



Welcome to Issue One of the Newsletter for 2016. The information in this newsletter is an attempt to keep the sector in Offaly informed and up to date. I hope you enjoy reading it and if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the office.

### Better Start

Better Start Quality Development Service has been offering an on-site mentoring service to Early Years providers since February 2015. If you feel your service would benefit from the support of a Better Start Early Years Specialist you will be interested to know that they have recently revised their allocation criteria. Their priority continues to be to work with large full day care services; however they are aware that some areas have had little access to quality supports. Services will be considered for the support of an Early Years Specialist (subject to availability) if they meet any of the criteria below.

1. (Services catering for 20 full and/or part-time children with at least 40 children overall)
2. Group or chain providers with services under the same ownership

They also retain flexibility to respond to requests from services for support in exceptional circumstances. Sample reasons for why a service might be eligible for special consideration for support could include one or a combination of the following;

- Inspection issues
- Access to quality support has been very limited
- A combination of factors such as location of service, high levels of disadvantage, rural isolation or the needs/profile of children
- Significant staff turnover

There may be additional reasons that you or your local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC) would like to put forward to make a case for your service to be given special consideration for the allocation of support of an Early Years Specialist. These will be considered on a case by case basis. If you are interested in applying for support, please contact your local CCC and they will submit a request on your behalf. If you have any questions, please contact enquiries@betterstart.ie or call 01 5117888.

### Kids Active

Kids Active is a new and exciting physical activity programme for early childhood care and education settings. Early Childhood Ireland recognises the importance of promoting physical activity from early on in life. They believe that young children should engage in physical activity in a fun, meaningful and playful way, every single day! Unfortunately, this isn't the case and research tells us that more and more children are becoming more and more inactive.

Early Childhood Ireland in partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation, Dublin City University and Medtronic are working on an exciting new programme called Kids Active. This new programme is being designed to support educators in promoting physical activity in their settings. The Kids Active Programme will build on the resources and knowledge already acquired through the development of the [Bizzy Breaks resource](#). The programme will also be evaluated and the information gathered will be used to develop and improve the content of the programme over the next three years as well as inform national policy.

In year one they are looking to recruit services in **Tullamore** who operate as full day-care and have an ECCE room. The programme will run between March-June 2016. We are asking interested services to complete an expression of interest form. Once a service has completed their expression of interest, Early Childhood Ireland will be in touch about the next steps. Services will be randomly selected to participate in the programme should we receive more expressions than required. All selected services will be involved in the formal evaluation which is being conducted by DCU.

Please contact Offaly County Childcare Committee for an expression of interest form.

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### Budget 2016 Update

The minimum enrolment number for ECCE is based on what is considered the minimum appropriate number for the fostering of pro-social behaviour and cognitive development. It is important that the pre-school classroom should provide stimulating, motivating activities that promote student involvement, where individual choices are encouraged and where there is an opportunity for children to engage with a diverse range of friends. Services are expected to have a minimum enrolment of at least 8 eligible children to participate in each pre-school session, and a service that does not have this level of participation has no entitlement to be funded under the programme.

The Early Education Unit has indicated that, while not ideal, it would be possible to deliver a good ECCE programme curriculum to a group of five or more children in the pre-school age-group (i.e. between 2½ and 6 years); it is not necessary for all of the children to be enrolled in the ECCE programme. In other words, provided that the service has a pre-school group of not fewer than five children, they will be permitted to participate, through exception.

Exceptions to this minimum requirement will be considered where, for good reason, a service which is an appropriate setting for the pre-school year has:

- a. an enrolment of at least 8 children of whom at least 3 qualify for the programme and the remainder will qualify in the following year, or
- b. Is a smaller service which has an enrolment of not fewer than 5 children in their pre-school year, or
- c. is a service that has an ECCE Room that is full but due to Budget 2016 extension of ECCE now has children eligible for ECCE in a room which has an enrolment of not fewer than 5 children in their pre-school year (i.e. between 2½ and 6 years) - assuming ECCE staff qualification criteria is met.

If the service can meet the criteria for the ECCE Room, that is appropriate Room Leader with a recognised qualification and children in the room within the correct age-range (but not necessarily in ECCE age-range), then the child can be registered for ECCE this year. However, if the service is not in a position to meet the requirements for ECCE and the only ECCE Room is full, then the child cannot be registered on the ECCE Programme for this year. The parent may however wish to consider using another childcare service with available ECCE space.

### Awards Night

Offaly County Childcare Committee is planning to host an 'Early Year's Appreciation Awards' evening in July 2016. The aim of the awards night is to recognise the valuable contribution made to the lives of children and families in Offaly by childcare providers and early years educators. It is hoped that the awards evening will stir the imagination of early years workers and parents and will promote the excellent work which has been on-going in the Early Year's Sector in Offaly for a number of years. The awards evening will be an opportunity for services to meet and network in an informal manner. We hope that nominations for the awards will come from services and parents. We would love to hear feedback from you on how you think the event should take place. If you have any ideas please contact Áine or Ruth.

## Offaly CCC News & Calendar of Events

Please see the enclosed calendar of events for details of upcoming activities and workshops organised by Offaly County Childcare Committee. Please display the calendar in a prominent place in your service so that all early years workers may have the opportunity to attend events. A generic booking form has been enclosed for all courses. The following is a brief summary of the activities and events we have on offer.

### Topic Boxes

Offaly County Childcare have built up resource boxes linked to themes in order to support planning from children's interest. The collection of fun and exciting Topic Boxes can support service providers in delivering creative, investigative and heuristic play.

