



An Roinn Leanai, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Core Funding Quality Action Plan

**Guidance for Completing the
Core Funding Quality Action
Plan Template**
2023/24



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Timeline and Steps to Developing a Core Funding Quality Action Plan.....	4
Choosing an Option	5
Actions	8
End-of-year Reporting – Impact Reflection.....	8
Appendix 1: Supports for Core Funding Quality Action Plan	9
Appendix 2: Option Examples and Case Studies	15



Introduction

The new funding model offers the opportunity to drive additional levels of quality over and above the basic requirements stipulated through regulations and existing contracts... (DCEDIY, Partnership for the Public Good, 2021:64)

Core Funding supports Partner Services with their financial sustainability while enhancing the quality, affordability, and accessibility of their services. In accordance with *Partnership for the Public Good*, (DCEDIY 2021) the Core Funding model commits to drive high- quality service provision. To support this, Core Funding requires all early learning and care (ELC), school-age childcare (SAC) and childminding services that benefit from Core Funding to complete a quality planning template, using tools provided by the Department and their agents to compile their Core Funding Quality Action Plan.

“Enriching and informing all aspects of practice within the setting requires cycles of observation, planning, action and evaluation, undertaken on a regular basis” (Síolta, Standard 8)

Many services have long engaged in quality improvement processes, for example, through their engagement with the Better Start Quality Development Service or through self-evaluation processes supported by the *Aistear- Síolta* Practice Guide.

Core Funding Quality Action Planning offers a means of systematically capturing and acknowledging this positive work.



Figure 1



This guide will go through what is required for the Core Funding Quality Action Plan in year two (2023/2024). Nationwide consultation events facilitated by the City and County Childcare Committees were held in June 2023 and Partner Services were offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the 2022/23 Quality Action Plan process. These events were hugely beneficial, and we would like to thank all partner services that participated. Findings from the consultation has resulted in some changes to the Quality Action Plan process for 2023/24.

As the Core Funding Quality Action Plan process is in its infancy, learning from it will continue to inform the development of the process as it evolves in future years. Therefore, the Quality Action Plan process and templates may change in year three and subsequent years.

The quality planning options for 2023/24:

- 1.** Implement improvements on aspects of quality as identified in Inspection Reports (either Tusla or Department of Education Inspectorate)
- 2.** Participate in quality engagement actions through the Better Start Quality Development Service
- 3.** Participate in National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI) opportunities
- 4.** Complete a comprehensive review and development of chosen statements, policies, procedures, and practices.
- 5.** Participate in quality improvement activities (workshops, communities of professional practice, mentoring & support, self-evaluation, and quality improvement) through DCEDIY-funded services e.g., City/County Childcare Committees, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and Better Start.

Further details on the options and their suitability by service type is provided below.

Timeline and Steps to Developing a Core Funding Quality Action Plan

15 September 2023 Partner Service will receive a link to access the Core Funding Quality Action Plan online survey template, via email from their local City/County Childcare Committee.

15 September 2023 – 20 October 2023 Partner Services will commence the Core Funding Quality Action Planning process (See Fig 1) and complete the Core Funding Quality Action Plan online survey template. Services can choose from the set of options listed above on (Pg 4) and specify planned activities in relation to their chosen option(s). Once complete services will be prompted to save their responses to the survey as a PDF document, this document will be the Service's Core Funding Quality Action Plan for 2023/24.



The plan should cover the period from September 2023 (or the date on which the Partner Service signed the Core Funding contract if later) to either June, July or August 2024 depending on the service's opening weeks.

20 October 2023 Partner Services will then upload their Core Funding Quality Action Plan (PDF document) to the 'My Service Profile' on the **HIVE** system for validation. Validation will take place in the November Review and Confirm window. Core Funding payments **will be placed on hold** until such a time as the process is completed. A copy of the completed plan will be automatically shared with the local City/County Childcare Committee. In addition, a copy of the Core Funding Quality Action Plan should be displayed in the service in a location that is accessible to parents.

16 January 2024 – 16 February 2024 Midpoint Review. This will be an opportunity, for those who need it, to amend their identified activities mid- way through the year due to circumstances changing. To do so they will repeat the original process then upload their new Quality Action Plan to their 'My Service Profile' on the **HIVE** system for validation.

20 May 2024 -28 July 2024 Partner Services submit a Quality Action Plan Report detailing the actions they have undertaken. The reporting process will follow the same process. Partner Service will receive a link to access the Core Funding Quality Action Plan Report online survey template, via email from their local City/County Childcare Committee. Once complete services will be prompted to save their responses to the survey as a PDF document, this document will be the Service's Core Funding Quality Action Plan Report for 2023/24. Partner Services will then upload their Core Funding Quality Action Plan Report (PDF document) to the 'My Service Profile' on the **HIVE** system for validation.

