

**A Study to explore what elements of Early Years  
management training should be prioritised to ensure  
the Early Learning and Care (ELC) workforce is  
professionally led.**

**By**

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## Declaration Page

*I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Education, Learning and Development, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other learners.*



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## Abstract

Today's Early Learning and Care (ELC) managers must be politically astute, conscious of, and involved in a multitude of contexts encircling beyond one's day-to-day work; they must also be accomplished in envisaging and facilitating change. ELC managers must operate on many different levels, carrying responsibility for children, parents and families, supporting the growth of EY practitioners, and facilitating inspectors and funders while integrating the expectations of legislators. Until now, they have had to navigate that role through on-the-job learning with no dedicated training. However, this issue is about to change due to the national drive guided by the Workforce Development Plan (WDP) towards developing a pedagogical management qualification for all ELC managers by 2028. This study aims to help that plan by exploring what elements of management training need to be prioritised so ELC managers can achieve professionalism in their roles. Through the use of a mixed method questionnaire, the research takes anonymised data from 304 ELC managers currently working in a diverse range of early years settings. It explores the current responsibilities of those managers, their existing training to date and the barriers they face. The research also invites them to input how they want future training presented.

The study findings expose the requirements for sector-specific training, which encompasses financial management, human resource management and regulatory compliance training to benefit leadership throughout the sector. Further recommendations are made to the Government to develop this training as part of their WDP, with consideration being given to the review of current Early Education and Care training programmes also. The establishment of a change management module is recommended, and suggestions for the programme to be implemented through mentoring is also proposed.

The study's conclusion emphasises the importance of addressing the complexity of the ELC manager's role to ensure the training is targeted correctly to promote sustainability and high quality in early education and care for the future.

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## **1.1 Introduction**

This study aims to examine what elements of early years management training should be prioritised to ensure the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector in Ireland is professionally led. This chapter presents an overview of the rationale behind the study. It also outlines the research questions asked, along with the objective behind them. Finally, it provides a synopsis of the forthcoming chapters.

## **1.2 Background**

Research to date has shown that the quality of any early years provisions is directly linked to management and leadership skills within the ELC setting (Ang, 2012). Nevertheless, until now, there has been very little policy focus on managers even, despite extensive research linking effective leadership and management in ELC directly to the provision of quality services (Lee, 2019). To review this further, Moloney and Petterson (2017) describes the management of an ELC setting occurring within an ecological framework, where the manager needs to be able to operate within and between different layers of an ecosystem. Their management role branches across extensive areas, including finance, planning, dealing with parents, caring for children, human resources, quality improvement, collaboration with partners and cooperation with external agencies (Government of Ireland, 2021b). Even though this role has grown due to global and national influence, it remains on the periphery of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) discourse (Moloney and Petterson, 2017) and, due to this, has now become a critical area of interest for policy developers.

Unlike most other European countries, which require all managers of ELC centres to hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree, Ireland currently does not require any qualification or training

for their service managers (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister, 2019). Furthermore, the Nurturing Skills Workforce Development Plan (2021-2028) backs this report by stating that there are currently no qualification or training requirements for persons specifically in managerial or leadership roles (Government of Ireland, 2021b). However, this issue is about to change due to the national drive guided by the workforce development plan towards developing a pedagogical management qualification for all ELC managers by 2028 (Government of Ireland, 2021b).

### **1.3 Rationale**

For this purpose, this study wishes to explore the concept of management training with managers who already hold that post within the ELC sector. An initial review of the literature suggests that very little research has been carried out with ELC managers on their current management role since the growth of government influence. Literature such as Preston (2013) in England and Moloney and Petterson (2017) in Ireland built on the perspectives of how managers perceive their roles. Findings from both would suggest that numerous managers assumed their role by default. Due to a lack of training, Moloney and Petterson (2017) indicate that the role is learned on the job. As both previous studies mentioned above were carried out qualitatively, the data collected was minimal. This researcher now aims, on a more quantitative level, to query whether, in the absence of mandatory training and development, managers can obtain quality standards within the policy landscape of Ireland. The researcher also enquires, that now with the imposed development of management training, what elements of such training do ELC managers believe should be provided?

### **1.4 Aim and Objectives**

The objective of this study is to explore what elements of Early Years management training should be prioritised to ensure the ELC workforce will be professionally led in the future. The study aims

to focus on the impact that sector growth, government agencies, legislation, and inspection have had on managers training at both macro and micro levels, these areas will be researched to achieve the objective.

The questions the study will focus on are.

- What current areas of ELC management are managers responsible for?
- What areas of management training do current managers partake in?
- What barriers, if any, affect ELC managers from being successful in their role
- How can this research inform the development of future dedicated management training programmes at government policy level?

### **1.5 Methodological Approach**

The methodology adopted for this study is a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research design is guided by the pragmatism paradigm, combining elements of positivism and interpretivism. To supplement the approach, the researcher employed purposive sampling, targeting ELC managers with the data collected through a comprehensive online questionnaire. The data is analysed using a thematic approach. The study seeks to reduce individual bias and addresses validity through triangulation. Limitations of the research are also addressed.

### **1.6 Structure Summery**

Chapter Two literature review presents an analysis of the relevant literature on how the role of management and training has been influenced in Ireland at a macro level to identify how these outcomes have impacted the manager's role at a micro level.

Chapter Three Methodology presents the methodological processes that the research study is based upon. It will discuss the paradigm, design and method in which the research is located. It will then outline the data collection process, sampling, limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four findings will present the findings of the mixed-method questionnaire completed as part of this study. The data is depicted under four headings identified during the research process: background information, qualifications, the management role and future training.

Chapter Five discussion will interpret and analyse the findings in relation to the research and literature presented in chapter two. Any insights that emerge from the observations will be discussed, and significant findings will be drawn upon.

Chapter Six conclusion and recommendations synthesise the overall conclusions taken from this research study and presents any recommendations in relation to the research questions established in chapter one.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the rationale for this piece of research. It draws on the emphasis of why the need for Early Years management training should be explored and discusses how these aims and objectives will be investigated. Further to this, the chapter provides an overview of how the study will be structured and how conclusions will be drawn.

The next chapter will review the body of literature that is currently available on the subject of the above aims and objectives.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, Start Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care (2012), policymakers are urged to pinpoint particular policy initiatives that improve the quality of care and education in the ELC sector (Knox, 2021). It asks what training and qualifications would be most applicable for managers (OECD, 2012) and questions the requirement for more research in the field of managerial skills and knowledge rather than concentrating exclusively on formal staff qualifications.

As discussed in Chapter One, this study aims to explore what elements of early years training should be prioritised to ensure the workforce is professionally led in the future. Therefore, this chapter must first examine how the role of management and training has been influenced in Ireland at a macro level to identify how these outcomes have impacted the manager's role at a micro level. For this purpose, Chapter Two is broken up into two main sections.

By exploring the literature available, section one focuses mainly on the change agent history of the ELC sector, exploring how macro-level growth has impacted the need for training and qualifications for managers. It studies the various government departments that maintain the decision-making responsibility and investigates how the implementation of legislation and inspection have impacted the manager's role.

Section two focuses on the role of the manager at a micro-level in line with the policy developments mentioned in section one. It questions the degree to which managers are equipped for their duties and responsibilities and explores what elements of management have the most significant impact on the success of their role.

## **2.2 Management Training at a Macro Level**

### *2.2.1 Introduction*

Over the past two decades, there has been a substantial shift in the care and provision of young children outside the home. With a significant social, political, and media focus now being placed on ECEC worldwide (Moloney, 2015b), policymakers are accepting the responsibility they have to ensure that cost, quality, and availability for families are at the forefront of their framework development (Brennan and Adamson, 2015). Ireland serves as a case in point for this concentration; however, it is only recently that the importance of management and leadership has been highlighted as a field that needs to be involved in such investment (Urban 2017). To identify why, it is imperative first to explore the historical development of the sector and understand the influence that policy has had on its directional growth.

### *2.2.2 Irish Policy Growth*

Until the 1990's childcare in Ireland was deemed a private family matter with minimal state contribution (OECD, 2004). However, due to the neoliberal policies brought forward during the Celtic Tiger years, Ireland began witnessing rapid growth in economic activity (Da Col Richert, 2012). This employment influx encouraged Irish women to actively participate in the professional workforce (Kennedy, 2018). Nevertheless, although this growth led to a large category of educated professional young women emerging, these women began to be confronted with the complexities of combining employment and family duties (Da Col Richert, 2012), hence putting pressure on the policy developers to review the childcare requirements needed to enable the female workforce to continue developing. Furthermore, as the demands increased, flaws in the standard of care and attention being given to children became evident, emphasising the need for some kind of statutory care (Kennedy, 2018).

In 1996 the first legislative control over early education services in Ireland came into place in the form of the Child Care Act 1991 (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 (O'Kane, 2005). Although

this regulatory act enforced care and safety for children, no emphasis was ever placed on the need for education or a qualified early years workforce. The initial regulations introduced required a team member to be a 'competent adult' with no prerequisite for experience or qualifications (Government of Ireland, 1996). The introduction of the term childhood education followed in 1997 when an amendment was made to include education as part of a young child's care needs (Department of Health and Children, 1997). This demand for care and education began a perpetual divide between the responsibility for ECEC across several different government departments, the main two being the Department of Education and the Department of Health (Murphy, 2015).

Since the beginning of such departmental detachment, there has been a repeated call to coordinate and integrate the needs of the ECEC sector to ensure a holistic and coherent structure. However, according to Hayes (2008), ECEC services remained "*fractured across the welfare (childcare) and educational (early education) domains*" (Hayes, 2008, p 33). Adshead and Neylon (2008, cited in Moloney, 2015a), maintained that childcare is most often viewed as a private commodity that the family should handle and pay for, and education is viewed as a public good that the State should offer free of charge.

Although it has been widely established that quality care delivery is the key to any effective care provision, the sector was being divided by an ongoing shift in government on how governance, spending, people qualifications, pay, eligibility conditions, and regulation should be handled (Moloney, 2015b). To help understand this fragmented shift, Figure 1 below shows how since the adoption of the Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations in 1996, ECEC services have operated under the supervision of numerous departments, therefore denoting the traditional separation of care and education in Ireland as mentioned above (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010, cited in Knox 2021).

**Fig 2.1. Overview of Accountability Shift for ECEC between 1996 and 2020**



Source: Knox, 2021

Due to this shift, it is fair to suggest that although management and governance determine whether ELC services are consistent in quality, affordability and coherent policy-making (Knox, 2021), a fragmented understanding of which government departments drove the need for change caused considerable confusion on what elements of education required focus. As a result, managers, practitioners, and service providers were not receiving any educational training and professional development was being completely neglected (Moloney, 2015a).

