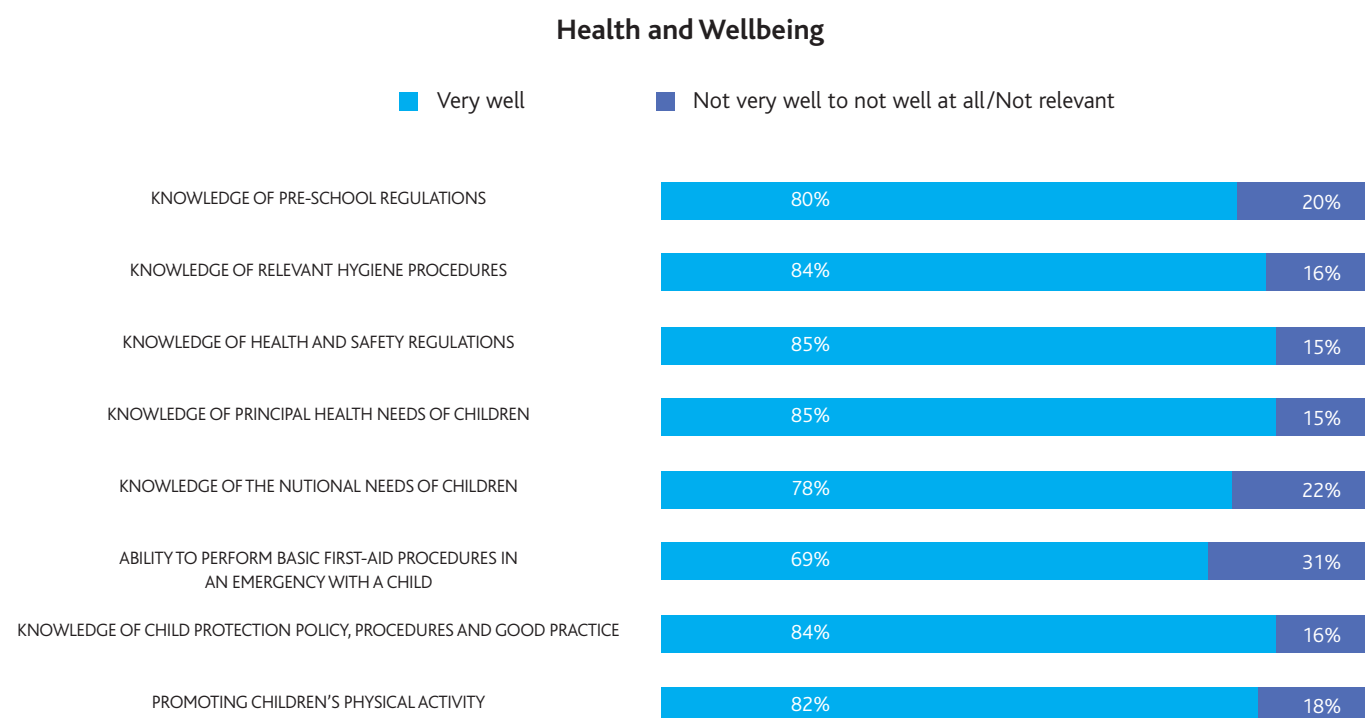
A slightly lower proportion of respondents felt adequately prepared in relation to using a range of interaction strategies and methods to enhance children’s learning and development (79%), supporting children’s language and literacy development (79%), having an awareness of the role of the arts in children’s educational development (76%), curriculum planning and implementation (79%), being aware of the value of relevant research (74%), and supporting the development of early mathematical skills and numeracy (73%). In relation to each of these areas, approximately 75-80% of respondents felt adequately prepared.

Respondents felt significantly less prepared in other areas. 42% of respondents felt unprepared in relation to Aistear, 46% in relation to Síolta, 46% in relation to catering for children with special educational needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds, and 51% felt unprepared in relation to the use of ICT as a learning support. The area where respondents felt least prepared was in relation to catering for the needs of children whose first language is neither English nor Irish: 54% of respondents felt inadequately prepared in this area.

4.9.3 Health and Well Being

Approximately 80% or more of respondents reported being 'well' or 'very well' prepared in relation to children's physical activity (81%), the health needs of children, and child protection policies (84%). A slightly higher proportion felt adequately prepared in relation to health and safety regulations, and hygiene procedures (85%), knowledge of the pre-school regulations (79%), and children's nutritional needs (77%).

Fig 16: Health and Wellbeing



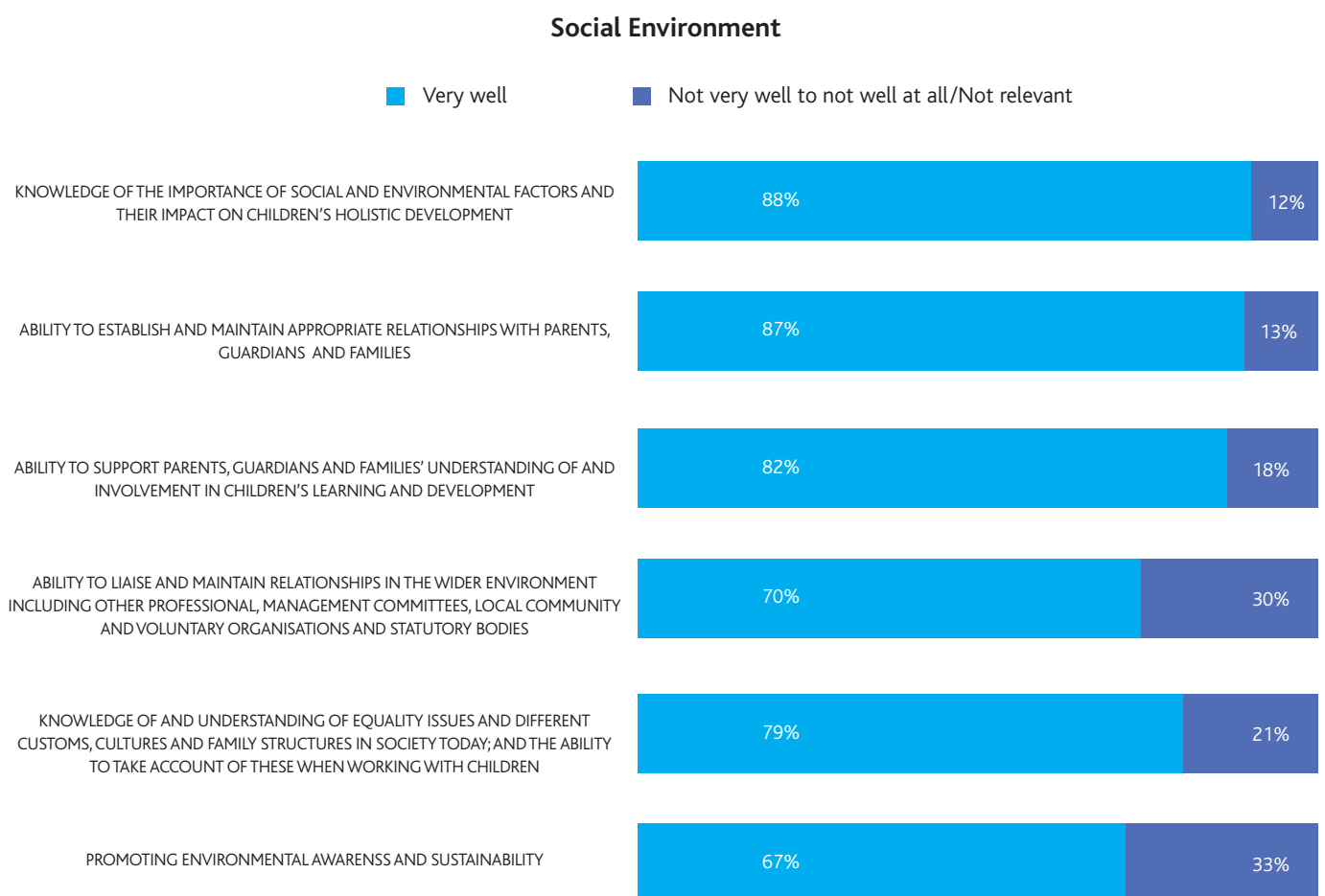
The area where respondents felt least prepared was in relation to the performance of basic first aid procedures: 68% of respondents felt inadequately prepared in this area.

4.9.4 Social Environment

Approximately 88% of respondents felt 'very well' or 'well' prepared to understand how social and environmental factors impact on children's development and, also, how to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents or guardians.

Practitioners were slightly less positive about their level of preparedness to support parents' and/or guardians' involvement in their children's development and how to take into account the diversity of children's backgrounds or how this impacts on their learning and development. There were significant deficits in relation to the maintenance of relationships in the sector in general and promoting environmental awareness and sustainability.

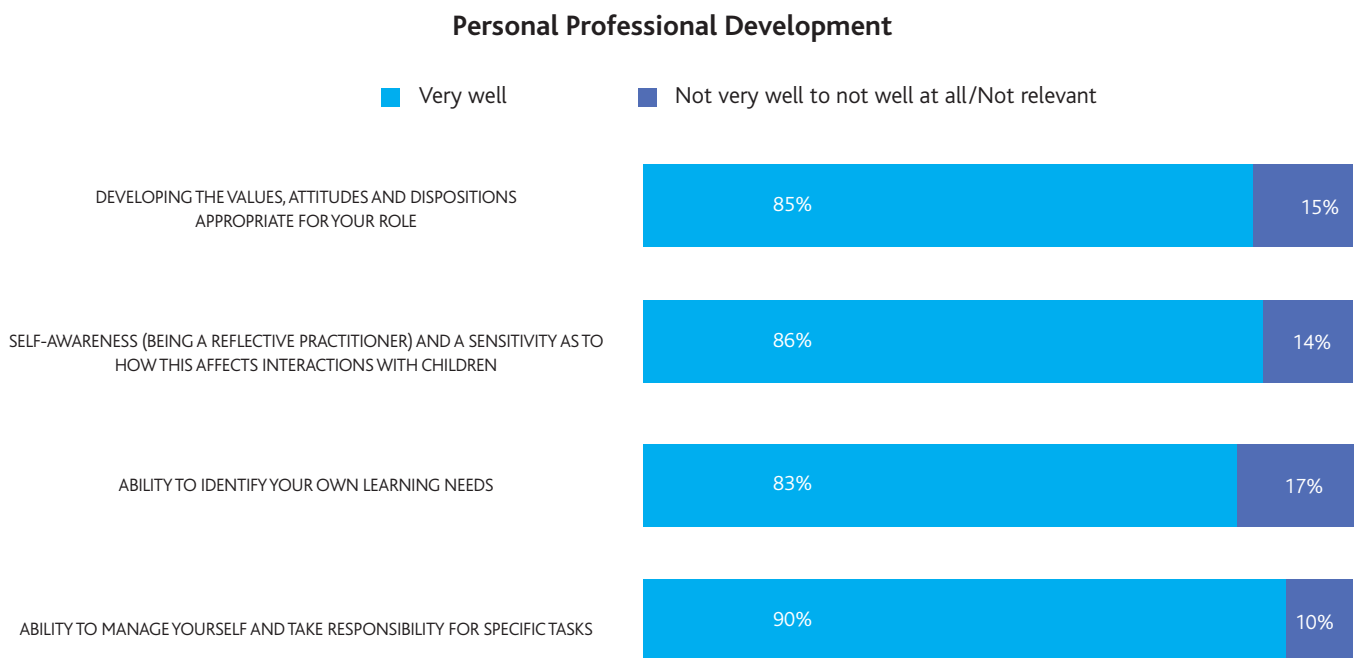
Fig 17: Social Environment



4.9.5 Personal Professional Development

This was the competency area where practitioners who responded to the survey were most positive about their level of preparedness. A high proportion of respondents felt adequately prepared in relation to all areas of personal professional development. This encompassed developing the relevant values and attitudes (85%), being a reflective practitioner (86%), identifying personal learning needs (83%), and managing oneself and taking responsibility (90%). However, some 17% were not able to identify their own learning needs.