Choosing an Option

Section one of the planning template provides a list of the five options. Services are asked to select the option that meets their current circumstances. A minimum of one option must be chosen. However, there is provision to choose more than one. This selection will be the basis for the service's Core Funding Quality Action Plan for the year ahead, actions identified maybe new or may build on actions commenced in year 1.

Stand-alone School Age Childcare (SAC) services can choose from options four and five at this time, with quality improvement actions to be undertaken in line with the *National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services (DCEDIY, 2020)*.

Childminders can choose options, one, three, four and five.

Options Available for the 2023/2024 Core Funding Quality Action Plan and



Suitability by Service Type:

Option 1- Inspection Reports

[Early Learning & Care Services, Early Learning & Care & School Age Childcare Combined Services and Childminders]

This option is appropriate where a most recent inspection (whether carried out by Tusla or by the Department of Education Inspectorate) highlights aspects of quality to be developed.

Option 2 - Better Start Quality Development Service.

[Early Learning & Care Services and Early Learning & Care & School Age Childcare Combined Services]

This option is appropriate where a service is either currently working with Better Start, have applied for, or intend to apply to participate in Better Start Quality Development Supports in 2023/24.

Option 3 - National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI)

[Early Learning & Care Services, Early Learning & Care & School Age Childcare Combined Services and Childminders]

This option is appropriate where a service/childminder aims to attend any of the NSAI Síolta Aistear workshops or CPD delivered by Better Start, the local County/City Childcare Committees (CCCs) or a National Voluntary Childcare Organisation (NVCO)

- Introduction to Síolta & Aistear workshops are available through the CCCs
- Síolta awareness workshops are available through the CCCs
- Aistear and Play CPD is available through Better Start

Or

Where a service/childminder intends to develop a familiarity with and understanding of the national Frameworks Síolta and Aistear, or independently engage in self- evaluation and quality improvement using the Aistear-Síolta Practice Guide

Option 4 - Comprehensive Review and Development of chosen Statements, Policies, Procedures, and Practices

[Early Learning & Care Services, Early Learning & Care & School Age Childcare Combined Services, Standalone School Age Childcare Services and Childminders.]

Annual review of a service's quality and safety, including review of its policies and procedures, is a regulatory requirement for ELC services under Regulation 14, which requires that:



At regular intervals, being intervals of not more than one year, a review is carried out in respect of the quality and safety of care provided by the pre-school service to pre-school children attending the service, including a review of the policies, procedures and statements of the service.

School Age Childcare services are also required to maintain the policies and statements specified in Schedule 6 of the SAC Regulations.

It is important to note that for 2023/24 this option is considered an addition to and an extension of a service's regulatory requirements. For 2023/24 option four will focus on the review and development of statements, policies, procedures, and practices related to:

- Outdoor Learning and Play and/or
- Partnership with Parents

This option also includes the possibility to complete CPD training or receive support related to the review and development of the statements, policies, procedures, and practices listed above or to complete CPD training or receive support related to the review and development of statements, policies, procedures, and practices generally.

Option 5 – Participate in Quality Improvement Activities

[Early Learning & Care Services, Early Learning & Care & School Age Childcare Combined Services, Standalone School Age Childcare Services and Childminders.]

This option is broad in scope and is intended to capture all types of quality improvement activities that services, or childminders may wish to engage in, which may not be captured elsewhere within the template. It is also appropriate for School Age Childcare Services planning to develop whole service familiarity with and understanding of the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services.

The types of activities included within this option include attending workshops to support quality practice, participating in communities of professional practice, accessing mentoring & support, engaging in self-evaluation and quality improvement.

The support agencies, City/County Childcare Committees, Voluntary Childcare Organisations (full list in appendix I) and Better Start will be offering workshops, communities of professional practice and mentoring & support linked to one or more of the pillars of practice in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide or to the National Quality Guidelines for School- Age Childcare. Supports will be offered through a variety of modes (on-line, in-person, on-site etc) to facilitate choice and availability.



Actions

Once the option/s has been chosen, there will a request for some more details. In this section, services are asked to describe the actions for their 2023/2024 quality action plan in more detail by identifying what the actions are, who will carry them out, any potential challenges in carrying them out and the support agencies they wish to engage, if any.