### *2.2.3 Irish Policy Growth in Management Education/Training*

Although the rupturing issues of the poor-quality provision were becoming evident, ECEC investment from 2000 to 2010 was primarily focused on social inclusion, the main aim being to develop additional childcare places (Felon, 2019). Little to no funding was allocated to or recognition given to the ECEC workforce's education, leadership, or management potential (Hayes, O'Donoghue-Hayes, & Wolfe, 2013, cited in Felon, 2019). It was not until 2010 that any form of recognition towards the need for a qualified workforce was even suggested (Urban, 2017).

In 2010 the Department of Education and Skills (DES) published a Workforce Development Plan (WDP) which stated that the *'skills and qualifications of adults working with young children are a critical factor in determining the quality of young children's ECEC experiences'* (DES, 2010, p6). With this workforce growth, the sector also experienced the introduction of the free Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school year in 2010, implemented through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). According to Oke (2019), the ECCE scheme was an attempt by the DCYA to transcend beyond the extremely fragmented ECEC model that was currently dominating the sector. The model aimed to allow each child to attend preschool for 3 hours a day, 38 weeks of the year prior to their integration into primary school (Oke, 2019). With the development of the ECCE scheme, it brought to light the first requirement of any formal education obligation for early years practitioners, requiring only any leader of an ECCE preschool room to hold a minimum qualification of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 5 in Childcare. This was extended to an NFQ Level 6 in 2014 (Moloney, 2014). This ECCE childcare investment witnessed a growth of 95% uptake in children attending ECEC services (Moloney, 2014), putting significant pressure on the need for training and quality management to be explored and invested in, yet these assets did not unfold.

In 2013 the absence of any governance or training investment revealed itself when the proficiency of Irish ECEC practitioners, managers and service providers was brought to the forefront of quality discourse (Oke, 2016). In several Irish ELC centres, where 'competency' was still the bare minimum necessary to work in the ELC sector, abuse of young children was made public in the RTE Prime Time documentary "A breach of trust" (Oke, 2016). The images of gross incompetence, carelessness, and negligence of responsibilities exposed in the documentary uncovered an extensive dereliction of governance and management duties, along with a shocking disregard for children's safety, health, and well-being (Knox, 2021).

Many reports following the documentary, such as the Oireachtas (2013) *'Health and Childrens Debate'* (Fitzgerald, 2013) highlighted the apparent need for education and training to become a

priority for the safety of all involved. To back up these reports, the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Francis Fitzgerald, T.D., announced a radical need for transformation within the sector (Moloney, 2014). She produced an eight-step Pre-school Quality Agenda (Table 1), which identified key areas of focus displayed in a bid to rectify the discourse.

**Table 2.1 – Pre-school Quality Agenda**

Action	Description of Plan of Action
1	Publication of on-line inspection reports from 1st July 2013
2	Strengthening the national inspection system
3	Introducing new protocols on regulatory compliance and enforcement
4	Increasing and widening the sanctions which can be taken for non-compliance
5	Increasing the qualification requirements for all staff in pre-school services
6	Introducing a registration system
7	Implementing new national pre-school standards
8	Supporting implementation of the Síolta framework and Aistear curriculum

Table 1 - Source: Maloney, 2014

Number five on the agenda was "*Increasing the qualification requirements for all staff in pre-school*" (Moloney, 2014, p 80). However, it was not for a further three years after the expose, in 2016, that the enactment of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into force. Only at that point did the minimum qualification of an NFQ Level 5 in Childcare become a regulatory requirement for *all* early year's practitioners (Tusla, 2018b). In conjunction with this, changes were made to the capitation premiums paid for room leaders in ECCE preschool rooms (Moloney, 2014). As a result, services would receive a higher capitation on their funding for room leaders that held a childcare qualification of NFQ Level 7 or higher (Cafferky, 2013). Although this was not a regulatory requirement, it was the first recognition that there might be a professionally led workforce in the future.

Regrettably, although the Pre-school Quality agenda and the Early Years Regulations brought the need for professional education in the sector up the policy agenda, managers and service owners

were and are still not subject to any additional management training or qualification beyond the minimum requirements (Mooney and Murphy, 2021). In 2019, this lack of consideration became extremely apparent again when a second RTE documentary: *Creches Behind Closed Doors*, was aired. This exposé clarified how little political attention is given to the sector's managerial capabilities (Knox, 2021). The evidence in the report showed that the management teams within the ELC services were directly in breach of numerous regulations, all causing potentially detrimental effects on the health and safety of the children in their care. Further to this, the documentary also highlighted numerous governance and Human Resources (HR) issues, showing an abundant level of staffing problems and minimum qualifications requirements being ignored (Knox, 2021). In response to the documentary, Brian Lee, Director of Quality Assurance at TUSLA, credits that, robust management and good governance in ELC services are what underpin a quality service, and if those things are lacking, the service will never be successful (TUSLA, 2019). Nonetheless, the government has still ignored the need for management training or qualifications for decades (Knox, 2021).

In an attempt to shift change, a new policy framework has been established; it is a ten-year, whole-of-government plan from 2018 to 2028 that focuses exclusively on the first five years of a child's life (Government of Ireland, 2018). The policy highlights four issues, with; *'the need to reform the ELC system'* being one of them (Government of Ireland, 2018, p.4). However, according to Urban *et al.*, (2017), this reform can only succeed if Ireland aims to implement a Competent System approach emphasising the sector's governance. For this purpose, the implementation of a WFD called *'Nurturing Skills'* has come into play. The plan aims to advance *'professional development within a coherent and professional system'* by reviewing the current workforce and committing to upskilling, qualifying, and valuing a diverse cohort of practitioners (Government of Ireland, 2021b, p.8). In addition, the plan, in agreement with Urban (2017), states that consideration needs to be given to leadership and management within ELC systems, requiring the need to evolve the professional identity of managers and ensure that the revealed observations of gross

incompetence, negligence and complete carelessness of management duties (Knox, 2021) do not remain an issue for the future of the sector.

Supporting the new government plan is the introduction of a new public Core Funding Model introduced in 2022. As part of Core Funding, the implementation of an Employment Regulation Order (ERO) has been put in place. This ERO establishes "*minimum rates of remuneration and links different roles and qualification levels within the sector to higher rates of pay*" (Curristan, S., McGinnity, F., Russell, H. and Smyth, E., 2023, p71.). The ERO clearly defines the need for ELC managers to be placed on a higher pay scale. The new model suggests that the planned pedagogical leadership and management training currently being developed needs to meet the requirements of this pay increase (Government of Ireland, 2021a). However, to ensure this new pedagogical leadership and management training is successful in supporting the management role, it is imperative that an understanding of ELC inspection management in current policy growth must also be addressed.

#### *2.2.4 Irish Policy and Quality Inspection Management*

There are three main categories of management-related inspection/regulation criteria for ELC services in Ireland. The first is the Early Years Focused Inspections (EYFI), which, among its core themes, comprises leadership and management for high-quality learning (DES, 2018). The principle foundation of what is inspected during EYFI is embedded in Ireland's two national frameworks; Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] 2009) and Siolta; the National Quality Framework (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Care [CECDE] 2006). Both frameworks are developed from a quality point of view. Although both frameworks discuss the role of the room leader, the main direction of management comes in the capacity of working directly as a leader to guide the child's learning, suggesting that both frameworks overlook the importance of the service manager's role in ensuring their workforce is implementing the quality that is expected.

The inspector's role in the EYFI is to determine whether the facility has clearly defined, well-developed, and operational management structures to guarantee that all stakeholders receive high-quality care and education. (DES, 2018). Unfortunately, though, the initial evaluation of the Siolta/Aistear Quality Action Plan (QAP) implementation, which was examined in 134 services, highlighted that staff education and training levels hampered their ability to engage with and implement standard quality for children because the managers implementing such a structure lacked sufficient training and qualifications. (Unit, Early Years, Education Policy [EYEP] 2013). This evaluation is supported by the report's final recommendation for improvement, which is the urgent necessity for "Leadership development programs for managers." (Unit, EYEP, 2013, p18).

The second is the independent statutory regulator of ELC and School Age Care (SAC) services, known as the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate (EYI). The Tusla EYI is designated to ensure that children enrolled in ELC and SAC programs are safe, receive appropriate care, and have a positive experience (Department of Education, 2022). The main focus areas are governance and all aspects of the child's health, safety and welfare.

In 2014 the release of a report on the Quality of Pre-school Services indicated that 46.2% of ELC services were non-compliant in management and governance under Regulation 8 of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 (Hanafin, 2016). These conclusions were considered as part of a regulatory inspection process review, and in 2016 new regulations explicitly tailored to management under Regulation 8 and staffing under Regulation 9 were implemented (Tusla, 2018a). In line with this, Tusla (2018b) emphasises that the person in charge (manager), as mentioned in the Quality Regulatory Framework (QRF), is responsible for overseeing and maintaining all aspects of the ELC service. According to Moloney and Petterson (2017), embedding management in the revised regulations brought on a significant administrative burden with no additional resources or training to support the role. In conjunction with this, as addressed above, the discourse between practice and these regulations is still

extremely evident due to direct breaches of management regulation documented in the RTE expose and ongoing inspection reports published to date.

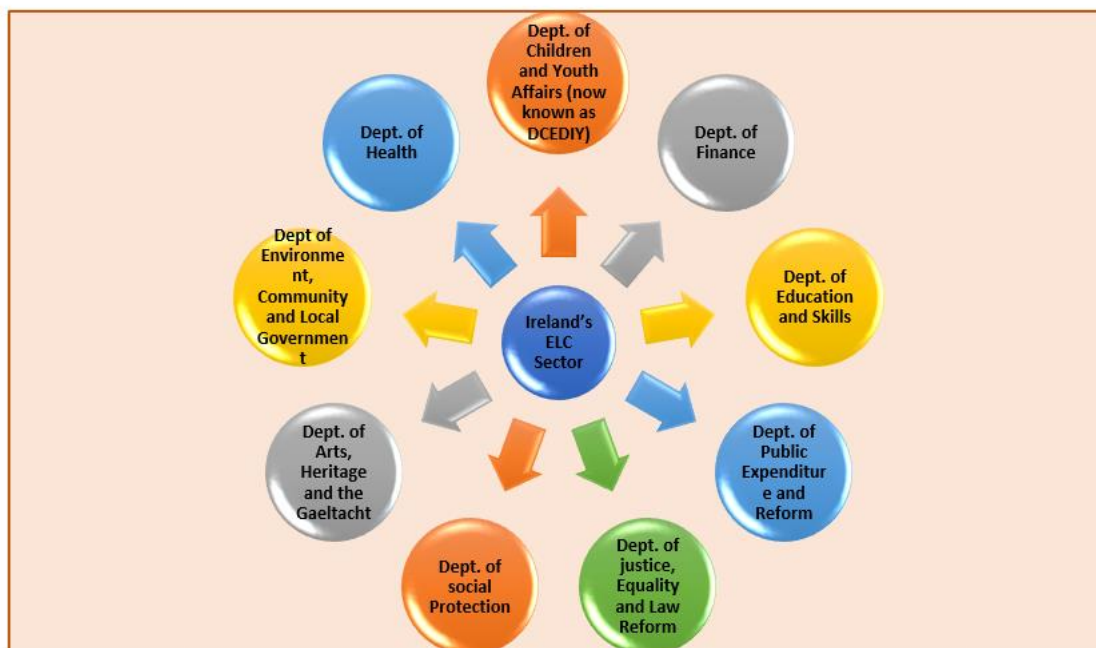
The third inspection managers/providers are required to facilitate is from Pobal, a funding administrative body contracted by the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Their role is to undertake compliance inspections with participating childcare service providers that run one or more of the national childcare programs, such as the ECCE scheme and the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) (Pobal, 2020). From a review of the sector, it is stressed that over 95.8% of ELC services in Ireland are contracted to at least one of these programmes (Pobal, 2022a). Rendering to Pobal, it states that it is the service provider's responsibility to ensure compliance with these programmes; failure to do so will result in the participation of Pobal's recoument processes (Pobal, 2022b).