Fig 18: Personal Professional Development



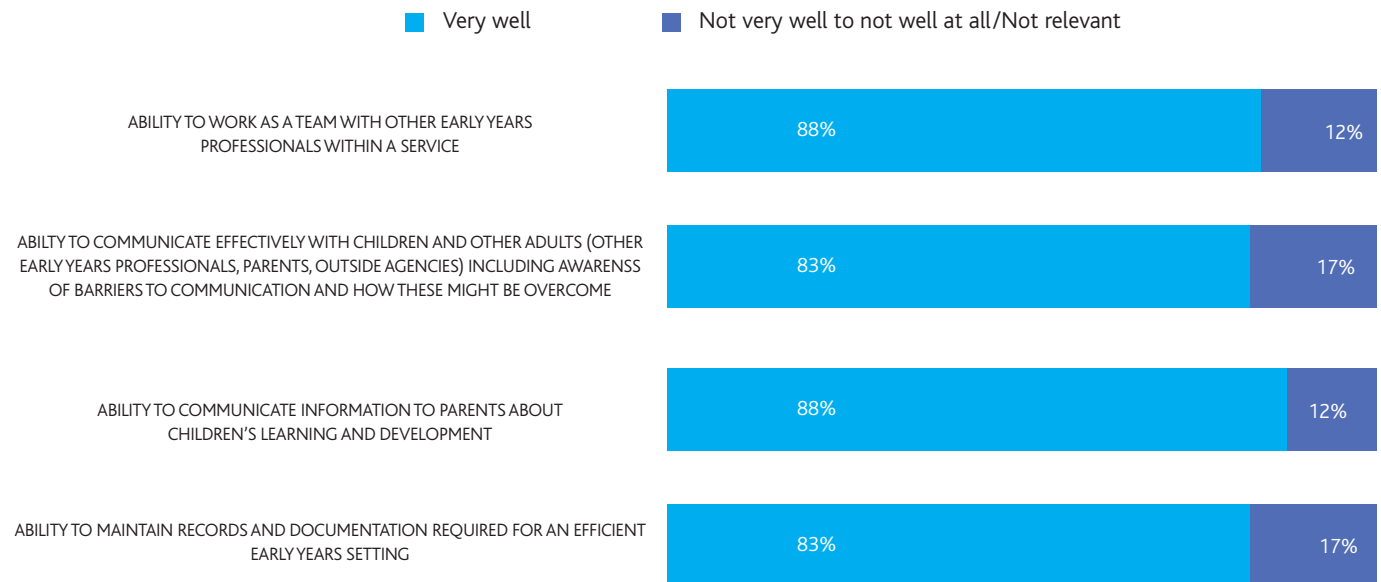
4.9.6 Communication, Management and Administration

In general, respondents felt that their programme of education and training had prepared them adequately for their responsibilities in relation to communication, administration and management. Approximately 87% felt very well or well prepared in relation to working as a team in their settings, and with other Early Years Professionals within their service, and 88% felt 'very well' or 'well prepared' regarding their ability to communicate information to parents about children's learning and development.

The area where practitioners felt least prepared related to record keeping and maintaining other documentation and communicating effectively with children and other adults, including parents.

Fig 19: Communication, Management and Administration

Communication, Management and Administration



Key findings: Further Education

Strengths

Respondents felt well-prepared by their education and training in relation to many aspects of these key areas. The most positive responses in any area were for Personal Professional Development which reflects the motivation identified early in the survey by many respondents in seeking to undertake further study.

The practitioners felt more confident about their abilities and preparation in relation to Health and Wellbeing than in Education and Play but in the latter area, most felt well prepared in relation to the importance of play for children and their knowledge of children's different styles of learning.

There were also positive findings in relation the practitioners' preparedness in all aspects of the area of Communication, Management and Administration.

Significant Gaps

However, gaps in preparedness were identified in aspects of all of the key areas but particularly in relation to Education and Play. In Child Development, the area in which practitioners felt least prepared by their programme of education and training was in the ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice.

In Education and Play, more concerns regarding their preparedness for practice in key aspects were identified by practitioners than in any other area. The aspects of this area identified that are of concern was a lack of preparedness to cater for the educational needs of children with special needs or disabilities (46%); of children whose first language is not English (54%); and of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (48%). The difficulties expressed in the survey clearly reflect the additional pressures placed on practitioners by the increased diversity of the cohort accessing ECCE caused by universal free access and increased societal diversity.

Three other aspects of Education and Play were identified by practitioners where they felt poorly prepared for practice. These include the knowledge of Aistear and its use (42%); Siolta and its use (46%) and the use of ICT as a learning support (51%). Given the centrality of Aistear and Siolta in the delivery of high quality education to children in pre-school, this is of particular concern.

In Health and Wellbeing, practitioners identified that they are inadequately prepared to perform basic first aid procedures in an emergency with a child (30%). This should be addressed through targeted CPD where necessary.

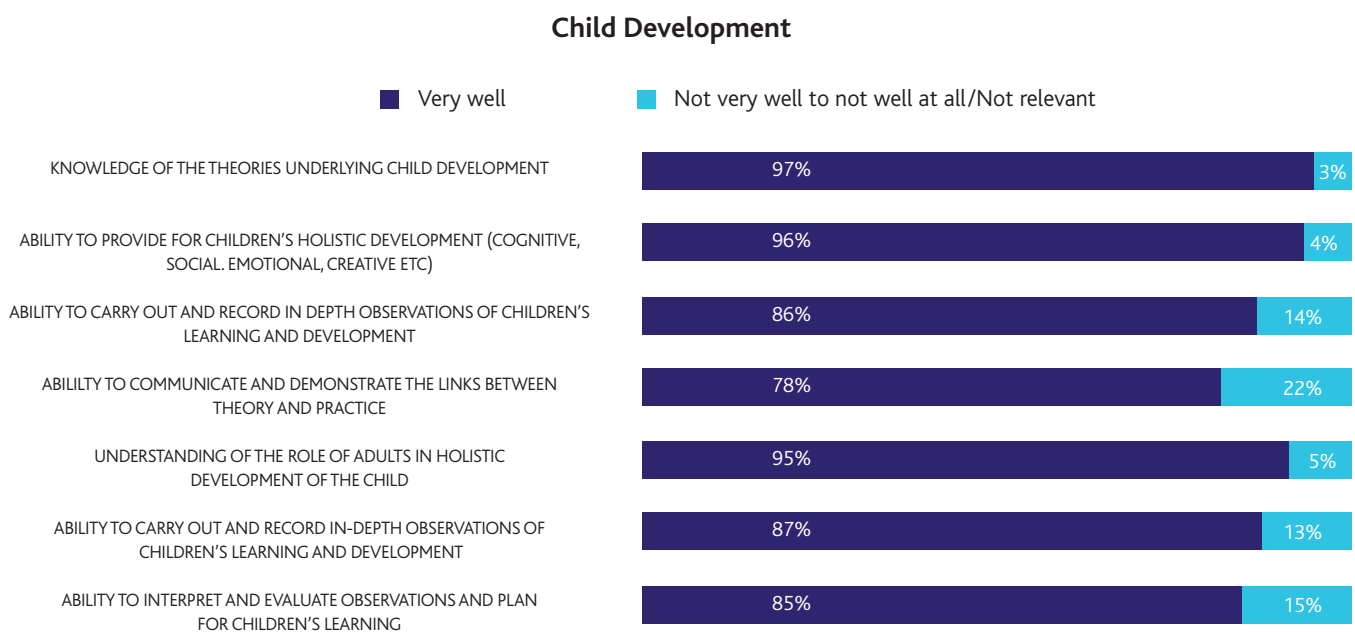
4.10 Higher Education Qualifications

4.10.1 Child Development

Over 95% of the Higher Education respondents felt they were 'very well' or 'well' prepared by their programme in areas of Knowledge of theories underlying child development (97%), ability to provide for children's holistic development (96%) and understanding the role of adults in that holistic development (95%).

The area least prepared was the ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice, which is an essential part of Síolta, the National Quality in Early Years Education Framework. As with FE respondents, over 20% of respondents felt that they weren't 'able' to communicate/demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice.

Fig 24: Child Development



4.10.2 Education and Play

Respondents felt most prepared in their knowledge of underlying theories on the importance of play for children (95%). There are several areas where respondents felt well prepared these include; knowledge of children's different styles of learning and supporting children language and early literacy (89%). The ability to engage children with suitable play activities (88%) and the awareness of the role of the Arts in supporting children's educational development and self-expression (85%). Supporting children to be active participants in their own learning (88%).

Preparedness to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds was 72% positive and supporting children with special needs 70%.

Like the FE respondents, knowledge of and how to use Síolta (50%) and Aistear (56%) showed significant deficits. The preparedness to support children whose first language was not English, children with special needs or disabilities and children from disadvantaged backgrounds was only marginally positive over all three categories; ditto the use of ICT as a learning support.