Information provided in this section will be used to identify where supports may be required and may be shared with the support agencies to assist them in their planning. Services and childminders might access supports from more than one agency, depending on their requirements and the capacity of support agencies to respond. Based on feedback received from Partner Services, services and childminders that choose to seek support form a support agency can now opt to have that agency contact them directly. If selected the City/County Childcare Committee will share the request and service/childminder contact details with the relevant support agency directly.

Services are reminded they should be realistic about what they have the capacity to achieve during the Core Funding Quality Action Plan 2023/24 timeframe. Not all quality actions can be completed in the short-term, in some cases significant quality improvement actions maybe started in 2023/24 but continue into 2024/25, or services/childminder maybe continuing with actions that commenced in 2022/23. This is acceptable once all Core Funding Quality Action Plan templates are completed to reflect this ongoing work.

What is required is that all services that receive Core Funding undertake some quality improvement action that is relevant to their current situation. Services must carry out at least one action.

End-of-year Reporting – Impact Reflection

From 20 May 2024 to 28 July 2024 Partner Services will be required to complete and submit a Quality Action Plan Report. This provides an opportunity to outline the option(s) chosen, the actions identified and how they progressed, support sought, and any challenges experienced. There will also be a section for services to provide feedback on the year two process; this information will be used to refine the process for year 3 and future years.



Appendix 1: Supports for Core Funding Quality Action Plan

The following supports are available to assist you in the development of quality in your service.

Tusla Early Years Inspectorate

The Early Years Provider Resources pages provide access to the Inspectorate's Quality & Regulatory Framework (QRF), the QRF eLearning programme, a series of webinars and various other guidance documents and publications.

[Early Years Provider Resources Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

Department of Education Early Years Inspectorate

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education have developed a webinar series entitled Insights: Quality in Early Years Education. These webinars are designed to share the findings, ideas and examples of effective practice that have been gathered during inspection visits.

www.gov.ie - [Insights – Quality in Early Years Education \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

The National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI)

The NSAI was established in 2016 to support the coordinated roll-out of Síolta and Aistear, the national quality and curriculum frameworks for the ELC sector. The initiative is led by the Department of Education (DE) in collaboration with DCEDIY who fund the initiative, Better Start QDS (Quality Development Service) and the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA). A number of resources are available on the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide. A range of organisations including Better Start, CCC's, NVCO's and ABC projects provide a range of CPD, training and mentoring supports to ELC settings within the initiative. Introduction to Síolta & Aistear and Síolta Awareness workshops are available through the CCCs, Aistear and Play CPD is available through Better Start.

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

The purpose of the Practice Guide is to support you in using Aistear and Síolta together to develop the quality of your curriculum and in doing so, to better support children's learning and development.

The Practice Guide includes a range of resources to help you to critically reflect on your curriculum and to identify what works well. Additionally, the resources can help you to identify priorities for development and to plan actions for positive change. In this way, the Practice Guide can be used for on-going review, development and improvement by individual early years educators, educators working together and by educators supported by a mentor.

www.aistearsiolta.ie



Better Start National Early Years Quality Development

Better Start Quality Development Service provides mentoring and coaching to Early Learning and Care settings, based on the Síolta and Aistear frameworks and Tusla's Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF), so that those settings are of high quality and deliver positive outcomes for children. The team offer a range of quality development options nationwide, including:

Quality Practice Query

If you have a specific query about practice, your setting can contact Better Start for information and advice. You might be interested in looking at promoting play, how to get the most out of your indoor or outdoor learning environment, seeking advice on partnership with parents, transitions or other pillars of practice. One of the team members will respond to your practice queries, providing information, advice and guidance to you based on Síolta and Aistear and government policy such as First 5.

Email your query to quality@betterstart.ie (include your DCEDIY service reference number and setting name in the subject line) One of the team will then get in touch with you by phone or email to answer your query.

Quality Practice Development

If your setting would like to review and develop quality in one area of practice, you can request Quality Practice Development. An Early Years Specialist will work with you over a short period of time based on your quality development priorities. This may be with one room, age group, a manager or early years educator. You will have the option to engage in a more comprehensive whole-setting mentoring process at the end of the initial period.

Early Years Specialists provide specific information, advice and practice guidance to individuals or teams in Early Learning and Care settings based on Síolta, Aistear, the Early Years Quality and Regulatory Framework and other government guidelines and strategies such as First 5.

Contact is primarily by phone, email or video-conferencing and can include on-site visits if it is agreed that it would be beneficial to the quality development process. The work can involve some or all of the setting staff, e.g., a manager, room leader or team depending on the specific practice focus agreed.

Quality Development applications are available on HIVE.