Further to this, in 2022, "*Together for Better*", new funding was launched through the "Partnership for Public Good" funding model (Government of Ireland, 2021a). As part of this model, providers must become partner services with the state and, in return, receive large volumes of funding to support business operations and enhance quality. In partaking in these programmes, service providers or managers running the service are requested to learn how to use ineffective platforms without IT training or any additional financial background (ECI, 2020, cited in Forde, 2022), opening their services up to significant financial discrepancies. ELC service providers and managers are educators first and foremost. Moloney and Patterson (2017) argue that most do not have sufficient financial management skills as they are trained as early years practitioners, not as specialists in business and administration. However, according to Forde (2022), the additional responsibility for managers that do not have management training constantly challenges compliance with regulations, hence leaving managers susceptible to ongoing failure.

In addition to the central three inspections outlined, Environmental Health, the Health and Safety Authority and the Workplace Relations Commission also inspect ELC services. To give a visual

understanding of the level of inspection-sharing responsibility among government bodies in Ireland, Figure 2 shows the control bodies over the past two decades.

**Figure 2.2. Government Depts. Sharing Inspection Responsibility for ELC services.**



Source: Urban et al., 2017

Moloney and Petterson (2017) documented the level of critique managers have had on inspection and agree with Forde (2022) when suggesting that the fragmented monitoring and evaluation systems of so many inspection bodies are causing confusion and inefficiencies for managers, services and other stakeholders. Hence, concurring with Urban et al., (2017) who suggest that the management and governance of the ELC inspection system are unsurprisingly tricky, given that there are numerous government agencies, each with a piece of the ELC pie (Knox, 2021). The need to address this issue was also highlighted in the OECD Report (2021), where it was suggested that there is a need for clear occupational roles within the workforce that should include inspection, mentoring, and training as qualification requirements for service leaders to ensure quality care can consistently prevail.

To help achieve this, priority should be given to reviewing different foreign policy methods before moving on to consider which strategy should be used when developing an effective approach.

### *2.2.5. International Policy and Management Training*

In contrast to the review of several countries such as Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Norway made the decision to professionalise its ECEC sector, incorporating national – degree level standards and staff pay scales (Moloney & Petterson, 2017). Like Norway, Finland also implemented a Bachelor of Arts degree as their minimum qualification requirement. Research on the foot of these decisions noted that strong management quality thrived without the need for extensive monitoring from policymakers (Sahlberg, 2013). Agreeingly, Waniganayake (2014) discusses how teachers in Finland have professional autonomy and accept responsibility for their decision-making, stating that their job satisfaction is linked directly to the absence of external control and monitoring (Waniganayake, 2014).

In conjunction, although Australia has not adopted Finland's approach, leadership and management are still one of the seven key indicators of quality in their Australian National Quality Standards [NQS] (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2017). The Australian NQS framework provides abundant resources and training guidance to support the daily role of the manager. It also recognises the contextual and local landscape of ELC services, which in turn requires ongoing reflection to ensure continuous development and improvement within the service (Lee, 2019). The absence of such support is glaringly obvious in Irish policy frameworks to date. Although both *Siolta* and *Aistear* are stationed in strongly evidence-based research, neither emphasises how vital robust management is for ensuring that children receive quality care, nor do the frameworks offer managers guidance as systematic as that offered to Australian practitioners who work with the children daily (Lee, 2019).

With that said, while Ireland continues to embody a '*split system*' of governed support (Moloney & Petterson, 2017) with no requirement for degree-level management training, or no direct guidance for managers to support staff in the two quality frameworks, the researcher feels it is imperative that policymakers implement some version of training support to mend the fractured system that is currently in place. The main question needs to be answered: What should that training entail?

## **2.3 Management Training at a Micro Level**

### *2.3.1 Introduction*

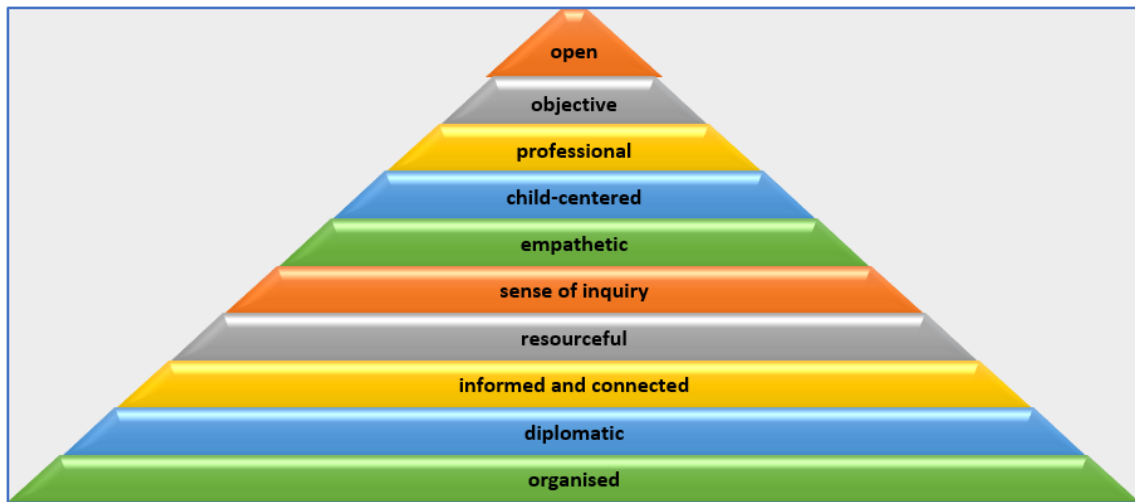
Research to date has shown that the quality of any early years provisions is directly linked to management and leadership skills within the ELC setting (Ang, 2012) with Moloney and Pettersen (2017) claiming that the manager is the lynchpin of quality and the unit who holds everything together. For this purpose, the researcher deems it necessary to investigate further the intricate role of the ELC manager at a micro level. Once the role of the manager is explored, the researcher will then look at the impact, quality, financial, human resource, and change management have on the manager's ability to lead a service. Finally, the chapter will briefly explore other barriers that also may affect the role.

### *2.3.2 The Role of the Manager*

Today's ELC leaders must be politically astute, conscious of, and involved in a multitude of contexts encircling beyond one's day-to-day work; they must also be accomplished in envisaging and facilitating change (Goffin & Washington, 2007; Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008; Rodd, 1996 cited in Whitebook *et al.*, 2012). According to Moloney and Petterson (2017), the ELC manager must operate on many different levels, carrying responsibility for children, parents and families, supporting the growth of EY practitioners, and facilitating inspectors and funders while integrating the expectations of legislators. To successfully manage different layers of the ecosystem, Hearron and Hildebrand (2015) specify the need for prioritising organisational skills,

human relations, fiscal, marketing and workforce management. McPartland (2012) states that such success can only be achieved if the manager can obtain and practice numerous and wide-ranging skills, as visualised in the chart below.

**Figure 2.3. The Building Blocks of the Supervisor/Manager's Role**



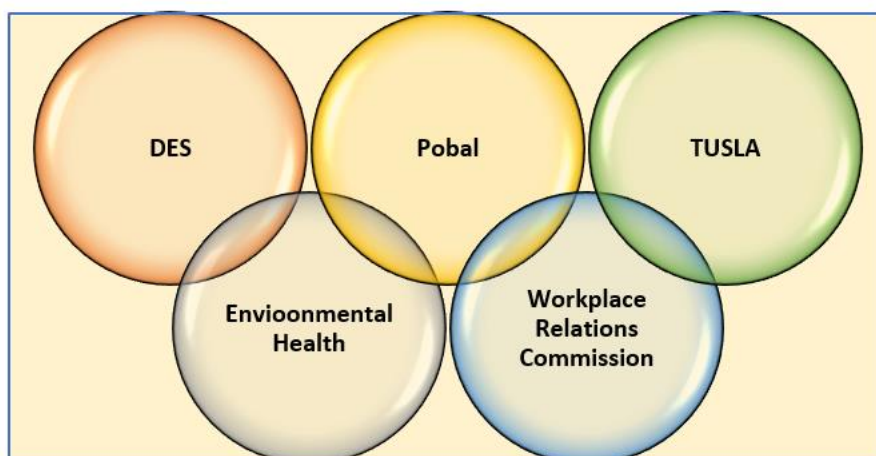
Source McPartland, 2012

However, the question must be asked, how can a manager successfully obtain such skills without adequate training? Interestingly, questions like these have encouraged policy developers to seek professionalisation in the Irish management sector (Knox, 2021). In 2018 a *Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care Sector* (PACG) (DES, 2019) was developed. The guidelines intend to assist the future development of a workforce that is graduate led and aims to ensure successors will be "*fully prepared to take on the complex challenges of practice in this field*" (DES, 2019, p.8). Although the development of such guidelines influences a shift of change in the sector, it is still not a mandatory requirement. With that said, the plan for change is imminent, so for future programmes to be successful, it is imperative that the manager's intricate role is investigated further, ensuring training and learning will be meaningful and beneficial. Therefore, the researcher will investigate specific management areas in more dept. Firstly exploring training and quality management.

### 2.3.3 Training and Quality Management

Moloney and Petterson (2017) maintain that from a management perspective, the ultimate goal of any ELC service, regardless of its make up is to provide a quality setting for children and families. In a study conducted by Moloney (2015), which aimed to gain the perspectives of 17 managers from a range of private and community services, the consensus remained the same, 'effective business management is essential' and can only be achieved by striving for quality. In such strife, part one of this literature review outlined the focus of policymakers and their implementation of a variety of statutory inspection regimes; however, it was not mentioned how this attempt at quality improvement had created a surge of accountability, stress and demand on the ELC manager's individual roles (Knox, 2020). As mentioned above, the ELC sector in Ireland is subject to multiple inspections, including TUSLA, DES, Pobal, Environmental Health and the WRC (Moloney and Petterson, 2017).

