



Career Pathway

Getting started and progressing your career in
Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age
Childcare (SAC)



An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais
agus Comhionannais
Department of Children,
Disability and Equality

Your career journey

If you are already working in Early Learning and Care or School-Age Childcare as an early years educator, school-age practitioner or childminder or you are thinking about starting your career, this guide will give you a typical pathway from entry to progression and leadership.

How it helps

This guide provides clarity on roles, progression options and the supports that can help you keep learning while you work.

Career journey (typical Early Learning and Care pathway)

01

Start here

Level 5 course, studies including practice placement, induction, first role in setting.
More information on course content can be found on
<https://www.nurturingskills.ie/become-an-early-years-educator/>

02

Build your qualification

Upskill while working – plan your next award (QQI Level 6, 7 or 8) or modules through Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

03

Progress your career

Get promoted from Educator to lead educator or take on a post of responsibility e.g. Inclusion Coordinator.

04

Progress to management

Take on a role as a manager or deputy manager.

A few questions to ask yourself to get started

- Where am I now (what is my role and how confident am I)?
- What do I want next (new skills, new responsibility, leadership)?
- What learning do I need to get there (qualification, CPD, mentoring)?
- What support is available (in my setting, training provider, learning hub, Nurturing Skills Learner Fund)?

Next step

Visit www.nurturingskills.ie to explore role profiles, recognised qualifications and learning supports available to you.

Nurturing Skills

Career Development: Qualifications, roles and progression

Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028 supports a clear career framework, helping you understand different roles, how qualifications link to roles, and how you can progress over time.

Typical roles you may see in the sector

Role	What it involves
Early years educator	Provides child-centred, play focused learning and care for children not yet in school (age 0-6), working in partnership with families, building strong relationships with children and creating enriching indoor and outdoor experiences.
Lead educator/ graduate lead educator	Has responsibility for the learning and care for a group of children, leading the practice with that group of children. They support colleagues and ensure quality practice.
Manager/ graduate manager (Person in charge)	Leads the setting's overall operation and quality, including team leadership, compliance, planning, and continuous improvement.
School-age childcare practitioner	Provides child-centred, play focused learning and care for school-age children, working in partnership with families, building strong relationships with children and creating enriching indoor and outdoor experiences.
Childminder	Provides home-based child-centred, play focused learning and care for children, working in partnership with families, building strong relationships with children and creating enriching indoor and outdoor experiences.

These roles may also be undertaken in Irish-medium settings, with additional responsibilities related to supporting children's Irish language development.

A comprehensive list of role profiles outlining the key tasks, responsibilities, and the skills and knowledge required for each role can be accessed on www.nurturingskills.ie.



Progression in practice

Progression often happens in steps

Progression in practice typically begins with induction and settling into your role, where you build confidence and gain experience. As your skills develop through experience and continuous professional development, you may take on increasing responsibilities, such as mentoring students, leading practice within a room, or stepping into specific leadership roles (e.g. inclusion coordinator).

Example pathway

- An early years educator completes a Level 5 award, starts work after placement and induction, then later upskill to Level 6 while working and move into a lead educator role.
- An early years educator progresses their studies to Level 7/8 and when qualified takes on a role of graduate manager.

Minimum qualification requirements

- Minimum requirement (All Early Learning and Care Staff): An approved award at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.
- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme lead educator: An approved award at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent.
- Graduate lead educator/graduate manager: approved award at Level 7 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent.

More information on becoming a childminder can be found <https://www.tusla.ie/early-years-inspectorate/childminding-services/i-would-like-to-register-as-a-childminder/>

Tip

Keep a simple record of your learning and experience (CPD, training, mentoring, projects). It strengthens your CV and helps you prepare for progression opportunities.

A Diverse and Flexible Career

With services located in communities throughout the country, Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare provide opportunities to build a rewarding career close to home, supported by local education and training opportunities, continuous professional development and clear progression pathways.

The sector offers a range of flexible employment opportunities, including full-time and part-time roles, helping people build a career that suits their individual circumstances and career goals.

There are opportunities to work in Irish-medium and bilingual Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare settings throughout Ireland. Educators who speak Irish play an important role in supporting children to develop Gaeilge while fostering their identity, sense of belonging and connection to Ireland's cultural and linguistic heritage. As recognised in Aistear, exposure to and use of Gaeilge from an early age contributes to young children's language development and supports their sense of identity.

Nurturing Skills

Career Development – Getting ready for an interview

The following will guide and can support you to prepare for Early Learning and Care or School-Age Childcare Roles.

Before the interview

- Re-read the job description and match your experience to the key responsibilities.
- Prepare 2 to 3 short examples that show your experience – such as planning, interactions, inclusion, teamwork.
- Prepare to demonstrate your understanding of Síolta (Ireland's national quality framework) and Aistear (Ireland's early childhood curriculum framework for babies, toddlers and young children), and how you apply both in your work with children.
- Bring copies of qualifications and training details (as relevant).
- Prepare questions for the employer – what you would like to learn from the interview – like what type of induction there is, what mentoring is in place, are there CPD supports, and what is the team structure like.

During the interview

- Keep your answers child-centred and practice-focused.
- Use a simple structure for examples: Situation; What I did; the Outcome; What I learned.
- If asked about an example scenario, talk through how you would respond and who you would involve.

After the interview

- Note what went well and what you would improve next time.
- Follow up with a short thank-you email (and ask about timelines if needed).

Common interview questions to help you practice

- Why do you want to work in Early Learning and Care or School-Age Childcare, and what do you enjoy most about the work?
- How do you build warm, respectful relationships with children and support their wellbeing?
- Describe how you plan play-based experiences that support learning and development.
- How do you support inclusion and respond to different needs in a room or group?
- Tell us about a time you worked as part of a team to solve a problem or improve practice.
- How do you communicate with parents/guardians, especially when there is a concern?
- What would you do if you had a child-safeguarding concern? (who, what, how)
- Scenario: A child is upset at drop-off or there is conflict between children - what do you do?
- What does reflective practice look like for you, and how do you use CPD to improve?

Questions you can ask a potential employer

- What does induction look like for new staff?
- How is planning and reflection supported?
- What CPD opportunities are available (and how is time supported)?
- How do you support teamwork and wellbeing across the staff group?

What people working in Early Learning and Care say about their career

"Early years is really a very vital time in a child's life and it's a wonderful place to be. The joy on a child's face when they learn something new from you is really wonderful."

Eimear

"It's a career where you go into your work and are greeted with such excitement and enthusiasm, and I just don't think you can get that in any other career. The children are always so grateful, and they think the world of you. The work you do and the importance it has is really something special to experience in your career."

Kelly

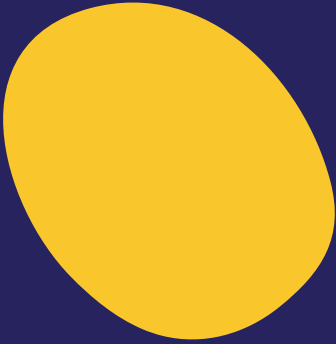
"My Level 5 qualification in Early Learning and Care and practice placement led directly to my first job as an early years educator. After completing a flexible Level 6 while working, I progressed to become a lead educator."

Mary

"You feel like you're an important part of the community and that you are making a really big impact in people's lives. Working through Irish every day is also incredibly rewarding. You can see children naturally picking up the language through play and conversations."

Jane





Visit www.nurturingskills.ie
for more details.



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