You can submit an application by logging into your **Hive** Account, in the Applications tab, select '**BS QDS Applications**', followed by '**New Application**'.

Quality Development (Whole Setting)

Better Start Early Years Specialists provide professional development to the full team and management in your setting for up to 6 months with regular mentoring and coaching appointments to develop quality development goals and an action plan.



Better Start Early Years Specialists will work collaboratively with your management team, with individual early years educators and groups of educators (e.g. within a room / team). The Better Start Early Years Specialists will work collaboratively through a combination of regular on-site visits, online learning and video-conferencing appointments to identify and implement quality development goals and action plans.

Quality Development applications are available on **HIVE**.

You can submit an application by logging into your Hive Account, in the Applications tab, select '**BS QDS Applications**', followed by '**New Application**'.

Quality Development (Multiple Settings)

Quality Development (multiple settings) is suitable for group providers interested in working collaboratively to review quality and implement change across a number of their settings at the same time.

Better Start Early Years Specialists will provide mentoring and coaching to management and teams in your settings for up to 6 months of regular appointments. This is a whole-setting and whole organisation approach designed to ensure consistency in the development of quality practice.

Early Years Specialists provide specific information, advice and practice guidance to individuals or teams based on Siolta, Aistear, the Early Years Quality and Regulatory Framework and other government guidelines and strategies such as First 5.

The Better Start Early Years Specialists will work collaboratively through a combination of regular on-site visits, online learning and video-conferencing appointments to identify and implement quality development goals and action plans.

Quality Development applications are available on **HIVE**.

You can submit an application by logging into your Hive Account, in the Applications tab, select '**BS QDS Applications**', followed by '**New Application**'.

Please note that each **individual setting from the group/organisation must submit their own** separate application form in Hive and select **Quality Development (Multiple Settings)** as the Type of Support being requested

You can contact Better Start at **P:** 015117000 **E:** enquiries@betterstart.ie

W: www.betterstart.ie



City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs)

City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are your first contact point for the provision of general information and support in relation to the operation of early learning and care and school-age childcare. CCCs will also signpost settings to other relevant support organisations where appropriate. Supports include:

- Delivering training, mentoring and information on quality practice (including delivery of NSAI workshops, and how to meet statutory regulations).
- Facilitating local network meetings and communities of professional practice.
- Providing information on funding and DCEDIY programmes.
- Providing services with sustainability supports.
- Assistance in accessing capital and grant programmes.
- Guidance for families on sourcing quality early learning and care and school-age childcare services.

You can find your local CCC contact details on **W:** www.myccc.ie

National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs)

NVCOs represent the interests of and provide support services to early learning and care and school-age childcare service providers and parents nationwide.

Barnardos

Barnardos provides a range of supports to vulnerable children, parents and early learning and care and school-age childcare settings. Supports include:

- Publications and resources.
- Professional training.
- E-learning (practice webinars).
- Library and Information Service.
- Early years mentoring.

You can contact Barnardos at **P:** (01) 4530355 **E:** resources@barnardos.ie.

W: www.barnardos.ie/learning-development

Childminding Ireland (National Childminding Association of Ireland)

Childminding Ireland is the National Childminding Body, supporting and promoting quality childminding in the home. Childminding Ireland offers parents, throughout Ireland, support with their childminding needs. It advises parents on how to recognise quality in a childminding setting. Supports include:

- Information and Support for new and existing childminders.



- Access to discounted childminding insurance.
- Childminding specific training – including First Aid and Child Safeguarding for childminding.
- Childminding helpline.

You can contact Childminding Ireland at: **P:** (01) 2878466 **E:** support@childminding.ie

W: www.childminding.ie

Early Childhood Ireland (ECI)

Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) provides a range of supports which include quality enhancement, publications, advocacy, training, HR supports and information for the sector. ECI is a membership organisation providing supports to both members and non-members. Supports include:

- HR supports (Early Years Employer Service).
- Garda vetting and insurance provision.
- E-learning.
- Practice and pedagogical support.
- Publications and resources.

You can contact ECI at P: (01) 4057100 **E:** info@earlychildhoodireland.ie

W: www.earlychildhoodireland.ie

National Childhood Network (NCN)

National Childhood Network provides a range of supports to early learning and care and school-age childcare settings. Supports include:

- NCN Play Hub (information, resources and ideas about play).
- E-Learning.

You can contact NCN at P: 047 72469 **E:** info@ncn.ie.