**Figure 2.4. An Overview of Inspections in ELC Services**



Source Moloney and Petterson, 2017

Studies such as Pettersen (2015) evidenced managers being critical of the amount of time, lack of training and stress, regulation and inspection bring on the sector. Supporting this was a review

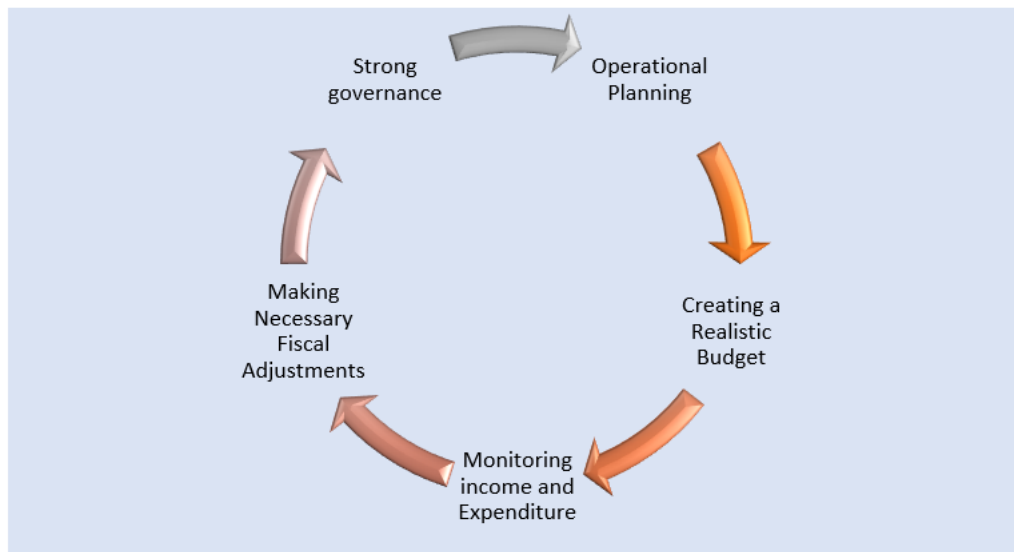
done by the Department of Education and Science in 2018. In their *Review of the First Year of the Implementation of EYEI Inspections* (DES, 2018), ELC managers were quoted saying they were “unclear as to exactly what the inspectors expect and want from these visits” while also highlighting that they “would like a course or training in the area of these inspections “(DES, 2018, p21.) to ensure they are getting it right. For this purpose, what this training may look like should be considered.

With that said, it is not only inspections that encourage quality practice; both national frameworks, again mentioned above as the Aistear curriculum framework (2008) and Siolta quality framework (2006), require an ongoing focus on areas such as curriculum development, maintaining the learning environment, partnership with parents and supporting learning. According to the OECD report (2021), expectation falls on leaders of ELC services to act as the promoters of quality practice. It suggests that managers should be ‘*providing resources and conditions for staff to develop high-quality practices*’ (OECD, 2021, pg. 132). Nevertheless, the question needs to be considered: are managers adequately trained to provide such guidance for their teams? Dougless (2019) explores this concept and suggests that training in leadership professional development and mentoring programs could be a strategy used to improve leader effectiveness and increase their perception to improve quality. That being said, other areas aside from quality should be studied; the next is financial management.

#### *2.3.4 Training and Financial Management*

Herron and Hildebrand (2015) claim that ELC settings, like any other business, cannot survive unless the manager utilizes its financial resources. According to Moloney and Petterson (2017, p102), sound financial management involves five key elements: “*operational planning, creating realistic budgets, monitoring income and expenditure, knowing when to make necessary judgements and strong governance*”.

**Figure 2.5. Key Elements of Sound Financial Planning**



Source: Moloney and Petterson, 2017

These tasks require clear understanding and are fundamental to maintaining a sustainable business. Nevertheless, studies undertaken by the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) in 2015 reported that not one of the services that were reviewed financially using these elements was making any profit. Another study carried out by Moloney (2015) highlighted the concern that although the 17 ELC managers interviewed knew what their financial outgoings were, 12 of them were concerned about the future viability of their ELC services, admitting that they had no idea how to estimate their operational costs and did not know how to calculate a weekly fee for parents.

Comparable to this lack of financial understanding is the financial and administrative burden from the government funding schemes mentioned in section one. In a study carried out by Cafferky (2013), managers discussed how financial oversight because of uncertainty with funding schemes was an ongoing challenge. When asked what was causing the challenge, the consensus arising was a need for training in areas of funding management and financial returns. Moloney and Petterson (2017) assert that even if poor financial management such as the above does not lead to closure, it can result in educator and staff layoffs, a decline in the number of children using the service,

and general deterioration of the environment. With that said, a setting's worth cannot be judged by its financial stability alone (Moloney and Petterson, 2017), and for that purpose, additional management areas must also be considered.

### *2.3.5 Training and Human Resource Management (HRM)*

Hearron and Hildebrand (2015) maintain that to ensure the survival and growth of an ELC business, a manager must invest in human capital. This is a demanding task for an ELC manager in a sector that has a problematic relationship between education, minimum training requirements and disproportionate funding streams (Moloney and Petterson, 2017). It was reported in Petterson's (2015) study that 44% of managers referred to HRM as a crucial task that takes up most of their time, yet, as mentioned in section one of this review, although HRM is now a legal requirement, the reality is that many ELC managers step into the role without any prior training (Moloney and Petterson, 2017). Agreeing with this are the findings from the Cafferky (2013) report that stressed HRM as the most challenging task for managers and an area that causes significant stress. Corresponding to this is Moloney's (2015b) study, which reports managers having fallen into their role, further clarifying that they learned the competencies of their ELC managerial role through trial and error when faced with the day-to-day issues of HRM (Maloney, 2015b). Although these legislative requirements place additional HRM responsibilities upon ELC managers and further compound the complexity of their role (Knox, 2021), the vital HRM skills required do not form any part of the training under the current regulated qualification of QQI Level 5 in childcare. That being said, Indecon International Consultants (2021) acknowledged that the state is now seeking to enhance professionalism in the Irish ELC sector. The OECD (2021) report distinguished two critical training dimensions under the term of leadership, stressing the importance of HR training for managers as an area that requires exploration.

### 2.3.6 Training and Change Management

As highlighted in section one of this chapter, the policy and practice landscape of ELC services in Ireland over the last decade has changed significantly (Government of Ireland, 2021b). ELC managers at the forefront of this change have had to grapple with this level of sectoral and regulatory reform, suggesting that the ability to promote and guide change for their teams has become a core management competency (Knox, 2022), which requires training. According to Hujala and Eskelinen (2023), a manager must recognize the necessity for change to manage the change for the better. That said, Lindon and Trud (2016) note that there is often a strong reluctance against change in the ELC setting until it is too late. Aubrey, Godfrey and Harris (2013) back this up by highlighting that the reluctance and unwillingness of staff to change their practice is a significant challenge for any ELC leader. Unfortunately, such reluctance guides managers to remain stagnant, and resistance to change manifests (Maloney and Petterson, 2017). For this purpose, leadership and management training are all the more pertinent for the professional development of ELC managers (Ang, 2011). Such training would guide them in fulfilling their roles effectively, help them value the service and those accessing it, and manage the contrast for change to ensure quality standards are met (Ang, 2011). Furthermore, McPartland (2012) suggests that managers need to be open and current so that change can be quickly and efficiently interpreted and implemented. Lee *et al.*, (2022, p2.) strengthen this by stating that if managers become '*change agents*', they will be more likely to engage in innovative professional learning and development, which in turn would have the potential to enhance the quality of their services. Nonetheless, there are always other mitigating factors that can affect growth; for this purpose, other potential barriers must be explored.

## **2.4 Other Barriers Affecting the Role of ELC Manager**

In February 2020, 30,000 ELC professionals and families marched through the pathways of Dublin to petition a radical change in ELC services in Ireland; they were calling for affordability, recognition and decent pay (SIPTU, 2020). This march was one of many that highlighted some of the barriers affecting the ELC sector. According to Moloney (2020), the Irish government is underspending significantly, leading to sacrificed staffing. The outcome of this underspending has guided growth in poorly paid, under-valued and overworked practitioners (Moloney, 2019). In 2020, it was reported that 49% of full-day ELC services had vacancies in their settings, and a staggering 53% had difficulty recruiting staff (Pobal, 2020). If managers do not have staff on their floors, they cannot manage their services effectively.

Agreeing with this, SIPTU (2020) determines that a high staff turnover undermines quality for families and hinders the ability to sustain ELC services. Managers are reporting difficulty in achieving a work-life balance which in turn is affecting their performance (Jovanovic, 2013). Research shows that they are not finding enough time for breaks and are constantly doing unpaid work, all while trying to cope with the ongoing consequences of low pay and fearful financial sustainability (SIPTU, 2020).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is fair to suggest that none of Ireland's Departments or Agencies has yet to fully provide coherence across ELC services (Urban *et al.*, 2017). However, according to Moloney (2019), there is much talk of "*transforming the workforce*" (online, 2019) through the implementation of the current WDP. As mentioned in chapter one, this plan aims to develop a pedagogical leadership qualification for all ELC managers by 2028 (Government of Ireland, 2021b).

In the context of this present study, evidence has highlighted the absence of support managers have received and the apparent demand that is needed for dedicated management training. To support policymakers in getting it right this time, this review of literature has developed a case for asking ELC managers directly what elements they feel should be prioritised to ensure their workforce is professionally led in the future.

The researcher believes that by giving managers an opportunity to collaborate and partake in training development at the policy level, it may just shift the divide and instead become the '*key to providing quality care and education for all children*' (Urban et al., 2019, p.10).

The next chapter, methodology, will outline how this will be achieved.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research paradigm chosen and provides a rationale for applying a mixed-method approach.

Throughout this chapter, the researcher will explore the research design that underpins the study, giving details of the sampling style and why the specific cohort of participants were chosen to take part. It will take into account any ethical considerations that require attention and will investigate any potential issues of research validity or reliability. Finally, the chapter will give consideration to the limitations that may occur when utilising pragmatism as the paradigm in a research study.

### **3.2 Research Aim**

The overall aim of this study is to explore what elements of Early Years management training should be prioritised to ensure the ELC workforce will be professionally led in the future.

By utilising the current literature available, the researcher has highlighted potential areas in the previous chapter that could be considered for future training. For this purpose, the researcher intends to build on that research by exploring the current practices of ELC managers and investigating what areas of that training should be prioritised.