Fig 25: Education and Play

Education and Play

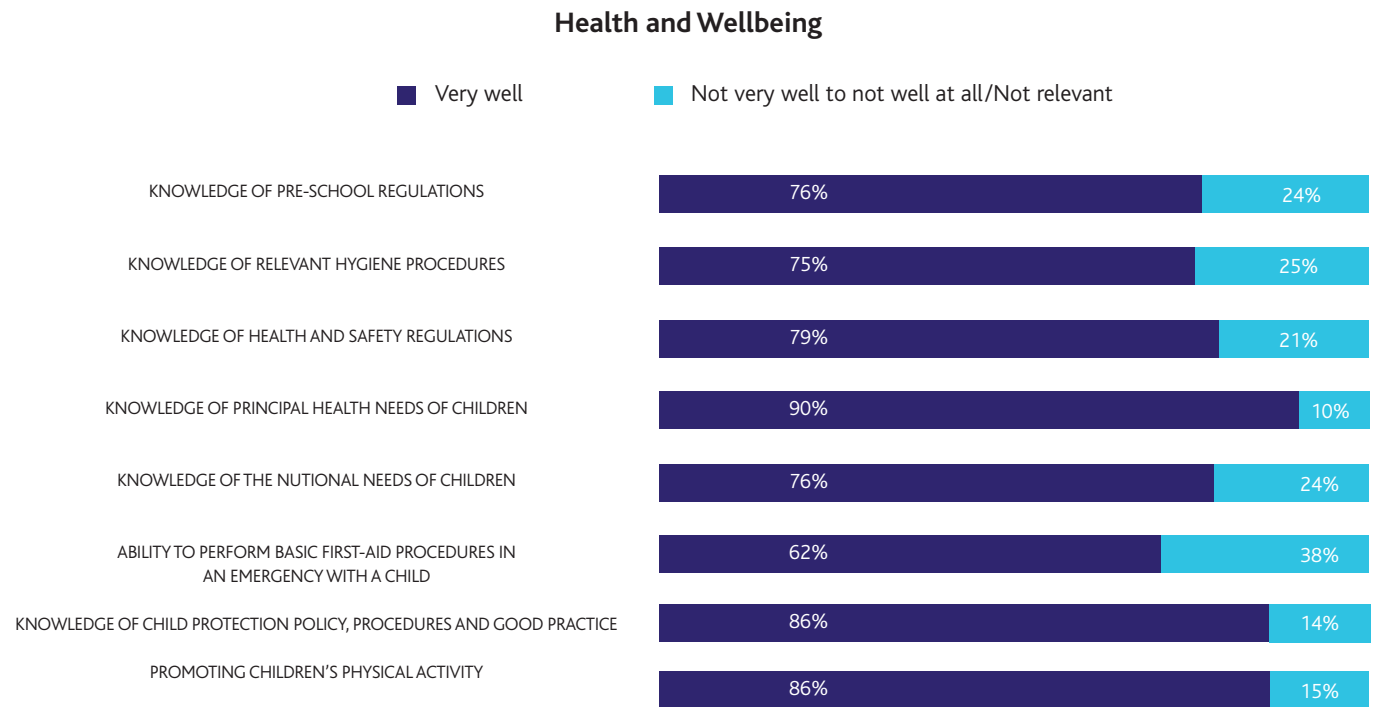


4.10.3 Health and Wellbeing

The knowledge of the principal health needs of children was 90% very well or well prepared. Knowledge of child protection policy, procedures and good practice and promoting children’s physical activity was 86% positive. Knowledge of hygiene procedures was 75% positive.

Similar to the further education responses, the higher education respondents felt the least prepared regarding their ability to perform basic first aid procedures in an emergency with a child or familiarity with the pre-school regulations.

Fig 26: Health and Wellbeing

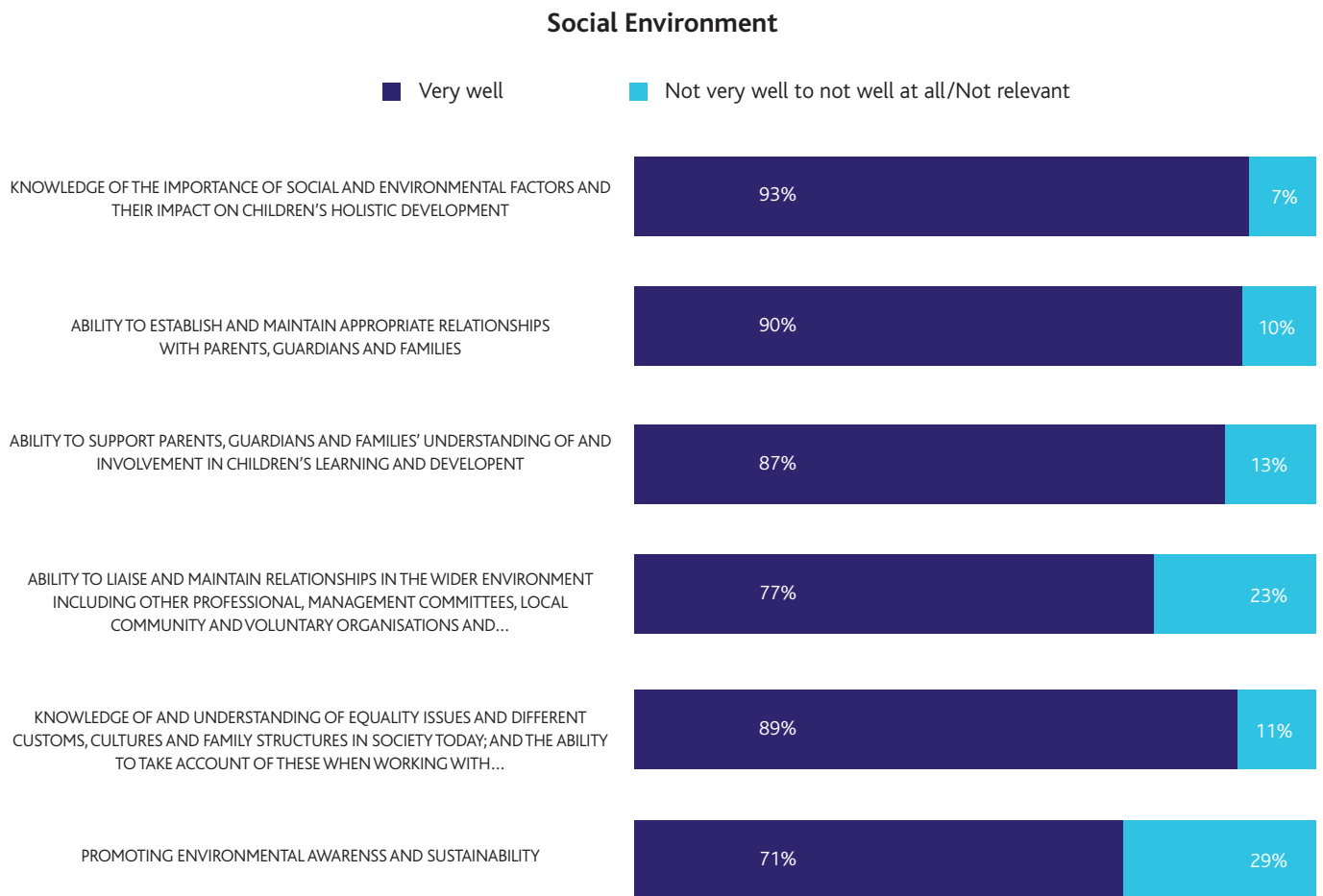


4.10.4 Social Environment

Approximately 93% of respondents felt 'very well' or 'well prepared' in their understanding of how social and environmental factors impact on children’s development, and also how to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents and families (90%). Equality issues and understanding of different cultures and family structures 89% positive.

There were two areas where respondents felt inadequately prepared i.e., establishing and maintaining effective relationships with the network of professionals and other bodies that have a role to play in supporting early years settings and in promoting environmental awareness and sustainability – effectively mirroring the FE practitioner response.

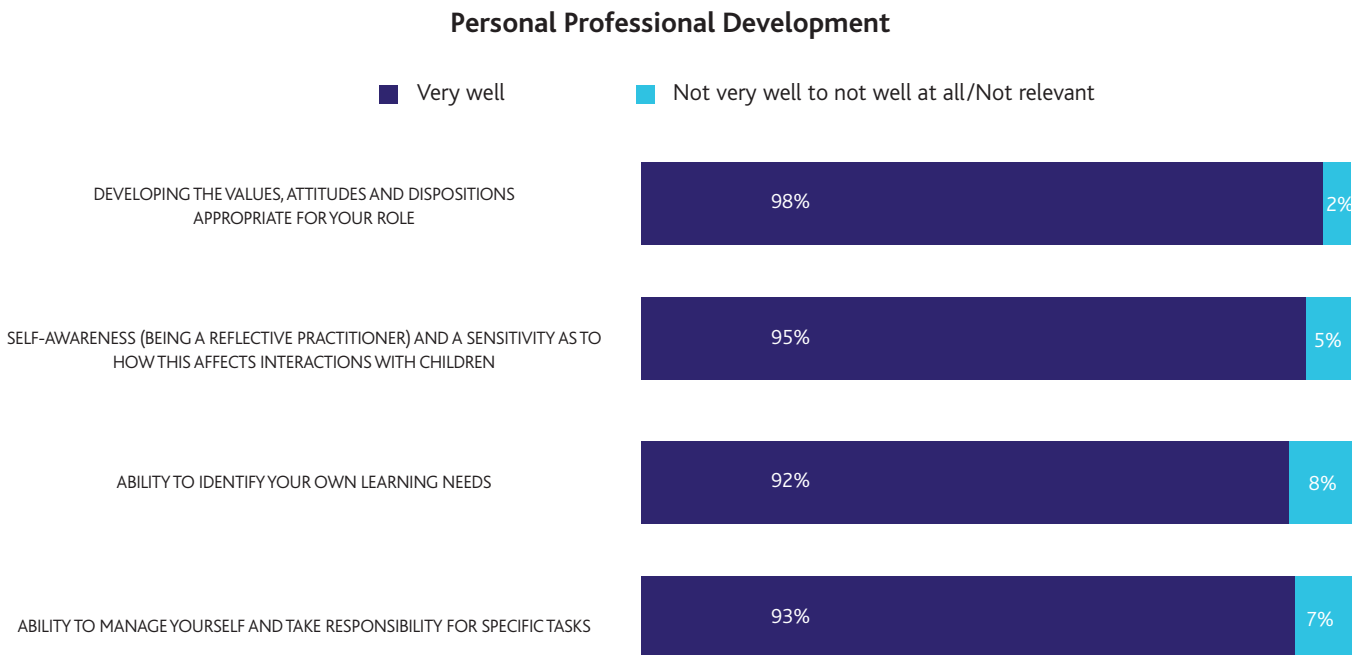
Fig 27: Social Environment



4.10.5 Personal Professional Development

Similar to further education respondents but to a greater extent, the area of personal professional development is where respondents felt most prepared. Developing the values, attitudes and dispositions appropriate received a very well or well response from 98% of the practitioners. Preparedness for being a reflective practitioner received a very well or well from 95% of practitioners.