W: www.ncn.ie

Bláthú (Steiner Early Childhood Association)

Blathú Steiner Early Childhood Association provides support to early learning and care settings and support organisations in relation to Steiner Waldorf Education. Supports include:

- Mentoring.
- Information and advice.
- Library and Information Service.
- CPD/workshops for both educators and parents, focusing on nature and play.

You can contact Blathú at P: 089 2411816 **E:** nc.blathu@gmail.com **W:** www.blathu.ie.



Irish Language Organisations

Irish Language Organisations which support Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Organisations operating through the medium of Irish.

Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta

Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG) is the nationally recognised Early Years Service Provider throughout the Gaeltacht. Over 100 services are provided by CNNG with offices located in all Gaeltacht areas. CNNG provide administration, support and training services for early learning and care services through Irish.

You can contact Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta at **P:** (091) 595337 **E:** eolas@cnng.ie

W: www.comharnaionrai.ie

The National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services

The Guidelines, which comprise guidelines, components and elements, are intended to complement the regulations for school-age childcare services. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist and guide school age childcare service providers and staff to reach beyond and aspire to achieving more than the minimum standards set out in regulations.

[gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services | Guidelines, Components and Elements \(September 2020\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)



Appendix 2: Option Examples and Case Studies

Inspection Reports

The Early Years team in Strong Foundations received an Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) and this report was published. As a team, they carefully considered the findings and actions advised in the EYEI report and agreed a plan for the implementation of those actions. An action advised included in the report under Area 4 of the EYEI Quality Framework for Early Years Education; Quality in management and leadership for learning was prioritised by the team for implementation.

They chose Option 1 on the Core Funding Action Planning template to reflect the steps taken to implement this action.

The action in the EYEI report under Area 4 centres on developing a system for on-going internal evaluation to inform review and quality improvement initiatives. This was a new area of practice for the setting. To build capacity and shared understanding of internal evaluation, management and early years educators reviewed the three-part [Insights webinar series](#) development by the Department of Education Inspectorate. This series provided an introduction to self-evaluation and described practical ways in which early years settings can use reflective practice to support collaboration and improvement practices. Using the suggested cycle of reflection, evaluation, action planning and implementation, the team organised bi-monthly meetings to begin to progress self-evaluation actions. The materials of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide proved useful to progress this action. A record of this action was maintained by management and the team and information was shared with parents.

National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI)

Sycamore Park full-day setting has a large open outdoor play area. The team are very interested in outdoor play and think that the outdoor space has potential to be more interesting and engaging for the children with a wider range of opportunities for children to experience nature and natural materials. They want to carry out a self-evaluation as a team, to gather information from all of the resources available to them online and to develop a quality design for their outdoor space. They also want to include the children in designing their space.

The team have already researched the tools and resources available online including the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, the Department of Education 'Insights' series of webinars and e-learning resources and publications from Barnardos and Early Childhood Ireland.

When completing their Core Funding Action Plan template they choose Option 3 - National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI) and select the option to 'Start or continue the process of self-evaluation and quality improvement through use of the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide', stating they intend to work independently.



Comprehensive Review and Development of chosen Statements, Policies, Procedures, and Practices

Busy Bees Crèche and Afterschool have been reflecting on the ways in which they work in partnership with parents and families and the changes that have occurred since the Covid 19 pandemic.

They have identified some issues that they would like to overcome and chose Option 4 to 'complete a comprehensive review and development of statements, policies, procedures, and practices related to Partnership with Parents. They opt to seek support from their local county childcare committee in doing so.

School Age Childcare

The staff and children at Colinstown school age childcare service have decided this year to focus on environmental issues, carrying out sustainable activities and raising awareness in their local community. The team have been discussing their Core Funding Action Plan and have decided to prioritise Component 3.4 Environmentalism of the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services, developing their knowledge and planning and implementing environmentalism in their programme of activities.

When completing their Core Funding Action Plan Template, the manager chooses Option 5 - Participate in Quality Improvement Activities. The service will seek support from National Childhood Network when working on their action plan.

Childminder

Monica is a childminder who cares for four young children. She has been thinking about her Core Funding Quality Action Plan and determines that what she most needs to do is to evaluate the toys and equipment she has and the areas in her house where the children play, with a view to making some improvements. Monica decides that she will make contact with her local County Childcare Committee and Childminding Ireland to find out where is the best place for her to go for information to ensure that she provides the best quality natural and sensory rich play resources and play space for the children. When completing her Action Plan Template for the coming year, the option open to her as a childminder is Option 5 - Participate in Quality Improvement Activities. Monica states that she will seek support from her local Childminding Development Officer by making contact with her local City/County Childcare Committee and Childminding Ireland from the dropdown options given.