### **3.3 The Research Design**

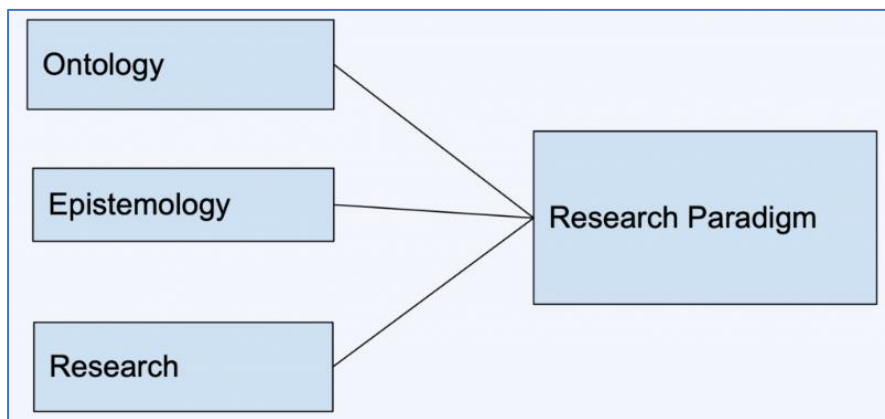
#### *3.3.1. Research Paradigm*

In research, the term paradigm, coined by Thomas Khun (1970), was described as the disruption of science or tradition due to revolutions or radical cries that questioned the way things are seen,

hence encouraging the exploration of new models and ideas (Kuhn, 1970). McNiff (2013) simplifies paradigm further by explaining it as a set of attitudes and ideas that inform research.

According to Rehmen and Alharthi, (2016), each research paradigm considered will provide its own ontological view or reality, its own epistemological knowledge, a methodology that guides the research and an understanding of the methods chosen (Rehmen and Alharthi, 2016).

**Figure 3.1. Overview of what makes up the research paradigm.**



Source Abbadia, 2022.

Stage and Manning (2016) proposes that as a researcher contemplates their methodological journey, they must first determine the paradigm in which their thinking falls. Denscombe (2007) clarifies that there is no one right path to take, and for that purpose, the question asked should underpin the paradigm chosen (Stage and Manning, 2016). This is backed up by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), who argue that the methodological approach selected must be directly linked to the research question being examined, which in the case of this study is; 'What elements of Early Years Management training should be prioritised to ensure the workforce is professionally led.' From the onset, this research piece has been concerned with understanding what drives practice for managers in ELC services at a macro level while also understanding the manager's perspective of their role at a micro level. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was chosen as it would illuminate the findings and expose a broader, more nuanced investigation that might not have been possible using just one particular method (Bergin, 2018).

Deanscombe (2007) states that pragmatism can be commonly viewed as the philosophical partner that combines the two main research paradigms; positivism and interpretivism. According to Creswell and Creswell (2014), a positivist researcher engages in value-free research by using quantitative methods such as statistical data gathering, hence suggesting that positivism is an approach that implies knowledge is objective and can only be acquired through experiment and factual observation (Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, 2021). In contrast, Interpretive research is qualitative by nature and is rooted in methods that seek to explore, comprehend, and describe the realities experienced by participants (Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, 2021). Williams (2007) explains interpretivism further as an approach that believes scientific methods are incompatible when studying people, reasoning that people's actions have motivations, attitudes and meaning. Pragmatism, on the other hand, combines the fundamental principles of both positivism and interpretivism, creating a paradigm that, rather than opposing each other, can be utilised to complement both approaches (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

As mentioned above, this research study will be guided by a pragmatism philosophy as it allows the researcher to gather both statistical data and the perspectives of ELC managers. The aim is to gather extensive amounts of data that will illuminate the areas of training managers believe may be necessary for their role. Additionally, the researcher also wants to gain perspective on the day-to-day barriers managers are experiencing that might currently be hindering their professional success.

### *3.3.2 Methodological Approach*

Having a clear '*methodology provides a piece of research with its philosophy*' Almalki (2016, p 290). Deanscombe (2007) backs this by indicating that a good piece of research cannot be achieved slavishly; instead, the researcher must develop their methodology by making strategic decisions about the approach they choose. Initially, at the proposal stages of this study, the researcher had envisioned undertaking a solely qualitative approach as they wanted to gauge the depth of the

perspectives of the participants and their daily role in management. However, once embarking on the initial research, the researcher discovered that a study about the perspectives of the manager's role had been investigated on a very small scale. For this purpose, the researcher felt it would be beneficial to explore if the social realities and points of view initiated from the small-scale studies would strengthen the findings that the researcher required by conducting a larger-scale questionnaire that led opportunity to capture not only the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014) but also the complexities of the training that may be required in an objectively quantitative capacity (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). Hence, leading the researcher to choose a mixed-method pragmatic approach.

### **3.4 Research Method**

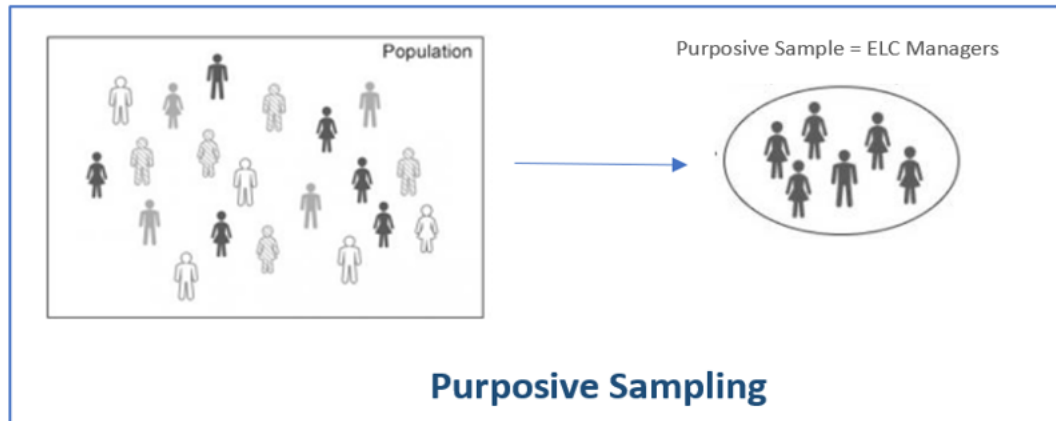
#### *3.4.1. Sampling procedure*

Sampling is a fundamental aspect of every investigative study (Flick, 2007), and should, according to Cohen et al., (2018), take place at the introductory stage of the research to help define the population of focus. Saunders (2009) states that it is entirely impractical to include every member of the population, so for that reason, the researcher must identify participants based on the relateness of the questions being asked.

Probability and non-probability sampling would be two of the main techniques used to identify a research sample; however, as probability sampling involves random sampling, it would not be sufficient. The researcher is looking specifically for managers that work in ELC services. Therefore, a non-probability approach was adopted. Aligning with this is the use of purposive sampling. Bryman (2016) explains purposive sampling as a process where the researcher always keeps the goal of the research in mind while seeking potential participants. Pobal (2022a) reported that there are 3,574 ELC staff that work as managers in the ELC sector, representing only 20% of the sector. As this study aims to understand what elements of management training should

be prioritised, it is imperative that the researcher purposefully seeks that data from the specific group in the know, i.e. ELC managers (Kumar, 2014).

**Figure 3.2. Purposive Sampling Procedure**



Source: British Research Methodology, 2022

### 3.4.2. Piloting

Agreeing with Malmqvist *et al.*, (2019) the researcher felt it was essential to consider piloting the questionnaire. As mentioned above, the sample population of managers chosen only makes up 20% of all ELC services in Ireland, so with such confined numbers, the researcher did not want to risk any ambiguous questions or layout issues that could cause problems at later stages in the research process. Due to this, the researcher chose a small group of five current colleagues that used to work as managers in the sector and requested they carry out a practice run of the questionnaire before it went to the non-probable sample. Once the pilot was completed, the researcher arranged a verbal question-and-answer session to take feedback. The only suggestion made was to swap when the researcher was asking participants about their understanding of each management role, it was suggested that by asking this question before the listed roles question, it would encourage the participants to consider their current knowledge on the topic a little further, the researcher approved of this logic. Agreeing with Bell (2005), by following up the pilot with a

feedback session, the researcher could make any necessary improvements to ensure the success of the final questionnaire before disseminating it.

### *3.4.3. Participant Selection and Collection*

To engage the participants and request them to participate, the researcher reached out through online platforms requesting ELC Owners, managers and supervisors to partake in a 10-minute survey. To achieve this, the researcher targeted online forums that showed activity from leading professionals in the sector. In conjunction, to ensure the research population was reached across the entire Island of Ireland, the researcher searched and disseminated the survey to any ELC services found that shared their email address publicly.

As it was decided that a single questionnaire would be the only choice of data collection for this study, the researcher took on a similar thinking to Deanscombe (2003), whose stance of "*Big is Beautiful*" is practised when conducting research through a survey. Deanscombe's (2003) perception is based on the thinking that the more cases that are covered, the less the likelihood of the result being biased, hence meaning that the greater the representation of the cluster being studied allows for amplified confidence in the generalisation of the conclusions from the sample participants (Deanscombe, 2003). For this purpose, the researcher aimed high and achieved an accomplishment rate of 304 completed questionnaires, supplying plentiful data to analyse.

### *3.4.4. Data Method Design*

The data was collected through a mixed-method approach in the form of a comprehensive self-completion questionnaire through google forms. The questionnaire was compiled of both quantitative and qualitative questions to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gather not only percentage and numerical data but also an open-ended narrative aspect.

There are many advantages to using a survey for research. Firstly, the data that is produced is based on real-world surveillance; secondly, there is an allowance for extensive geographical and inclusive coverage; and finally, it provides quantitative amounts of data without much strenuous expectation on the participants (Deanscombe, 2003).

As mentioned above, the online platform chosen for dissemination was Google forms. The online approach is both cost effective and also offers complete anonymity allowing the researcher to gather standardised information (Kabir, 2016). The questionnaire comprised of forty questions, using a variety of question types, including single choice, multiple choice, Likert Scale and open-ended. Agreeing with Rowley (2014), the researcher felt it was essential to limit the variety of options to avoid confusion when answering. The researcher was also conscious that the questionnaire was robust in quantity and, for this purpose, broke the questionnaire into four sections;

- **Section 1.** - Background information - to facilitate the researcher in gauging an insight into the manager's length of time in the sector and the version of business they operate.
- **Section 2.** - Qualifications – to understand the level of qualified early years training the managers have received.
- **Section 3.** - Management role – to gain perspective of the various parts of the role that managers are prominently practising and to provide insight into the level of understanding managers currently have in these areas.
- **Section 4.** - Future training – to gauge an understanding of what areas of management managers feel should be prioritised in the future and how they feel that training should be delivered.