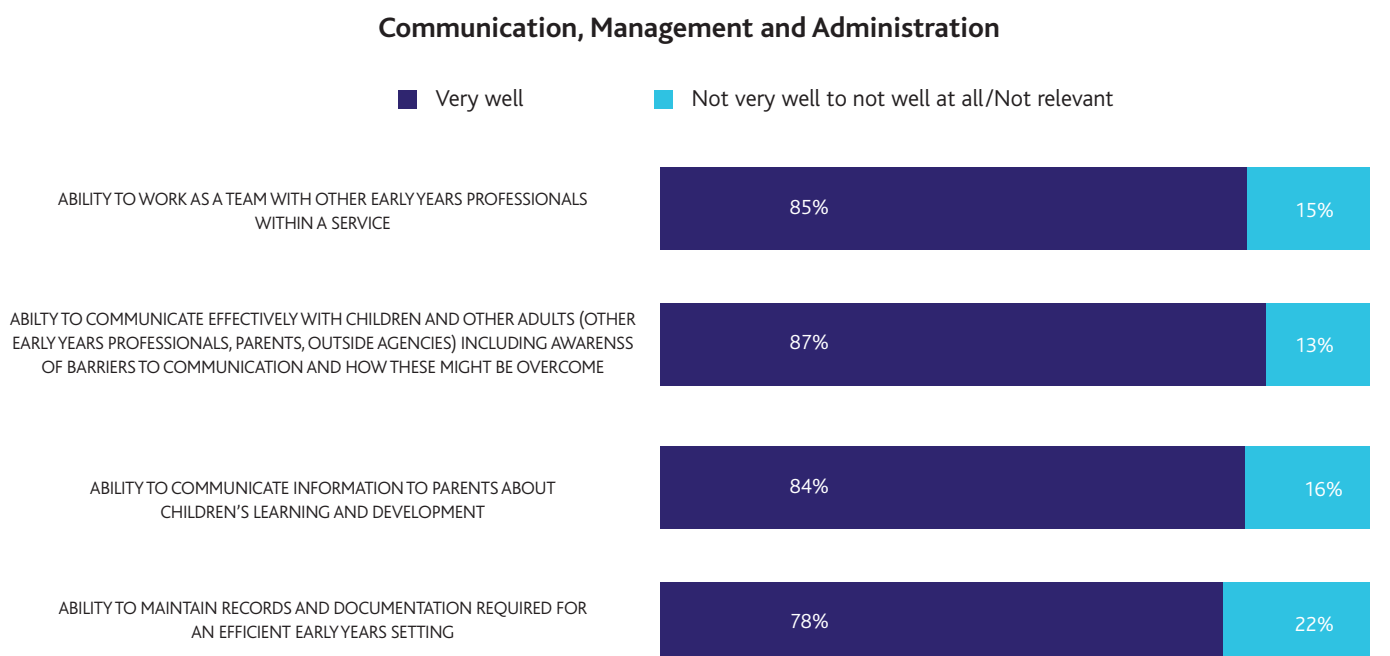
Fig 28: Personal Professional Development



4.10.6 Communication, Management and Administration

In general, respondents felt that their programme of education and training had prepared them adequately for their responsibilities in relation to communication, administration and management. Approximately 85% felt very well or well prepared in relation to working as a team in their settings, and with other Early Years Professionals within their service, and 87% felt very well or well prepared regarding their ability to communicate information to parents about children’s learning and development; record maintenance etc., less so than the other categories.

Fig 29: Communication, Management and Administration



Key findings: Higher Education

Strengths

Respondents felt well-prepared by their education and training in relation to many aspects of the key areas in the survey. The most positive responses in any area were for Personal Professional Development and for Child Development with respondents feeling very well prepared in their theoretical grounding and in their ability to provide for children's holistic development. The latter was also reflected in very high positive scores in Social Environment in relation to their knowledge of the importance of social and environmental factors and their impact on children's holistic development.

In Education and Play, practitioners were very positive in relation to their theoretical knowledge of the importance of play for children and their knowledge of children's different styles of learning. Practitioners who had completed higher education considered themselves highly aware of the value of research relevant to their practice.

Significant Gaps

However, significant gaps in preparedness were identified in some of the key areas:

Like their further education counterparts, the aspect of Child Development in which practitioners felt least prepared by their programme of education and training was in the ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice.

In Education and Play, practitioners with higher education practitioners were more positive about their preparedness to cater for the educational needs of children with various additional needs than those with further education. However, a significant proportion identified their lack of preparedness to cater for those children (30%); to cater for children whose first language is not English (43%); and of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (28%). As previously noted, the difficulties expressed in the survey clearly reflect the additional pressures placed on practitioners by the increased diversity of the cohort accessing ECCE caused by universal free access and increased societal diversity.

In very similar findings to the responses of those with further education, three other aspects of Education and Play were identified by practitioners where they felt poorly prepared for practice. These include the knowledge of Aistear and its use (44%); Síolta and its use (50%) and the use of ICT as a learning support (49%). Given the centrality of Aistear and Síolta in the delivery of high quality education to children in pre-school, this is of particular concern.

In Health and Wellbeing, practitioners with higher education also identified that they are inadequately prepared to perform basic first aid procedures in an emergency with a child (38%).

Although practitioners felt well prepared by their education and training to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families, they were less confident in their preparedness to liaise and maintain professional relationships in the wider environment (e.g. other professionals, management committees etc.)

4.11 Student practicum/placement in Further Education and Higher Education

89% of higher education and 80% of further education respondents had experienced a student placement as part of their education and training programme (n=290).

Fig 30: Student Placement in educational programme

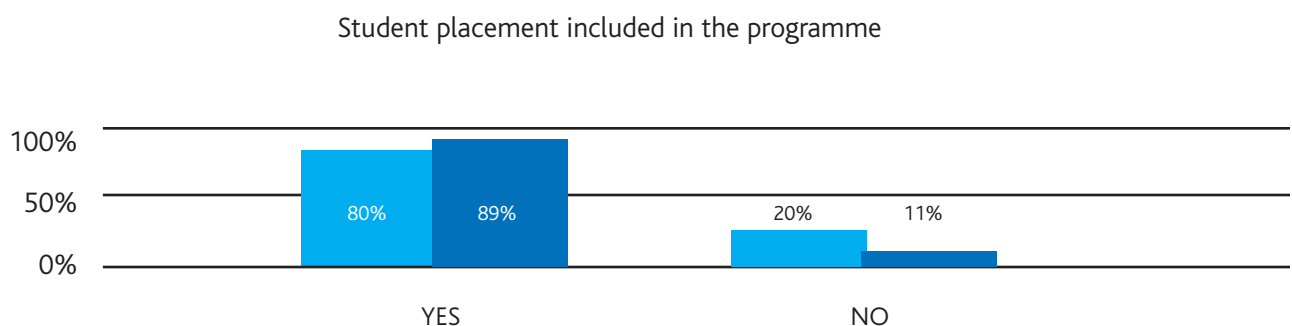
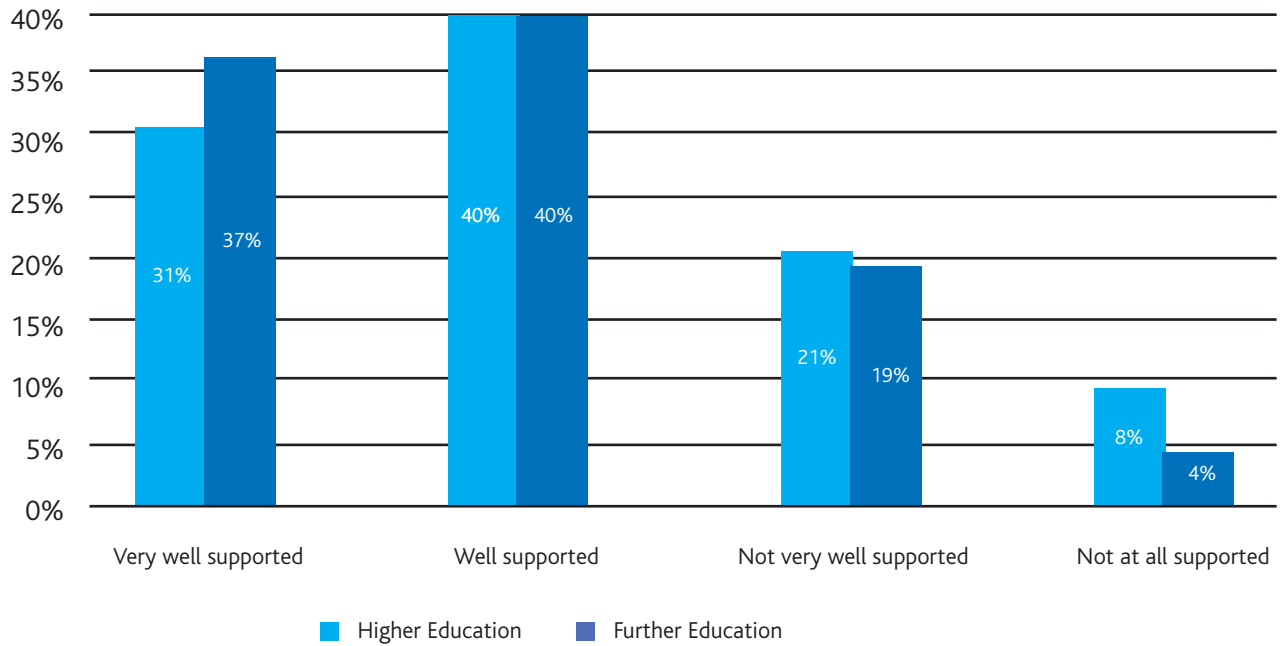
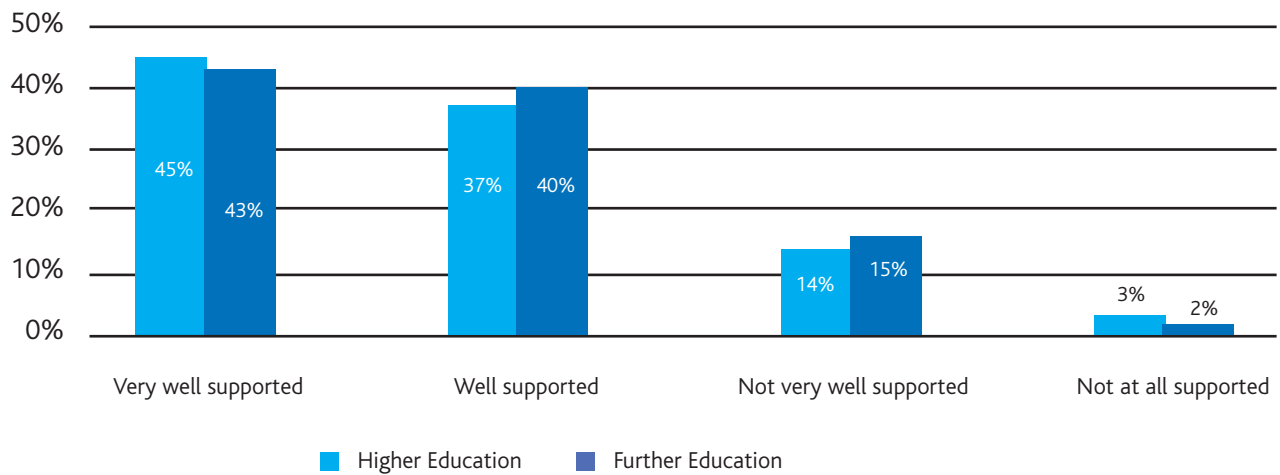


Fig 31: Support from training/ education provider



More respondents felt they were very 'well supported' or 'well supported' by the education and training provider during their placement with 71% of further education respondents in this category and 77% of higher education respondents. However a significant proportion of both further (29%) and higher education (23%) respondents felt 'not very well supported' 'not at all supported' or very well supported.

Fig 32: Support from early years setting(s)



In terms of how supported respondents felt by their settings during their placement, the findings are more positive, with only 17% of both further and higher education respondents feeling 'not very' or 'not at all supported'.

