

# Information for Service Providers



Forbairt Cáilíocht  
Luathbhlianta Náisiúnta  
National Early Years  
Quality Development



## **What is Better Start?**

Better Start is a national initiative established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to bring an integrated national approach to supporting quality in Early Years Education and Care (ECEC) for children from birth to 6 years in Ireland. It will coordinate and extend the wide-ranging choice of supports and services already provided through City and County Childcare Committees and Voluntary Childcare organisations. The new initiative will also provide a specialist on site mentoring service, the Better Start Quality Development Service.

## **What is the Better Start Quality Development Service?**

Better Start Quality Development Service is an 'on site' mentoring service which supports providers in implementing the quality standards of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear, The National Early Years Curriculum Framework. Early Years Specialists will work in early childhood settings (full day care or preschools) with managers and staff to develop and implement quality development goals and actions based on the Síolta and Aistear frameworks. Services will devise plans to suit their particular needs and interests and the Early Years Specialist will mentor staff in implementing their plans over an agreed time period. The service is flexible and adaptable to work within the demands and constraints of a busy early childhood service.

## **Who are Early Years Specialists?**

Early Years Specialists are qualified (Level 8/9) early childhood professionals with a wealth of practice experience. They have a thorough grounding in evidence based best practice and mentoring and facilitation. Early Years Specialists are Garda Vetted and receive on going professional support and supervision. They have experience of implementing quality frameworks (Síolta and Aistear) in a range of settings and across age groups – Birth to six years and can offer information, guidance and 'tried and tested' solutions which can build on your knowledge and experience to enhance the quality of your service to children.

## **How does it work?**

As a first step, the Early Years Specialist will arrange to visit your service and discuss what aspects of practice you would like to work on. This will help you to agree a quality development plan. The Early Years Specialist will work with you and your staff to make a joint assessment of your service using the Aistear and Síolta Practice Guide quality standards. From this you can agree specific quality development goals and realistic action plans, relevant to your service and the children you work with.

## **How much time is involved?**

Usually, an Early Years Specialist will be assigned to a service initially for 6 months. You can agree the frequency of visits, possibly weekly or fortnightly, in consultation with the Specialist and your staff. Actions to be implemented between visits will be decided and a realistic timeframe agreed. The Early Years Specialists will work with practitioners / educators in their rooms with the children. Some short amounts of non-contact time will be required from time to time to enable feedback and discussion.

### **Is there a cost?**

No. There is no charge for the Quality Development Service. However, any costs incurred in implementing quality development measures are solely the responsibility of the service provider.

### **Do I need to prepare anything in advance?**

The most important thing is to discuss the quality development service with your staff, parents/guardians and governing body, e.g. Board of Management or Directors to ensure their agreement and support. Think about what areas of practice you would like to focus on and discuss with staff to get their opinion. It is recommended that you nominate a Quality Liaison Person who will take responsibility for coordinating your quality development plans, passing on information to other staff members and ensuring actions are implemented. If your service has been involved in any other quality initiatives and has received any awards, evaluation reports or quality assessments, details of those would be useful. Once a date for a first visit is agreed, let your staff know and explain to the children that they will have a visitor.

### **What about parental consent and personal information on children attending the service?**

Parents need to be informed that information on your service and their children's participation may be shared and recorded as part of the quality development programme. Parental consent for using personal data for example, samples of work, or images of children gathered as part of the process must be obtained. The Early Years Specialist will provide you with a consent form. Personal data (e.g. gender, age, group) relating to children or families will only be used for the purpose of supporting quality development in your service. No personal data on children or families will be used or maintained on record by the Better Start without consent. No personal or identifying information on children or families will be included in reports relating to the quality development programme. Better Start is fully compliant with the requirements of the Data Protection Acts 1988 / 2003.

### **Child Protection and Welfare**

Better Start works within the context of Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011) on which Pobal's Safeguarding Policy is based. Early Years Specialists have an ethical obligation to promote the safety and welfare of children in ECEC settings. Should concerns arise in relation to the safety or welfare of children in the course of this programme, the EYS is obliged to implement standard Child Protection reporting procedures. In the first instance the EYS will report their concerns to the Designated Liaison Person for the service who should follow the service procedures. The EYS will also report their concerns to their line manager. Better Start may report concerns directly to the statutory authorities where reasonable grounds for concern exist.

### How do I sign up?

Contact your local City or County Childcare Committee to see what quality supports they can offer in your area, such as training, networking or information. There may be a number of options that would benefit your service. If you want to avail of the support of an Early Years Specialist, the CCC will send a request to the Better Start Quality Development Team. You will be let know within four weeks if an Early Years Specialist is available to work with you.

### What happens next?

When an Early Years Specialist has been appointed for your service, s/he will contact you to arrange a first visit. During the first visit the Early Years Specialist will discuss your needs and priority areas of practice. S/he will then work with you to undertake a joint assessment to help identify specific quality development goals and action plans to work on. A Quality Development Agreement will be drawn up with you, so that you have an agreed set of goals and actions to work towards. This will include a timeframe and an agreed action plan to achieve your goals.

### Anything else I need to know?

When the programme is completed, a full report outlining the areas of practice and quality development actions undertaken will be prepared by the Early Years Specialist for the your Service. This will be provided to the Service Manager and staff, as well as to the Board of Management, if requested. A summary report will be provided to the Childcare Committee.

### Further information and contact details:

Further information on Better Start Quality Development Service is available through your local County Childcare Committee or you can visit our website: [www.betterstart.ie](http://www.betterstart.ie)

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