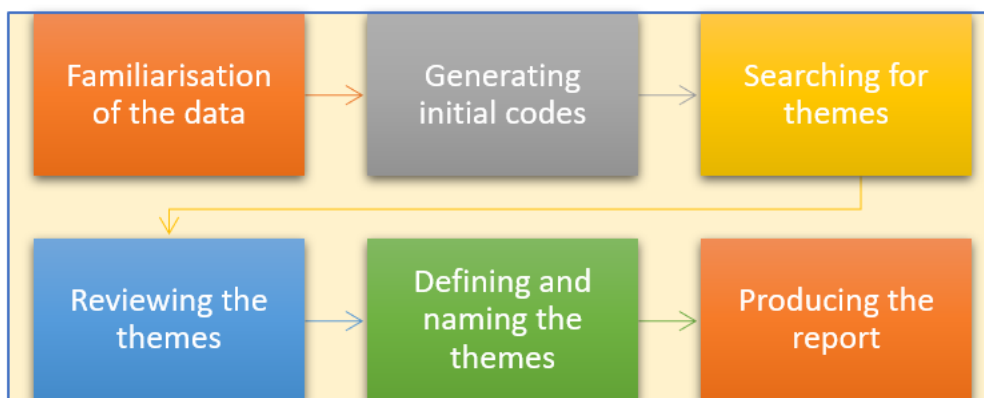
When grouping the questions into four sections, the researcher followed the format devised by Burgess (2001) and ensured that each section was “*logically sequenced*”, and each question was clustered into the sections that correlated with the segment of information being sought.

### 3.4.5. Data Analysis

Patton (2002) explains data analysis as the process that transforms the data collected into the findings. The procedure requires the researcher to clean and prepare the data for coding and thematic analysis (Kumar, 2016), which will, in turn, reduce the amount of data. Once achieved, the researcher can categorise the findings into groups and begin analysing them to identify key trends.

In this study, the researcher thematically analysed the data by following Braun and Clarke's (2006, cited in Clarke and Braun, 2015) Six-Step Thematic Analysis to create the story being told.

**Figure 3. 3. Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Step Thematic Analysis**



Source: Bachelor Print, 2022

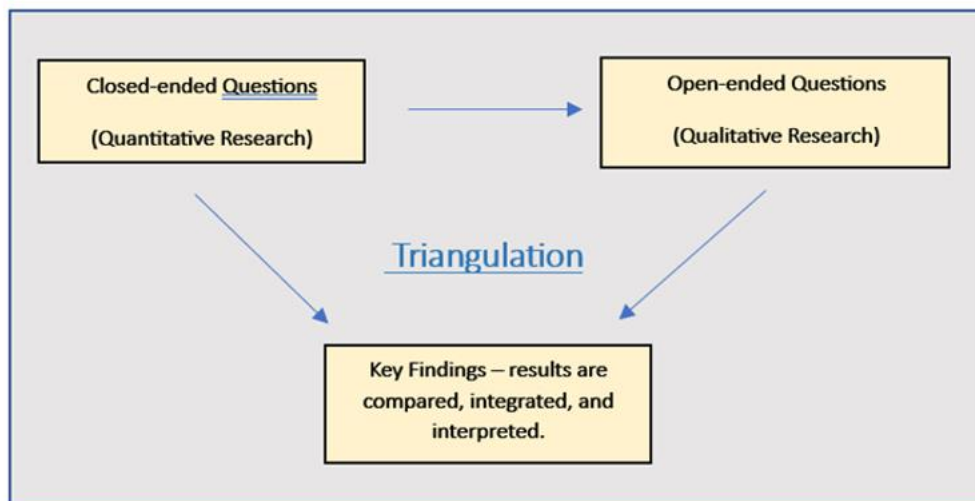
As highlighted in the collection section above, the researcher gathered 304 responses. Once the questionnaire was closed off, the researcher began setting out the figure data and transcribing the qualitative data to become familiar with it, aiming to capture something significant about the data that was relative to the research question (Clarke and Clarke, 2015). Then the coding began, reviewing, reading and rereading the responses helped to refine and consolidate the findings (Creswell, 2014). Upon review, themes similar to the headings in the literature review began to emerge. These themes fell under managers' main grouped responsibilities in their daily roles.

Once the researchers began to connect the objectives and the trends, the themes were defined, allowing the findings to emerge.

### **3.5. Reliability and Validity**

The term validity refers to how well the research methods, design, findings, and conclusions describe the phenomenon being studied (Bush, 2012). One way to assure validity is to follow a process known as triangulation, which according to Creswell and Miller (2000) is associated with the merging of different sources of information gathered. In this study, the researcher achieved this by providing opportunities (displayed in Figure 3.4.), for a larger number of participants to share their perspectives in both qualitative and quantitative ways through the questions asked, which were then positioned in the findings that were deliberated in the literature reviewed in chapter two of the study.

***Figure 3.4. Triangulation of research data***



Source: Atif et al.,2013

While triangulation can support the validity of the study, the researcher must still be conscious of research reliability (Atif et al, 2013). According to Bush (2012) personal bias affects research

reliability, invalidating the results of the study. For this purpose, the researcher remained conscious of personal bias and worked at reliably alleviating any throughout the journey. The researcher has made it clear that practical experience for many years in the field of ELC is the reason for interest in the hypothesis chosen. It is inevitable that subjectivity will potentially impact the study; nonetheless, through careful selection of the questions asked and the process followed when interpreting the findings, the researcher tried to consistently reduce such personal bias.

### **3.6. Limitations of Research**

Collis and Hussey (2009) describe the limitations in research as deficiencies or weaknesses. However, it is fair to suggest that there will always be some limitations with any research approach. Deanscombe (2007) suggests that the potential to strengthen further studies is possible if weaknesses are evaluated. Having said that, to try and limit the weaknesses in this study, the researcher used the tools of both quality and quantity. Although integrating both into a mixed method approach can provide insightful data, there are still potential limits, and it is essential to note that these restrictions still may affect the validity, dependability, and general calibre of the research findings.

For example, some of the questions presented were purely close-ended. Questions such as these can lead to a limited outcome in the findings. Other questions provided the participants with an opportunity to explain the reason for their answers; although this provided an opening to gain a deeper perspective of the participant's values and beliefs, not everyone answered them, hence leading to a shortage of responses.

The restriction of time was another limitation; analysing a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data can be very time-consuming and can sometimes require specialist software and or training (Granello et al., 2014). Learning how to use the software to compare comprehensive findings

required extensive hours of the researcher's time, being aware that without sufficient care, there was a chance of losing crucial details or misinterpreting the data, which in turn could jeopardise the reliability of the findings (Ward *et al.*, 2014).

Finally, the researcher was also aware of the burden on participants to complete a lengthy questionnaire. By requesting too many text-heavy responses, the participants could begin to experience response fatigue (Collis and Hussey, 2009), which, according to Silverman (2017) could lead to some of the information not being reported. For this purpose, the researcher limited the number of open-ended questions to very few, leaving less chance for in-depth perspectives to unfold.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

Performing research with human beings implies respecting the dignity and liberty of participants, which is essential to ensuring the honesty and quality of this research paper (Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Furthermore, according to Deanscombe (2007), legislation now explicitly protects the public from the collection and use of data for improper purposes, which can impact how researchers do their research. Thereby, this research study will be directed by Griffith College's Policy and Standards on Research Ethics and supervised by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Agreeing with Griffith's ethical standards, several ethical implications require consideration, one of the foremost being informed consent. Hollway & Jefferson (2000) state that consent to participate in a research study must be seen as more than just a conscious decision and instead is a constant awareness that permeates all interactions. Given that, all participants were supplied with an information sheet outlining what was expected of them, enabling them to decide whether or not they would like to consent to the study (Appendix1).

In conjunction with this, the right to withdraw at any time and data protection were also considered. Collis and Hussey (2009) outline that it is unethical to force or coerce participants to

take part in the study; adhering to this, the researcher ensured that no questions were locked for answering, and participants could choose to skip questions or stop taking part at any stage. The attached information sheet also made known this practice (Appendix 1).

To ensure data protection was not breached, no personal information was required before consenting to participate. With no requirement for personal information, anonymity and confidentiality were also afforded. Concurring with Bryman (2016), the researcher agrees that an anonymous online questionnaire approach makes it simpler to present results while assuring there is no confidentiality breach. It also allows for open and honest feedback and assures the participant that no information that they input can be identifiable. With that said, the dignity of the participants was also preserved. Careful consideration was given when forming the questions asked, as the researcher aimed never to humiliate or embarrass any of the participants on their lack of understanding or knowledge of the questions being asked. According to Winifred (2012), it is vital that the researcher reduces any of these ethical implications by maintaining sensitivity and transparency throughout.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the justification for using a mixed-method approach to gather information to support this study. As mentioned, the study's main objective is to identify what elements of early years management training should be prioritised to ensure the workforce is professionally led. To support this aim, the researcher delved into the fundamental elements of the research design chosen. The sampling approach was reviewed, and the justification for choosing a specific cohort of participants was explained. Further to this, the researcher explored the potential challenges related to reliability. Finally, ethical considerations were addressed, along with acknowledging what limitations can arise when utilising pragmatism as the chosen paradigm. The next chapter aims to provide the key findings available from the data collected and analysed within this study.

## Chapter 4. Findings

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the mixed-method questionnaire carried out that was targeted at managers working in the Early Learning and Care sector. According to Bell (2005), analysing the data gathered forms a significant portion of any research process and must be thoroughly reviewed in order to make logic of the findings. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this data was obtained using a small variety of question types, including single choice, multiple choice, Likert Scale and open-ended questions. To present the findings, the researcher will observe the four main sections into which the questionnaire is broken.

- Background Information
- Qualifications
- The Management Role
- Future Training

The findings will be presented using graphs, charts, tables and texts and will show the responses obtained from 304 participants in total. Not all participants answered every question; for this purpose, the number of responses per question obtained will also be displayed.

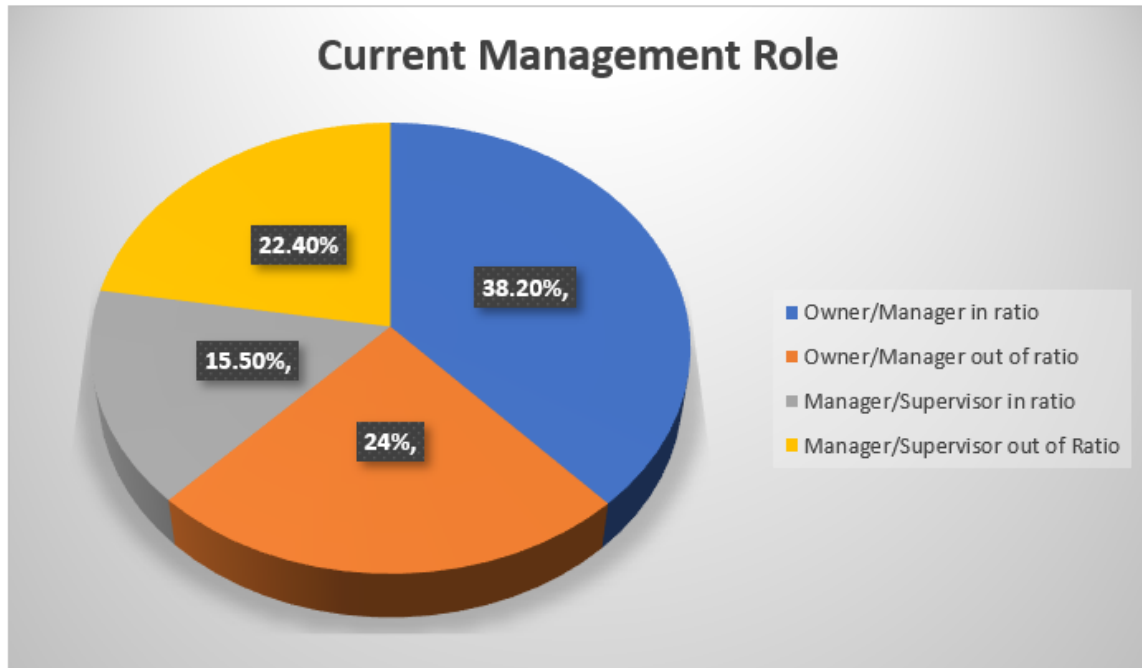
Once exposed, the data will be discussed further in Chapter Five using a series of themes which are positioned in and deliberated against the backdrop of questions asked in Chapter One and then the reviewed literature in Chapter Two.