4.11.1 General findings on practicum

The majority of respondents spent their placement in one setting, but a significant proportion (35%) of respondents spent time in 2 or 3 different settings. The number who spent time in more than 3 settings declined significantly: only 10% spent time during their student placement in more than 3 settings.

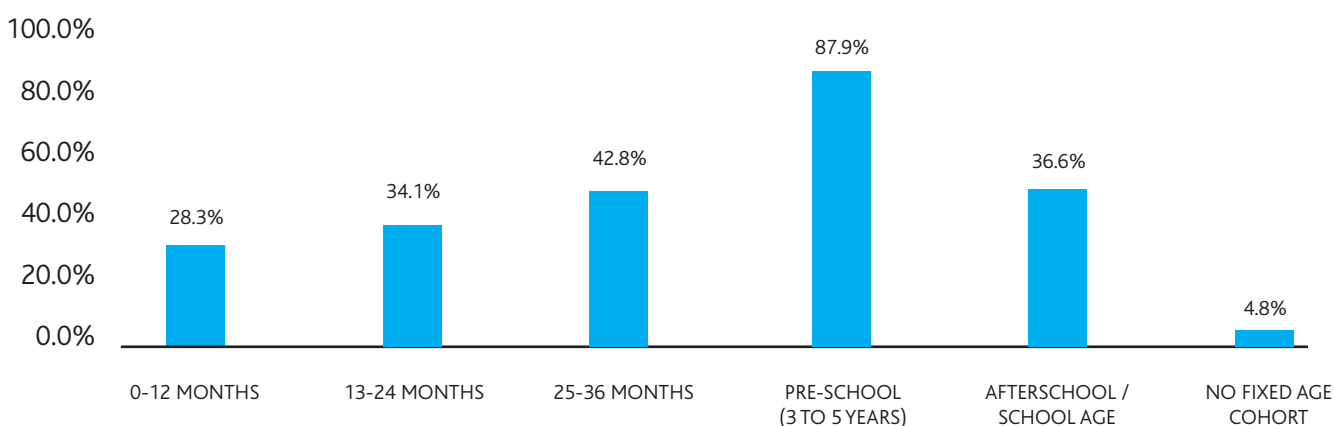
Table 9: No of settings for placement

No of settings	No. of respondents n=279	% respondents
1	153	54.8
2	49	17.6
3	48	17.2
4	14	5.0
5	3	1.1
6	3	1.1
7	3	1.1
8	6	2.2

The vast majority of respondents (88%) spent time with the pre-school cohort. The second most frequent category was 2 to 3 year olds (43% spent time with this cohort), followed closely by experience with afterschool/school age children (37%) and 1 to 2 year olds (34%). The age cohort that was least represented during the practicum was the youngest cohort of children, those in the 0 to 12 months category. Only a quarter of respondents (28%) had experience working with this age cohort.

Fig 33: Age Cohort of children

Please indicate which cohorts of children you had experience working with during your student placement



A number of respondents highlighted the value of the student placement in preparing them for working in the early years or for supporting their development. This was both positive and negative in terms of exposing them to good and poor practice, with some respondents witnessing very poor practice in some settings. This highlights the importance of ensuring that appropriate settings are used for student placement.

4.11.2 Areas for improvement

Respondents were asked for their views on how the student placement could be strengthened. The most common recommendation (75 respondents) was to strengthen the links between the educational provider and the early years setting where the placement occurs. This involves making sure that the setting knows in advance what is expected of it, that the setting receives some mentoring or training in advance about how to engage with the student, with regular visits or mentoring by the course tutor while the placement is ongoing. Some respondents indicated that they had no communication with their tutor during their placement. Respondents also considered it important that the student should be allowed to provide feedback to both the college and the early years setting in which they conducted their placement.

The second most frequent recommendation involves a desire for a greater variety of experiences within a particular student placement. Respondents felt that students would benefit from exposure to engagement with parents, involvement in paperwork, and conducting observations. They expressed a desire to be challenged in the student placement and to be allowed to get 'hands on'. This recommendation was made by 30 respondents.

Another priority is for students to spend time in a wider variety of settings to give them a sense of the diversity and challenges in the sector. Some respondents wanted the student placement to encompass community and private settings, different age groups, and different profiles of children, including children with special needs. This was mentioned by 15 respondents.

A further recommendation, by 14 respondents, is to try and arrange the student placement in block allocations rather than one day per week. It is felt by respondents that this would allow students to plan their activities more appropriately and also to see how the children respond and develop.

Other recommendations included a lengthening of the student placement (12 respondents), greater supports from within the setting in terms of guidance and mentoring and also ensuring that the student was not used to clean and tidy (17 respondents), and ensuring that only quality settings are used to host student placements (6 respondents).

Key Findings on practicum/placement:

There is still a significant proportion of respondents who never did a placement. There are concerns at both FE and HE levels around the level of support being received by the student from both the education providers and the setting practitioners as well as some concerns about the quality and variability of practice to which students are being exposed during their placement

4.12 Additional areas for inclusion in education and training programmes

Respondents were asked to identify any additional areas they would like to see included in their programme of education and training and these were broadly reflective of the gaps that had been identified earlier in the survey. The most frequently identified area was the practical nature of working in or running an early years setting, including the governance requirements, paperwork and logistical details.

A feeling of unpreparedness for the reality of working in an early years setting was a common theme running through survey responses. A number of respondents recommended that the student placement element of the initial education and training programme should be more practical and hands on.

The second most frequently mentioned area was a stronger focus on the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

This was followed closely by First Aid training. This links to the finding earlier that approximately 26% of respondents felt inadequately prepared to perform basic first aid procedures as a result of their initial education and training. A number of respondents highlighted the fact that they had had to pay for First Aid courses themselves

Aistear and Síolta were also frequently mentioned, although some respondents explained that their initial education and training pre-dated both frameworks. There was a call for more detailed treatment of both frameworks. A clearer focus on curriculum was a priority for others. Respondents wanted more information to be included in education and training programmes on the variety of curricula available, how to plan, implement and evaluate an appropriate curriculum.

Other priorities that were identified but less frequently included behaviour management, child protection, Síolta, dealing with parents, and preparing for Tusla inspections.



ADDITIONAL AREAS

'I felt that the course was very informative and I learnt a lot but when I started my new job I felt like I wasn't set up for the practical side of work. How to manage keeping children entertained, encourage learning, ensure all children reach their Milestones.'

A special needs module geared to the childcare worker that is caring for many children and how best to care and include a child with special needs into the group. This module could be of a great help to the childcare sector as it is nearly impossible to have funding for an SNA for a

child in a preschool setting and it is very difficult for the childcare worker to give proper attention to all the children in her care if one child is acting up'.

'More should be taught about all the paperwork involved in working with children, as this was a surprise element when I started working'

'If Aistear and Síolta are to be implemented effectively, a separate module on these should be developed. Currently, they are mentioned in passing and any knowledge gained is outside the scope of course.'

4.13 Areas requiring greater focus in initial education and training

Practitioners were also asked to identify areas that had been covered in their initial education and training programme but which would have benefited from greater focus. The most commonly identified area was the inclusion of children with special needs. There was a desire for more practical advice on how to accommodate special needs children into early years settings, how to communicate to a parent that their child might require an assessment or benefit from an intervention, and how to plan an appropriate curriculum for children with special educational needs.

The second most frequently identified area was a greater focus on the practicalities of working in or running an early years setting. The type of issues that practitioners wanted more support in included record keeping, supervision, staff management and governance issues.

Respondents also wanted more assistance in learning how to involve parents in their children's care and education, and how to communicate with parents about their children's development.

The other areas that respondents wanted to see included in more detail in initial education and training programmes were how to undertake and record observations of children's learning, the various regulations for the sector, child protection, and planning and implementing an appropriate curriculum.



AREAS FOR GREATER FOCUS

'Special and additional needs was very wide but didn't go into much detail. More skills and strategies to help children with particular needs would have been more useful.'

'Special Needs was covered, however, I feel that we learnt only about different needs a child may have and we did not learn how to create an inclusive environment for children with additional needs. We also did not learn about the challenges we may face when trying to create an inclusive environment.'

'I think that there should be more hands on practical training because some people are great at putting things on paper and passing exams but when they are working in a preschool room with children it's a different story, while others are great on a daily basis with children but are not good academically.'

SECTION 5

Induction and Continuing
Professional Development



Just over half (56%) of those who responded to the survey had received induction or an initial period of support when they started their current role in their early years setting. Some 44% indicated that they did not receive any induction or support (n=485).

The most frequent supports identified were the provision of information on policies and procedures (93 respondents), and information about the respondents' specific role in the particular early years setting (65 respondents). Other less frequent supports included shadowing another practitioner in the setting (30 respondents), support and advice from other practitioners (27 respondents), health and safety orientation (15 respondents) or support from either a County Childcare Committee or Voluntary Childcare Organisation (13 respondents).

More than two thirds of respondents (70%) indicated that they had received on-the-job training or CPD within the last 2 years. The remaining 30% had received no such support (n=455); of those who had received CPD in the previous 2 years, the most frequent training was in child protection, followed closely by first aid training.

A significant proportion of respondents identified their pursuit of a qualification in early childhood care and education as CPD. While this is clear evidence of professional development, the question in the survey was more intended to elicit details of CPD organised for respondents rather than studies in which they engaged on their own initiative. When the pursuit of a qualification is excluded, the number of respondents who had received CPD within the last two years is reduced to 60%.

The two other areas that were most frequently delivered as CPD were training in relation to the Aistear framework, followed by manual handling.

Table 10: Areas of CPD completed by respondents

Topic covered	No. of respondents
Child Protection	84
First Aid	80
Qualification	45
Aistear	41
Manual handling	33

A number of other topics were identified but with much less frequency. These included Síolta (19 mentions), Speech and Language (15 mentions), and Fire Safety (14 mentions).

The CPD training was provided by a myriad of different individuals and organisations. This included both publicly funded institutions and private providers. However, there were five categories of provider that appeared most frequently. The most frequent by considerable distance were the County Childcare Committees, followed by private for profit providers. CPD was also frequently delivered through publicly funded educational institutions (such as Education and Training Boards), Early Childhood Ireland, or by managers in early years settings.

Table 11: Providers of CPD

Provider	Number of respondents
County Childcare Committees	99
Private providers	66
Publicly funded educational institutions	37
Early Childhood Ireland	31
Manager of early years setting	25

Table 12: Areas of CPD respondents identified an interest

Topic/ area	Respondents (n)
Aistear	82
Behaviour management	68
Síolta	55
Special needs / Autism	48
Qualification	41
Administration and governance	39

Practitioners were positive about the quality of the CPD they had received: 97% of respondents categorised their training as either good (64%) or very good (33%). Only 3% indicated that the quality of the training was 'poor' (2%) or 'very poor' (1%) (n=296).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) indicated that they would like more on the job training opportunities. Only 9% indicated that they would not like more training (n=433).