They can be borrowed from the Tracey Buckley Resource Library at short notice to provide easy, no preparation resources to follow interests such as Minibeasts, Dinosaurs, Seasons and many more. Each topic box is linked to Aistear and provides some activity ideas as well as some display materials.

This workshop will introduce the topic boxes and give you the opportunity to see the resources available for borrowing.

### Transition

The focus of this workshop is to provide a resource and information which can be used to support services during transition from preschool to primary using an Aistear approach. Supporting Transitions is one of the curricular pillars of the Aistear Siolta Practice Guide. During this workshop the practice guide presentation will provide self-evaluation toolkits, examples and ideas for practice, resources for sharing, action planning tool templates and photos. There is a transition topic box available for purchase for €55 for services who attend the workshop.

### Support Visits

Offaly County Childcare offers support visits to services on a range of topics. If you would like a support visit regarding policies & procedures, curriculum, room layout, environment, finances, committee skills, record keeping, Aistear, Siolta, behaviour management, or any issues you may be experiencing please feel free to contact the office on 05791 35878 and an appointment will be arranged with the relevant staff member.

### Learner Fund 4

Learner Fund 4 will assist staff members to secure the necessary qualifications for the position as 'ECCE Room Leader' (i.e. Level 6 Award on the National Qualifications Framework). It was announced in December and will open in mid January. Further details on the Learner Fund can be found on the PIP portal under the Learner Fund tab. If you have any queries please contact Áine in the office.

### Music & Movement

This workshop aims to draw attention to a comprehensive learning resource for the Early Years Practitioner. The music and movement songs within the resource will help children work towards the learning goals set out in Aistear. Music and movement promotes active involvement in developing vocabulary and mastering a wealth of skills and concepts. Please wear comfortable clothes and shoes as everyone will be asked to participate. Each service will receive the resource after completion of the workshop.

### Aistear Clusters

This year the Aistear cluster group meetings will take a different format. The meetings will provide a more informal setting for practitioners to share their work and talk at length with other providers. A member of Offaly County Childcare will be present to facilitate and answer questions.

By sharing ideas and experiences practitioners can support each other and take fresh information back to their own childcare setting. The themes of the cluster groups will be **Observations/Assessment, Planning and Environments.**

During the first cluster please bring examples of observations and assessments along with you. The clusters are open to all practitioners at any stage of professional development.

### Child Protection Training

The dates for Child Protection Courses have been set for the first half of the year (see dates in calendar). The training will be offered in the first instance to Designated Liaison Persons who have not completed CP training in the past three years. Currently there is a waiting list for the courses. If you are on a waiting list your application will be prioritised.

### Training for Non-Music Specialists

Early Years Music Cork provides training for early childhood educators who wish to successfully incorporate music into their daily setting. Early Years Music Cork is pleased to present a one-day engaging study workshop that will focus on the practical skills and strategies that will support early childhood educators. Training will provide:

- sample experiences, techniques and materials illustrating the use of singing, movement, instruments and listening in early childhood
- content which is current, considered best practice and is relevant to early year's educators

This practical workshop promises to help build confidence in participants own music-making abilities. Workshop participants will be provided with a book, an accompanying CD, access to online resources and a certificate of attendance. This workshop is now open for booking:

**Title of Workshop:** Kodály-Inspired Music Education in the Early Years

**Venue:** CIT Cork School of Music

**Tutor:** Edel McDonnell

**Date:** Saturday, February 20th 2016

**Time:** 11:00-4:00pm

**Cost:** €70 (including Booklet, CD & online resources)

For more information and to book your place, please see [www.earlyyearsmusiccork.com](http://www.earlyyearsmusiccork.com) or email: [edel@earlyyearsmusiccork.com](mailto:edel@earlyyearsmusiccork.com)

**Places are very limited and early booking is advised**

### CCS Expansion Registration Deadlines

**REMINDER:** The Deadline to Apply to Enter the CCS Programme under the 2015 CCS Community Expansion (with effect from November 2015) is Friday January 8th. See Recent CCS Announcements for Details of this Expansion.

**Note:** The Deadline for Registration of Children under the 2015 CCS Community Expansion is Friday 29th January.

### New Requirement to Submit Tax Details to Pobal

From 1st January 2016, it is your organisation's responsibility to become familiar with the new real-time ongoing tax clearance process, to ensure there are no delays for Pobal making payments to your organisation.

The new eTax Clearance system is live from Monday 7th December 2015 and applicants can apply for electronic tax clearance from Revenue from that date.

**Please log onto PIP updates for full information.**

### ECCE Dates Table

A set of answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in relation to ECCE are available on the DCYA website and are updated regularly as questions arise and further developments are announced. **The age criteria for the current and coming pre-school year is as follows in relation to the ECCE Programme.**

To avail of the ECCE programme at any stage during the pre-school year	Children must have been born between the following dates (both dates inclusive)
September 2014 - June 2015	2nd February 2010 - 30th June 2011
September 2015 - June 2016	2nd February 2011 - 30th June 2012
To avail of the ECCE programme with effect from	Children must have been born between the following dates (both dates inclusive)
September 2016 - June 2017	1st January 2012 - 31st August 2013
January 2017 - June 2017	1st January 2012 - 31st December 2013
April 2017 - June 2017	1st January 2012 - 31st March 2014

### Training Audit Reminder

Please complete and return the training audit which was issued before Christmas.