## 4.2. Background Information

### 4.2.1 Question One

Please select your current management role.

304 Responses



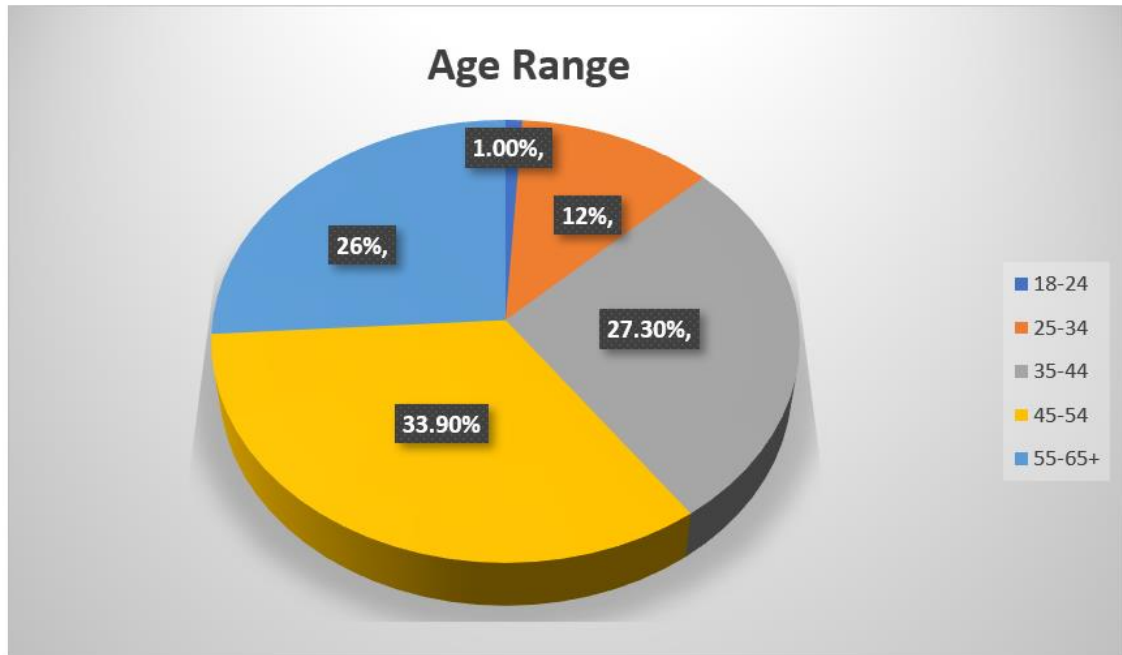
**Figure 4.1 – Current Management Role**

There was a relatively diverse split among the current management role of the participants. Of 304 responses, 32.2% of participants work as owner/managers in ratio and 24% work as Owner/Managers out of ratio. Also displayed is 15.5% of participants who work as Managers/Supervisors in ratio with the children and 22.4% of Managers/Supervisors out of ratio that do not own the businesses yet have a role in management within the ELC service.

#### 4.2.2 Question Two

What is your age range?

304 Responses



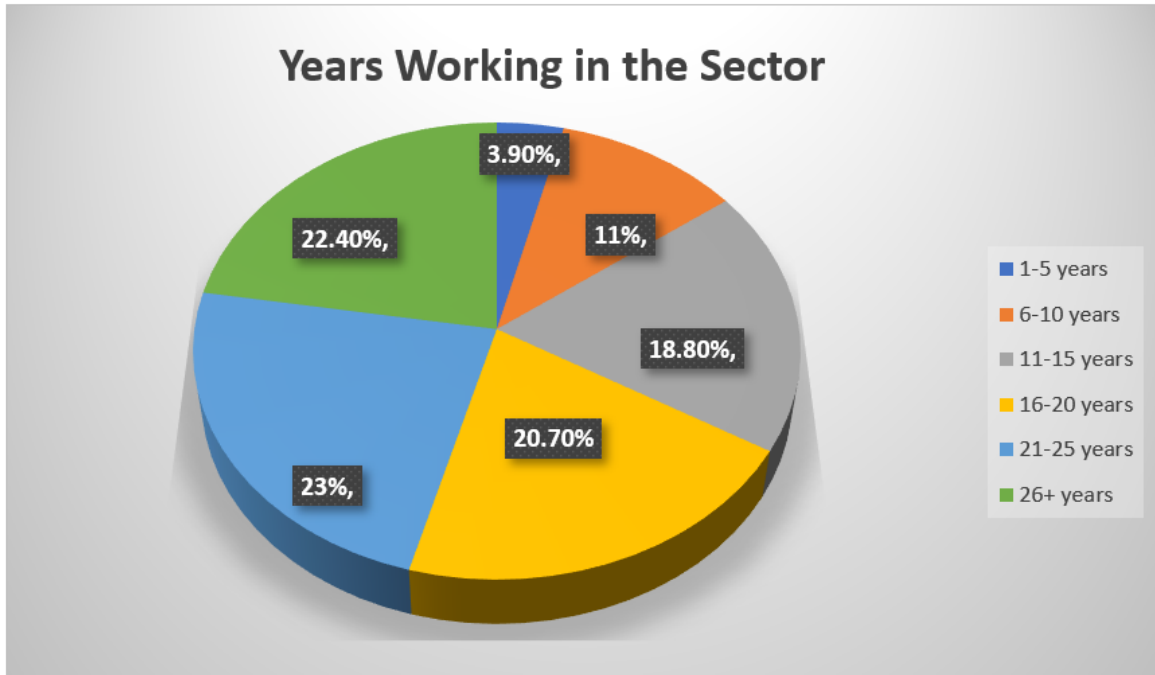
**Figure 4.2 – Age range of participants.**

The age range of participants varied, with one-third 33.9% (103) of participants being in the 45-54 age bracket and just below that is the 35-44 age bracket which shows a response rate 27.3% (83), very close to this is the 55-65+ age bracket showing a response rate of 26% (79) of participants, hence meaning that only 13% of participants in total that answered the questionnaire were below the age of 35 years.

### 4.2.3 Question Three

How many years have you worked in the Early Learning and Care sector?

304 Responses



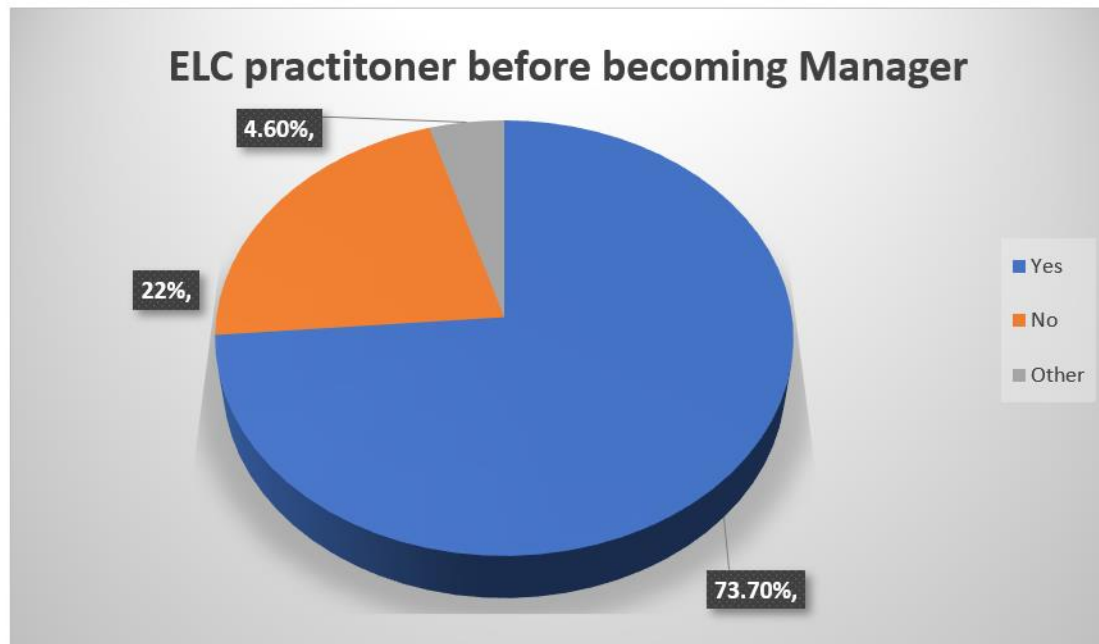
**Figure 4.3. - Years Working in the Sector.**

As presented above, 23% of participants have worked in the sector for 21-25 years, 22.4% have over 26 years of experience and 20.7% have worked in the sector for 16 -20 years. These findings highlight that an above-average amount of 66.1% of participants have been working in the ELC sector for over 15 years, which, as emphasised in the literature presented in chapter two, has been the decade and a half that has experienced the most change. The remaining 33.9% comprise of 18.8% of participants in the 11–15-year category, 11% in the 6–10-year category and only 3.9% of participants are in the 1-5 years bracket.

#### 4.2.4. Question Four

Did you work as an Early Learning and Care practitioner before becoming a manager?