Respondents made a number of general points about the provision of induction training and ongoing CPD. This included the importance of having induction provided to early years practitioners from the outset.

The point was also made that training is mainly organised outside of work hours and it was recommended that the CPD model for the teaching profession would be a more appropriate delivery model in terms of ensuring equality of access to CPD for those working in the early years sector.

While many respondents were eager for any future training that would be beneficial to them in their settings the type of training most frequently identified related to Aistear. Its sister framework, Síolta, also featured prominently as an area where further support would be welcomed.

The second most prominent topic was training in how to deal with challenging behaviour from children.

Catering for the needs of children with special educational needs was a core priority for many respondents. It was identified as an issue that is becoming more prominent.

The pursuit of a further qualification in early childhood care and education was the priority for others. Respondents also pointed to the need for more training in relation to administration and governance required to work in or manage an early years setting. This included a need to focus on and keep up to date with new policies, procedures and regulations in the early years sector.

The other topics that were frequently identified included a focus on child protection, leadership and management, supporting play in early years settings, engaging with parents, planning and evaluating an appropriate curriculum, training in first aid, the arts, management and leadership, and how to undertake and document observations of children's learning.



CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

'I have worked in 4 different services and only one of those included an induction. [In] the other jobs I was shown to my room and left to sink or swim.'

'Síolta and Aistear implementation. Majority of us, feeling under pressure and struggling to understand and implement these Frameworks.'

'I think it is important to not only examine the provision of training opportunities but also to examine HOW these opportunities can be availed of for staff. At the moment all training that ground level staff participate in is ALL in their FREE TIME. This should not be expected of people but services cannot afford to allow for this either.'

'Working with special needs children, we are seeing more and more children on the autistic spectrum and as we are stretched already with staff ratios, 11 children to two teachers, we find it increasingly very difficult to meet these children's needs.'

SECTION

6

Wider issues affecting quality of
early years education and care

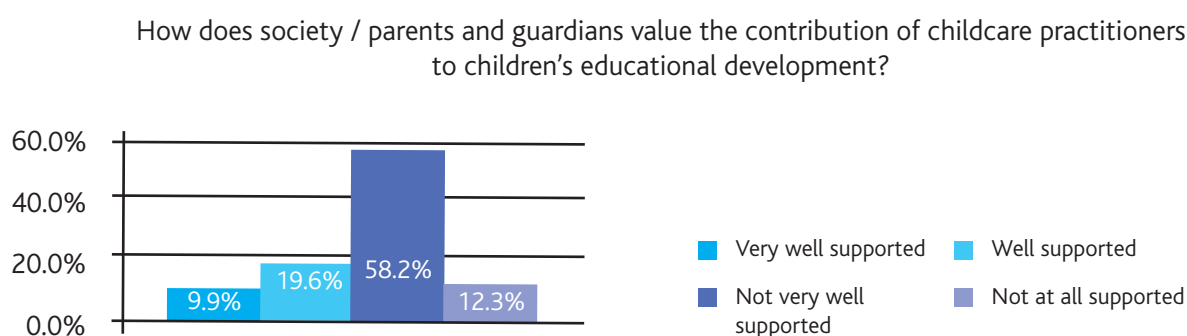


This section of the questionnaire asked respondents for their views on a number of wider issues that impact on the quality of education and care provided in early years setting. This included their perception of how their role is valued by society, the main obstacles affecting early years education, as well as structural issues relating to the regulation of the sector.

6.1 Perception of early childhood education and care

It was clear from the responses that practitioners do not feel that their contribution to children’s education and development is sufficiently valued by society. Only 10% of respondents felt ‘very valued’. A further 20% felt ‘valued’. This means that almost 60% of respondents felt ‘not valued enough’, with 12% not feeling valued at all (n=342)

Fig 34: Contribution to Society



6.2 Main obstacles to children’s educational development

Practitioners were asked for their views on the biggest challenge in supporting children’s educational development.

Table 13: Challenges in supporting children’s educational development.

Obstacle	Respondents (n)
Funding	101
Respect	88
Lack of non-contact time	83
Low pay	52
Parents	49
CPD	26

The issue most frequently identified was the level of funding and resources for the sector with inadequate supports for the type of materials and equipment that are required to support quality care and education for young children. There were calls for increased funding, and direct funding from the State, on the basis that this would lead to improvements for children and for those working in the sector.

A close second - given the frequency with which it was mentioned - was the level of respect for those working in the sector. Practitioners felt that they were not receiving adequate respect for their work in supporting children's development. They wanted to be treated more professionally. There were also calls for wider appreciation of the 'education' element of early childhood care and education.

The lack of non-contact time for paperwork and governance related issues, as well as trying to keep abreast of regulations for the sector, was the third most frequently mentioned issue. It was highlighted that any non-contact time has to happen outside of the working day. Those respondents who are employers as well as practitioners pointed to the fact that they cannot afford to support non-contact time, despite recognising the potential benefits.

Low pay for those working in the sector was a priority issue for many. Issues raised included the level of remuneration, the difficulty in retaining staff due to the salary levels, the 'seasonal' nature of employment in the sector, the lack of pay for bank holidays, and the lack of any financial recognition for the attainment of additional qualifications.

The difficulties of dealing with some parents was also frequently identified. This was linked to the general point about lack of respect, but it also encompassed trying to engage parents in their children's education, trying to manage parental expectations or to raise them.

The need for more CPD opportunities was also a priority issue. Practitioners recommended more CPD in areas relevant to their needs, and also for means to be found for such training to be made available during work hours.

The other priorities that were identified, but less frequently, were catering for children with special educational needs, the need for more highly qualified staff, the need for lower adult:child ratios in the sector (some respondents were of the view that the current ratios made it very difficult to give each child the necessary attention, especially if one child in the group was upset or unwell, and this undermined the quality of the adult-child interactions), the need for improvements in the inspection regime to make clear what is actually expected of practitioners, behaviour management, measures to address staff turnover, and accommodating children whose first language is neither Irish or English.



WIDER ISSUES

'Parents feel we are not qualified enough and that we cannot provide insight through our observations as to their child's development. I feel our opinions as childcare practitioners are not respected or appreciated.'

'It's hard to make a name for a profession that no one recognises IS a profession. I think there is not enough qualified staff in the sector and many people in the sector don't think they need any qualifications. You wouldn't be a doctor with a

degree in medicine so why can you be an early years education without it?'

'Parents attitudes can also be disheartening. Parents are still looking at us Early Years Practitioners as childminders and do not value the wonderful work we are doing with their children each day, especially for their social and emotional development not just the academic side. A lot of parents focus on the academic rather than the child's well-being and holistic education.'

6.3 Minimum qualifications for early years practitioners

More than half of practitioners (53%) felt that the current minimum qualifications for those working in the early years sector are too low. 43% felt they were about right. Only 2% of practitioners felt they were too high (n=342).

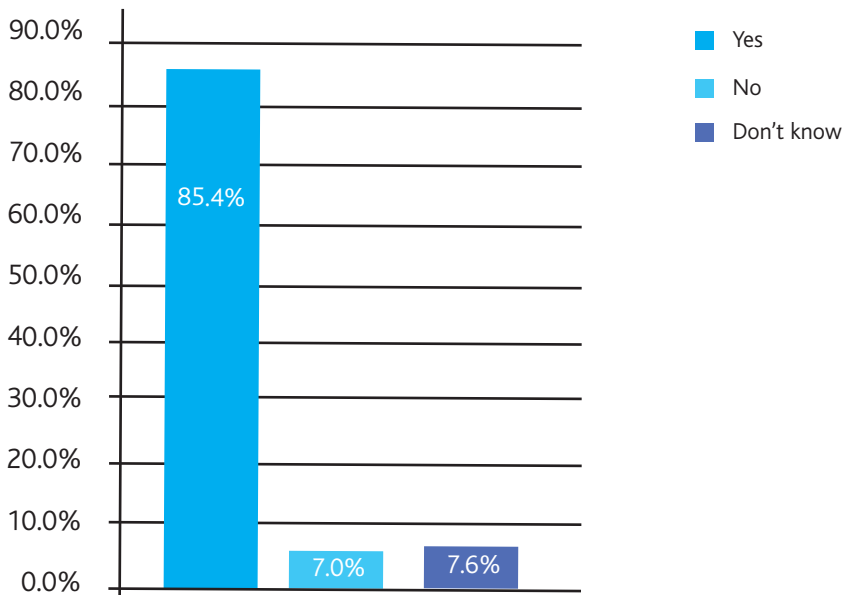
Fig 35: Minimum qualification requirements for Early years Practitioners



6.4 Professional regulation

Respondents were overwhelmingly of the view that there is a need for a professional standards body that promotes and regulates the early years profession (similar to the role played by the Teaching Council in relation to the teaching profession). 85% of respondents said there was a need for such a body. Only 7% felt that there is no need (n=342).

Fig 36: Need for a Professional Standards Body



SECTION

7

Additional Comments
of Practitioners



Section 7: Additional comments

The questionnaire afforded participants an opportunity to provide any other additional comments they felt would be relevant to the review. More than 150 additional comments were provided and many of these reflect the findings of other areas in the survey. These encompassed a wide range of areas but some clear patterns emerged.

In the first instance, respondents were grateful for the opportunity to have their voice heard in relation to the future of the sector:

Three themes dominated the additional comments made: concerns about the quality of some of the education and training programmes currently available, the remuneration levels of those working in the sector, and the related issue of a lack of respect for what practitioners actually do.

Key recommendations for strengthening the quality of early years education and training programmes included mainstreaming Aistear and Síolta into all early childhood education and training programmes, ensuring a consistent approach to the quality and cost of such programmes, providing more variety in the student placement so that participants experience a variety of different settings and different age cohorts, closer involvement of the education and training provider in the student placement, and ensuring that those delivering education and training programmes are appropriately qualified in early years education.

The second major theme that emerged from the additional feedback was remuneration and conditions of those working in the sector.

The third dominant message was the need for more respect for those working in the sector. A number of respondents indicated that they should be treated as educationalists and not solely as childminders.

The other issues that emerged, but less frequently, included an emphasis on raising the minimum qualification levels for working in the sector, anxiety over the existing inspection regime, the need for a professional standards body, the need for more accessible and affordable education and training programmes, and a desire for greater investment in the sector.



'Thank you for taking our comments into consideration, it feels this is the first time the practitioners are being heard and seen.'

'A major overhaul is needed of the training sector. Too many practitioners are coming into the profession inadequately equipped with the knowledge and skills required to deliver a high quality service to children and their families. The FETAC levels 5 & 6 need careful scrutiny for content and delivery.'

'While qualifications are essential to the progress and quality of early childhood care and education these qualifications are not leading to salaries that are appropriate for trained professionals.'

'Recognition and respect are real pretty words but we need to get them off the page and into reality.'

'My aspiration for the sector is that practitioners are seen as professionals in the same way teachers are.'

SECTION

8

Summary of key findings



The key findings to emerge from the survey of early years practitioners are, as follows: -

Key Findings from the Survey of Childcare Practitioners	
Finding 1	The passion and dedication for the improvement of the early years sector is evident from the survey responses received. The majority of early years practitioners are striving to improve their practice for the children in their settings.
Finding 2	Respondents reported overall a positive message in relation to the education and training that they had received and how it prepared them for the demands of the workplace.
Finding 3	Cost and work/study balance is a challenge in meeting the demands of the learning community.
Finding 4	Greater support and attention is required for students during their placements in Early Years Settings. A broader range of experiences during the placement and strengthening links between learning providers and early years settings would be beneficial to students as well as ensuring that students are only placed in high quality settings. A fifth of further education and 11% of higher education respondents had no practicum as part of their programme. In general supervised placement structures and content in both further and higher education programmes need to be reviewed.
Finding 5	The level of preparedness in implementing/delivering Síolta and Aistear is a concern and was a very significant gap identified by practitioners in both further and higher education programmes.
Finding 6	While responses to the level of preparedness to work in the sector were positive overall, practitioners clearly feel a lack of preparedness in respect of growing social diversity e.g., working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds; catering for the educational need of those with special educational needs or whose first language was not English or Irish.
Finding 7	The importance of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was highlighted in the responses received. The main CPD courses mentioned related to health & wellbeing i.e., first aid, hygiene, and manual handling.
Finding 8	While many felt enthusiastic about their profession, the majority of respondents did not feel valued as early years practitioners and that their work was not given sufficient respect by society. It was also commonly held that there was a lack of funding and resources for the sector.
Finding 9	Education and training providers need to review whether to include in programme content more practical information regarding record keeping, policy, legislation, regulations and the stakeholders in the sector and how they interact with settings and each other.
Finding 10	The environment for practice in early years is changing. Education and training programmes need to be reviewed to ensure that they continue to prepare those entering the profession to meet the demands of modern practice.
Finding 11	There is overwhelming support in the practitioners' responses for a professional regulatory body for the sector.

Appendix A – Areas of practice by further education qualification holders

Child Development	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of the theories underlying child development	56%	38%	5%	1%	0%
Ability to provide for children's holistic development	57%	35%	5%	2%	0%
Ability to carry out and record in depth observations of children's learning and development	54%	33%	9%	3%	0%
Ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE Theory and practice	37%	40%	13%	5%	5%
Understanding of the role of adults in holistic development of the child	50%	39%	9%	3%	0%
Ability to carry out and record in-depth observations of children's learning and development	52%	34%	10%	3%	1%
Ability to interpret and evaluate observations and plan for children's learning	51%	33%	13%	3%	1%

Education and Play	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of underlying theories on importance of play for children	51%	33%	13%	3%	1%
Knowledge of children's different styles of learning	43%	40%	14%	3%	0%
Ability to develop, implement and evaluate a curriculum	44%	36%	14%	5%	2%
Knowledge of Aistear and how to use it	28%	30%	19%	12%	11%
Knowledge of Síolta and how to use it	22%	32%	21%	14%	11%
Ability to use a range of interaction strategies and methods to enhance children's learning and development	37%	42%	15%	5%	1%
Ability to devise, set up and introduce a wide variety of suitable educational/ play activities that engage and involve children	43%	41%	9%	5%	2%
Ability to maintain an appropriate stimulating and challenging environment (indoors and outdoors)	38%	44%	14%	3%	1%
Supporting children's language and literacy development	40%	39%	16%	4%	1%
Supporting the development of early mathematical skills and numeracy	36%	37%	20%	6%	1%
Catering for the educational needs of children with special needs or disabilities	19%	35%	30%	12%	4%
Catering for the educational needs of children whose first language is not English	15%	31%	34%	14%	6%
Catering for the educational needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds	21%	32%	33%	12%	3%
Supporting children to be active participants in their own learning	39%	41%	14%	6%	0%
Awareness of the role of the arts in supporting children's educational development, participation and expression	34%	42%	16%	6%	2%
Awareness of the use of ICT as a learning support	16%	33%	29%	12%	10%
Awareness of the value of research in early childhood care and education	37%	37%	15%	7%	3%

Health and Wellbeing	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of pre-school regulations	45%	34%	12%	4%	4%
Knowledge of relevant hygiene procedures	47%	36%	10%	3%	2%
Knowledge of health and safety regulations	46%	39%	9%	2%	2%
Knowledge of principal health needs of children	45%	39%	8%	4%	2%
Knowledge of the nutritional needs of children	42%	35%	13%	6%	4%
Ability to perform basic first-aid procedures in an emergency with a child	39%	29%	12%	11%	7%
Knowledge of child protection policy, procedures and good practice	48%	36%	7%	4%	3%
Promoting children's physical activity	43%	38%	11%	4%	2%

Social Environment	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of the importance of social and environmental factors and their impact on children's holistic development	42%	47%	10%	2%	0%
Ability to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families	45%	42%	11%	1%	0%
Ability to support parents, guardians and families' understanding of and involvement in children's learning and development	40%	42%	15%	2%	0%
Ability to liaise and maintain relationships in the wider environment including other professionals, management committees, local community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies	31%	39%	24%	5%	2%
Knowledge and understanding of equality issues and different customs, cultures and family structures in society today; and the ability to take account of these when working with children	39%	40%	15%	3%	2%
Promoting environmental awareness and sustainability	31%	36%	24%	6%	2%

Personal Professional Development	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Developing the values, attitudes and dispositions appropriate for your role	42%	44%	11%	4%	0%
Self-awareness (being a reflective practitioner) and a sensitivity as to how this affects interaction with children	51%	35%	11%	2%	1%
Ability to identify your own learning needs	49%	35%	11%	4%	1%
Ability to manage yourself and take responsibility for specific tasks	50%	40%	8%	2%	0%

Communication, Management and Administration	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Ability to work as a team with other early years professionals within a service	48%	40%	10%	0%	2%
Ability to communicate effectively with children and other adults (other early years professionals, parents, outside agencies) including awareness of barriers to communication and how these might be overcome	43%	40%	14%	2%	1%
Ability to communicate information to parents about children's learning and development	43%	45%	8%	3%	0%
Ability to maintain records and documentation required for an efficient early years setting	44%	39%	13%	3%	1%

Appendix B Areas of practice by higher education qualification holders

Child Development	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of the theories underlying child development	74%	23%	2%	1%	0%
Ability to provide for children's holistic development	72%	24%	4%	0%	0%
Ability to carry out and record in depth observations of children's learning and development	66%	21%	11%	2%	1%
Ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE Theory and practice	55%	23%	11%	3%	7%
Understanding of the role of adults in holistic development of the child	70%	25%	5%	1%	0%
Ability to carry out and record in-depth observations of children's learning and development	52%	35%	9%	2%	2%
Ability to interpret and evaluate observations and plan for children's learning	58%	27%	11%	2%	2%

Education and Play	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of underlying theories on importance of play for children	68%	27%	4%	0%	1%
Knowledge of children's different styles of learning	63%	27%	9%	1%	1%
Ability to develop, implement and evaluate a curriculum	53%	30%	15%	1%	1%
Knowledge of <i>Aistear</i> and how to use it	37%	19%	16%	10%	18%
Knowledge of <i>Síolta</i> and how to use it	27%	23%	22%	11%	17%
Ability to use a range of interaction strategies and methods to enhance children's learning and development	53%	33%	12%	1%	1%
Ability to devise, set up and introduce a wide variety of suitable educational/ play activities that engage and involve children	53%	35%	10%	1%	1%
Ability to maintain an appropriate stimulating and challenging environment (indoors and outdoors)	54%	31%	12%	1%	2%
Supporting children's language of early literacy development	59%	30%	10%	1%	1%
Supporting the development of early mathematical skills and numeracy	51%	32%	13%	3%	2%
Catering for the educational needs of children with special needs or disabilities	35%	35%	26%	4%	1%
Catering for the educational needs of children whose first language is not English	27%	29%	32%	8%	4%
Catering for the educational needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds	34%	38%	22%	4%	2%
Supporting children to be active participants in their own learning	64%	23%	11%	1%	1%
Awareness of the role of the arts in supporting children's educational development, participation and expression	57%	29%	11%	2%	2%
Awareness of the use of ICT as a learning support	26%	26%	32%	8%	8%
Awareness of the value of research in early childhood care and education	61%	28%	8%	2%	1%

Health and Wellbeing	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of pre-school regulations	46%	31%	14%	3%	7%
Knowledge of relevant hygiene procedures	42%	34%	17%	2%	5%
Knowledge of health and safety regulations	43%	36%	15%	2%	5%
Knowledge of principal health needs of children	54%	36%	8%	1%	2%
Knowledge of the nutritional needs of children	39%	38%	17%	2%	4%
Ability to perform basic first-aid procedures in an emergency with a child	37%	25%	16%	14%	8%
Knowledge of child protection policy, procedures and good practice	59%	27%	10%	2%	2%
Promoting children's physical activity	53%	34%	11%	1%	2%

Social Environment:	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Knowledge of the importance of social and environmental factors and their impact on children's holistic development	68%	25%	6%	1%	0%
Ability to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families	56%	35%	8%	1%	0%
Ability to support parents, guardians and families' understanding of and involvement in children's learning and development	54%	33%	11%	2%	0%
Ability to liaise and maintain relationships in the wider environment including other professionals, management committees, local community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies	42%	35%	19%	2%	2%
Knowledge and understanding of equality issues and different customs, cultures and family structures in society today; and the ability to take account of these when working with children	57%	32%	10%	1%	0%
Promoting environmental awareness and sustainability	39%	32%	22%	4%	2%

Personal Professional Development	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Developing the values, attitudes and dispositions appropriate for your role	62%	35%	1%	1%	0%
Self-awareness (being a reflective practitioner) and a sensitivity as to how this affects interaction with children	72%	23%	4%	1%	0%
Ability to identify your own learning needs	62%	30%	7%	1%	1%
Ability to manage yourself and take responsibility for specific tasks	69%	24%	5%	1%	1%

Communication, Management and Administration	Very Well	Well	Not very well	not at all	not relevant to programme
Ability to work as a team with other early years professionals within a service	52%	33%	11%	2%	2%
Ability to communicate effectively with children and other adults (other early years professionals, parents, outside agencies) including awareness of barriers to communication and how these might be overcome	55%	32%	11%	1%	1%
Ability to communicate information to parents about children's learning and development	50%	35%	13%	2%	1%
Ability to maintain records and documentation required for an efficient early years setting	47%	31%	19%	2%	2%

Appendix C Survey Questionnaire



Survey of childcare practitioners

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) is conducting a review of education and training programmes that lead to qualifications in early childhood care and education.

The purpose of this review is to ensure that such education and training programmes provide childcare practitioners with the appropriate blend of knowledge and skills to support the educational development of children aged from birth to 6 in early years services (not including infant classes in primary schools or Early Start). While recognising that the care and education of young children should be provided holistically, this review is particularly focussed on children's educational development.

As part of this review, the DES is seeking your views, as a childcare practitioner or student, on the quality of the education and training you have received in early childhood care and education, and how well you feel it has prepared you to work in early years settings. This includes education and training programmes delivered by educational institutions in areas such as Childcare, Supervision in Childcare, Montessori, Early Childhood Studies and Practice, School Age childcare etc.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could take the time to complete this survey as your views are central to the review process. All information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be shared or used for any other purposes. All information is provided on an anonymous basis.

The deadline for return of completed questionnaires is 10 April 2015. This questionnaire can be completed and returned by any of the following means:

- Completed online through survey monkey at the following link [details to be inserted]
- Completed electronically and emailed to earlychildhood@education.gov.ie
- Sent by hardcopy to the following address: Tony Gaynor, Block 2, Floor 2, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

Any queries on this questionnaire, or the review, can be directed to Dr. Tony Gaynor, Early Years Education Policy Unit at (01) 8896402 or tony_gaynor@education.gov.ie

Background information

These questions are intended to obtain some background information about you in order to provide a context for your responses.

1. Please specify your gender

Male

Female

2. Please indicate your general age range

Under 20

21 – 30

31-40

41-50

51-60

Over 60

3. What county do you work in?

4. How many years (approximately) have you been working in the early years sector?

2. Your current role in the early years sector

These questions are intended to obtain information about your current role in the early years sector.

5. As an early years practitioner, can you further describe your current role? (please select one of the following)?

Centre Manager (supernumerary)

Centre Manager (direct work with children)

Deputy Manager (Supernumerary)

Deputy Manager (direct work with children)

Room leader

Childcare practitioner

Childcare Assistant

Student placement

Child-minder in own or someone else's home

Other (please specify)

6. Please specify the type of early years setting in which you work

Private

Community based

Other (please specify)

7. Please indicate the number of children (approximately) catered for in your early years setting

8. Please indicate the type of service provided by your early years setting (please tick as many boxes as are relevant):

Full day care

Part time care

Sessional care

Afterschool

Breakfast club

Drop in / Occasional

Other (please specify)

9. Which cohort of children do you work with most of the time?

0-12 months

13 – 24 months

25-36 months

Pre-school (3 to 5 years)

Afterschool / school age

No fixed age cohort

Other (please specify)

10. Did you receive any induction or support when you started your current role?

Yes

No

10.1 If you answered 'yes' to Question 10 then please specify the type of induction provided. If you answered 'no' to Question 10 then please proceed to Question 11

11 Have you received any on the job training or continuing professional development (CPD) within the last 2 years?

Yes

No

If you answered 'yes' to Question 11 please answer Questions 11.1 – 11.4. If you answered 'no' then please proceed to Question 12.

11.1 What was the main area covered in your most recent on the job training?

11.2 How long was the training you received? (e.g. an hour, a half day, two half days etc)

11.3 Who provided the training?

11.4 How would you rate the quality of the training?

Very good

Good

Poor

Very poor

12. Would you like more on the job training opportunities?

Yes

No

12.1. If you answered 'yes' to Question 12 please specify the type of training you would like to receive. If you answered 'no', then please proceed to Question 13.

13. How would you rate the quality of the education provided to all of the children in your early years setting (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 poor and 5 excellent)?

1 2 3 4 5 Don't know

14. Which curriculum is used in your early years setting?

Your highest qualification in early childhood care and education

*These questions are seeking your views on the quality of the education and training that led to your **highest** qualification in early childhood care and education. Please answer all questions in this section with reference to your **highest** qualification in early childhood care and education. (If you are currently completing your first qualification in early childhood care and education please base your answers on your experience so far with your studies).*

15. What is the full title of your **highest** qualification in early childhood care and education (e.g. Certificate / Diploma / Degree /Masters / PhD. in Early Childhood Care and Education)?

16. Which education and training institution delivered the programme that led to your highest qualification in early childhood care and education?

17. In which year did you complete the programme?

18. How long did the programme take to complete?

19. Did you attend the programme on a part-time or full-time basis?

Part-time

Full-time

20. How was the programme delivered?

Classroom based

On-line / Distance

Blend of classroom based and on-line

Other (please specify)

21. Who funded the programme?

Paid for it myself

Fully subsidised by someone else

Part-subsidised by someone else

Other (please specify)

22. Did your education and training provider offer any provision for Recognition of Prior Learning?

Yes

No

Don't know

23. What was your main motivation for pursuing this qualification?

24. Do you intend to take any further formal education and training courses in early childhood care and education in the future?

Yes

No

Don't know

25. Please specify any obstacles that would prevent you from taking up any further formal education and training in early childhood care and education?

26. Are you aware of the progression routes available to you if you wanted to take up any further studies in early childhood education and care?

Yes

No

Don't know

Extent to which your education and training prepared you to work in early years settings.

These questions are intended to obtain your views on how well the education and training that led to your highest qualification in early childhood care and education prepared you to work in early years settings. Please answer the questions in this section with reference to your highest qualification in early childhood care and education. (If you are currently completing your first qualification in early childhood care and education please base your answers on your experience so far with your studies).

27. In overall terms, how well did your highest qualification in early childhood care and education prepare you to work in early years settings?

Very well prepared

Well prepared

Not very well prepared

Not at all prepared

28. How appropriate was the length of the programme that led to your qualification

Too long

About right

Too short

a) How challenging was the programme that led to your qualification?

Very challenging

Challenging

Not very challenging

Not at all challenging

30. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Child Development:**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to my programme

Child development

- a. Knowledge of the theories underlying child development
- b. Ability to provide for children's holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative etc)
- c. Ability to plan a child-centred learning environment
- d. Ability to communicate and demonstrate the links between ECCE theory and practice
- e. Understanding of the role of adults in the holistic development of the child
- f. Ability to carry out and record in-depth observations of children's learning and development
- g. Ability to interpret and evaluate observations and plan for children's learning

31. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Education and Play:**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to my programme

- a. Knowledge of underlying theories on importance of play for children
- b. Knowledge of children's different styles of learning
- c. Ability to develop, implement and evaluate a curriculum
- d. Knowledge of *Aistear* and how to use it
- e. Knowledge of *Síolta* and how to use it
- f. Ability to use a range of interaction strategies and methods to enhance children's learning and development
- g. Ability to devise, set up and introduce a wide variety of suitable educational/play activities that engage and involve children
- h. Ability to maintain an appropriate stimulating and challenging environment (indoors and outdoors)
- i. Supporting children's language and literacy development
- j. Supporting the development of early mathematical skills and numeracy
- k. Catering for the educational needs of children with special needs or disabilities
- l. Catering for the educational needs of children whose first language is not English
- m. Catering for the educational needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds

- n. Supporting children to be active participants in their own learning
- o. Awareness of the role of the arts in supporting children’s educational development, participation and expression
- p. Awareness of the use of ICT as a learning support
- q. Awareness of the value of research in early childhood care and education

32. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Health and Wellbeing:**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to
my programme

- a. Knowledge of pre-school regulations
- b. Knowledge of relevant hygiene procedures
- c. Knowledge of health and safety regulations
- d. Knowledge of principal health needs of children
- e. Knowledge of the nutritional needs of children
- f. Ability to perform basic first-aid procedures in an emergency with a child
- g. Knowledge of child protection policy, procedures and good practice
- h. Promoting children’s physical activity

33. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Social Environment**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to
my programme

- a. Knowledge of the importance of social and environmental factors and their impact on children’s holistic development
- b. Ability to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with parents, guardians and families
- c. Ability to support parents, guardians and families’ understanding of and involvement in children’s learning and development
- d. Ability to liaise and maintain relationships in the wider environment including other professionals, management committees, local community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies
- e. Knowledge and understanding of equality issues and different customs, cultures and family structures in society today; and the ability to take account of these when working with children
- f. Promoting environmental awareness and sustainability

34. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Personal Professional Development:**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to my programme

- a. Developing the values, attitudes and dispositions appropriate for your role
- b. Self-awareness (being a reflective practitioner) and a sensitivity as to how this affects interaction with children
- c. Ability to identify your own learning needs
- d. Ability to manage yourself and take responsibility for specific tasks

35. How well did your education and training programme prepare you in each of the following areas of **Communication, Management and Administration:**

Very well Well Not very well Not at all Not relevant to my programme

- a. Ability to work as a team with other early years professionals within a service
- b. Ability to communicate effectively with children and other adults (other early years professionals, parents, outside agencies) including awareness of barriers to communication and how these might be overcome
- c. Ability to communicate information to parents about children's learning and development
- d. Ability to maintain records and documentation required for an efficient early years setting

36. Please specify any additional areas that you feel should have been included in the education and training programme that led to your qualification.

37. Please specify any areas that were included in your education and training programme that could have been covered in more detail

38. How would you rate the overall quality of the programme?

Very good

Good

Poor

Very poor

39. In your view how well qualified in early childhood care and education were the lecturers/tutors delivering the programme?

Very well qualified

Well qualified

Not very qualified

Not at all qualified

40. How well informed about recent developments in early childhood care and education were the lecturers/tutors delivering the programme?

Very well informed

Well informed

Not very well informed

Not at all informed

41. Did you have any opportunity to provide feedback to your education and training provider on any aspect of the programme?

Yes

No

42. Did your programme involve a student placement in an early years setting (practicum)?

Yes

No

If you answered 'yes' to Question 42 then please answer Questions 42.1 to 42.7 below. If you answered 'no' then please skip to Section 5.

42.1 How long was the student placement (practicum)?

42.2 How appropriate was the length of the student placement (practicum)?

Too long

About right

Too short

42.3 How many early years settings did you spend time in as part of your student placement (practicum)?

42.4 Please indicate which cohorts of children you had experience working with during your student placement (practicum)? (please tick all that are relevant)

0-12 months

13 – 24 months

25-36 months

Pre-school (3 to 5 years)

Afterschool / school age

No fixed age cohort

Other (please specify)

42.5 To what extent were you supported by your education and training provider during your student placement (practicum)?

Very well supported

Well supported

Not very well supported

Not at all supported

42.6 To what extent were you supported by the early years setting(s) where you spent your student placement (practicum)?

Very well supported

Well supported

Not very well supported

Not at all supported

42.7 Please identify any means by which the student placement (practicum) could be strengthened?

Section 5

This final section is intended to obtain your views on broader issues relevant to early childhood care and education.

43. How does society/parents and guardians value the contribution of childcare practitioners to children’s educational development?

Very valued

Valued

Not valued enough

Not at all valued

44. What is the biggest challenge in supporting children’s educational development in the early years sector?

45. Do you think that the current minimum qualifications requirement for working in early years settings are:

Too low

About right

Too high

Don’t know

46. How appropriate is the number of education and training programmes currently available in early childhood care and education?

Too many programmes

About the right number of programmes

Not enough programmes

Don’t know

47. Is there a need for a professional standards body that promotes and regulates the childcare profession (similar to the role played by the Teaching Council in relation to the teaching profession)?

Yes

No

Don't know

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your contribution is much appreciated. Space is provided below in case you wish to make any additional comments

Any queries on this questionnaire should be directed to Dr. Tony Gaynor, Early Years Education Policy Unit at (01) 8896402 or tony_gaynor@education.gov.ie