304 Responses



**Figure 4.4 - ELC practitioner before becoming a manager.**

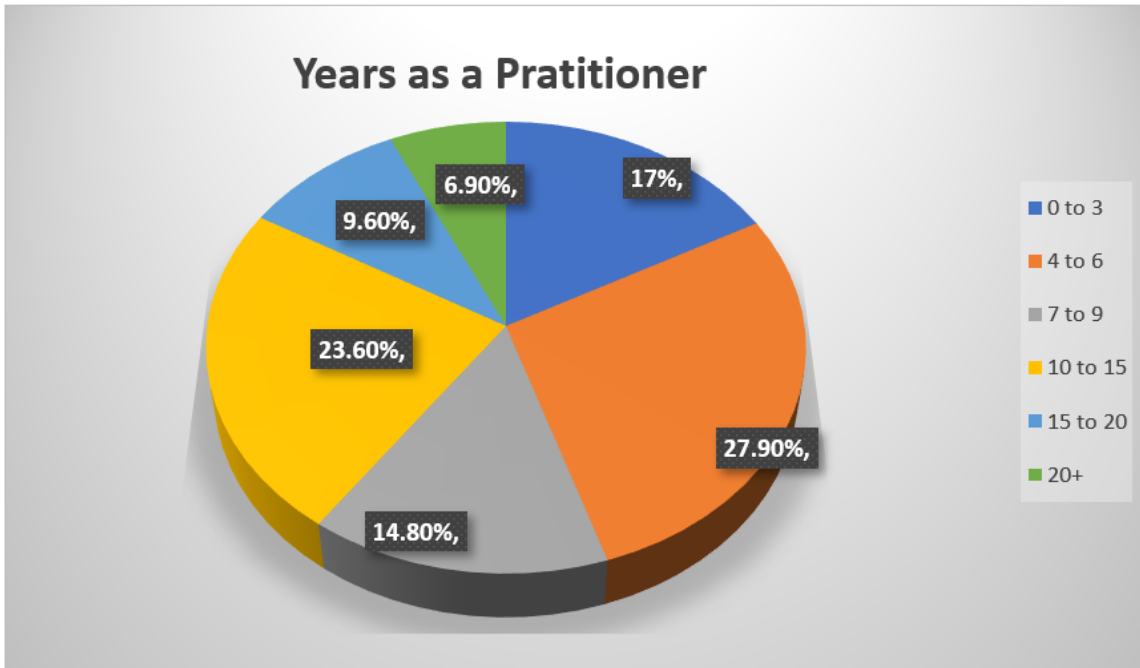
A total of 73.7% of participants worked as ELC practitioners prior to their role in management. However, 22% obtained the role without having a background in ELC. A further comparison here shows that from the data gathered in Question 4.3.2. *I currently hold a qualification in*. 19% of the 22% of the participants that answered no to this question (question 4), had obtained a business management qualification to support them in obtaining an ELC management role.

Of the 4.6% that answered others, they all listed roles working directly with children outside of the ELC practitioner role. Roles listed included: childminding, primary school teaching, Special Needs Assistant and School Age Childcare professionals.

#### 4.2.5. Question Five

If answered yes to the previous question, how many years were you working as an ELC practitioner?

229 Responses



**Figure 4.5. – Years as a Practitioner Before Becoming a manager.**

The highest percentage of participants that worked as practitioners before becoming managers was in the 4 to 6-year bracket with 27.9%. Next to this was the 10 to 15-year bracket that showed 23% of participants working as practitioners before obtaining their management role.

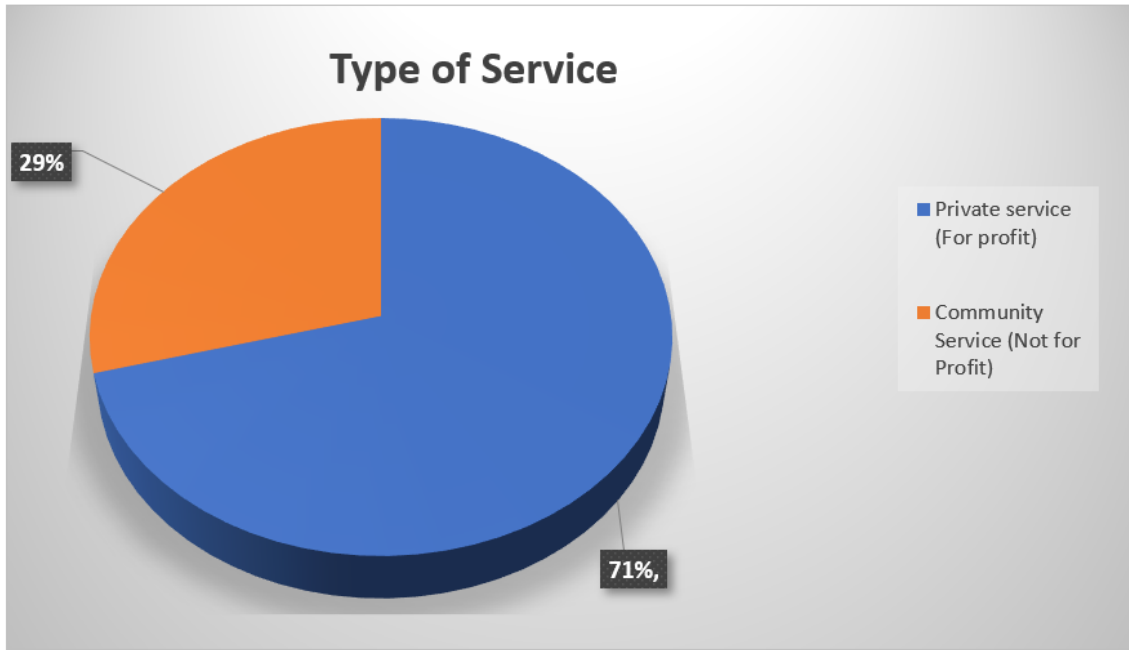
Following from this is the 0–3-year category, with 17% becoming managers; interestingly a further comparison shows that of that 17%, 75% of them are Owner/Managers hence suggesting this cohort opened their businesses very soon after joining the sector.

Remaining for highlighting is the 7–9-year category which is 14.8%, the 15–20-year category coming in at 9.6% and the 20+ years at 6.9%.

#### 4.2.6. Question Six

What type of ELC service do you supervise?

302 Responses



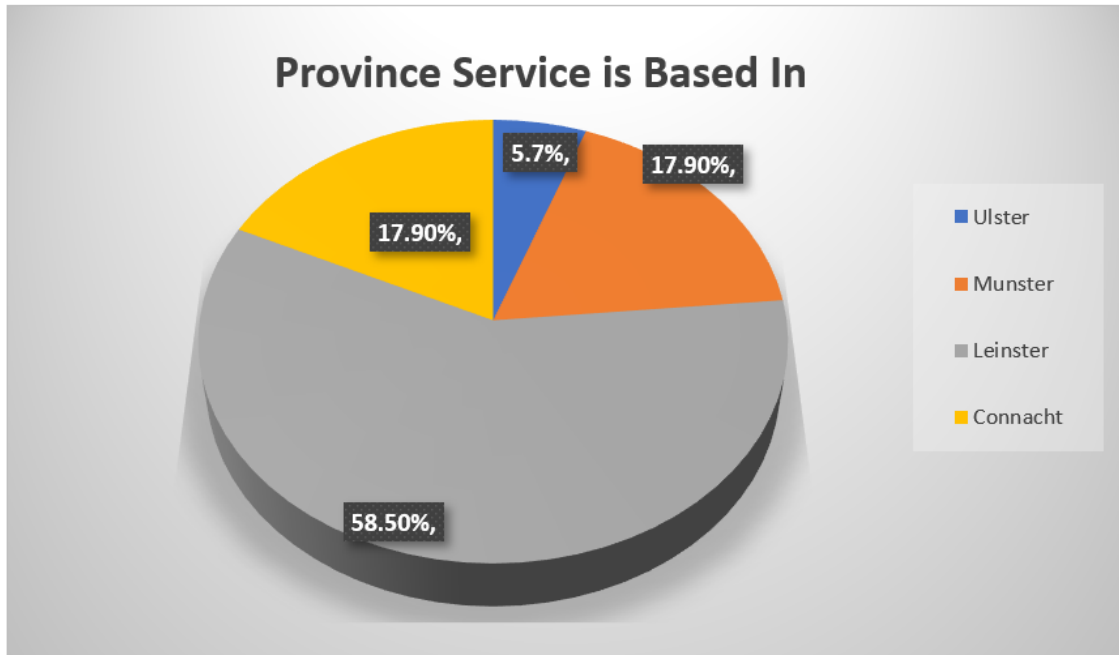
**Figure 4.6 – Type of ELC service.**

Of the 302 responses received, 71% of participants that answered operate private, for-profit businesses, with only 29% operating Community services funded through the not-for-profit sector.

#### 4.2.7. Question Seven

What province is your Early Learning and Care service based in?

301 Responses



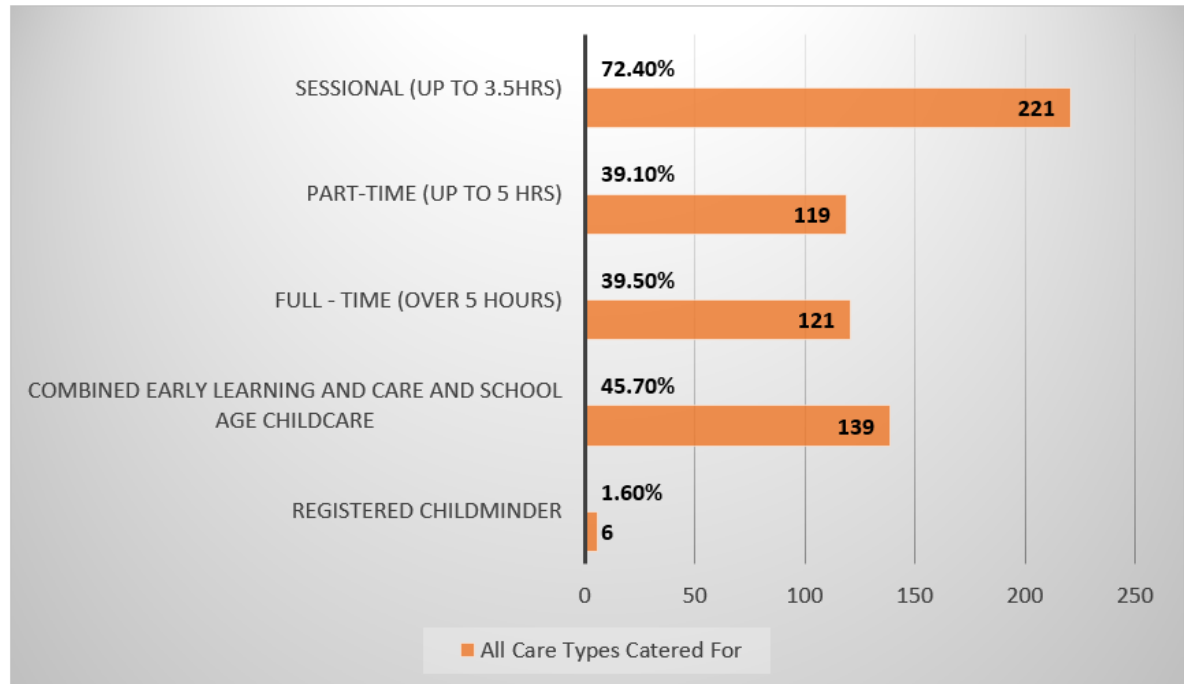
**Figure 4.7. – Province Service is Based in.**

The questionnaire distribution reached a national widespread response; however, a majority of responses came from the Leinster area, with a response rate of 58.5% being from this geographical area. There was an equal response rate of 17.9% from both Munster and Connacht and only a 5.7% response rate from the Ulster province.

#### 4.2.8. Question Eight

Please select all care types your Early Learning and Care service caters for?

304 Responses



**Figure 4.8. – All Care Types Catered For**

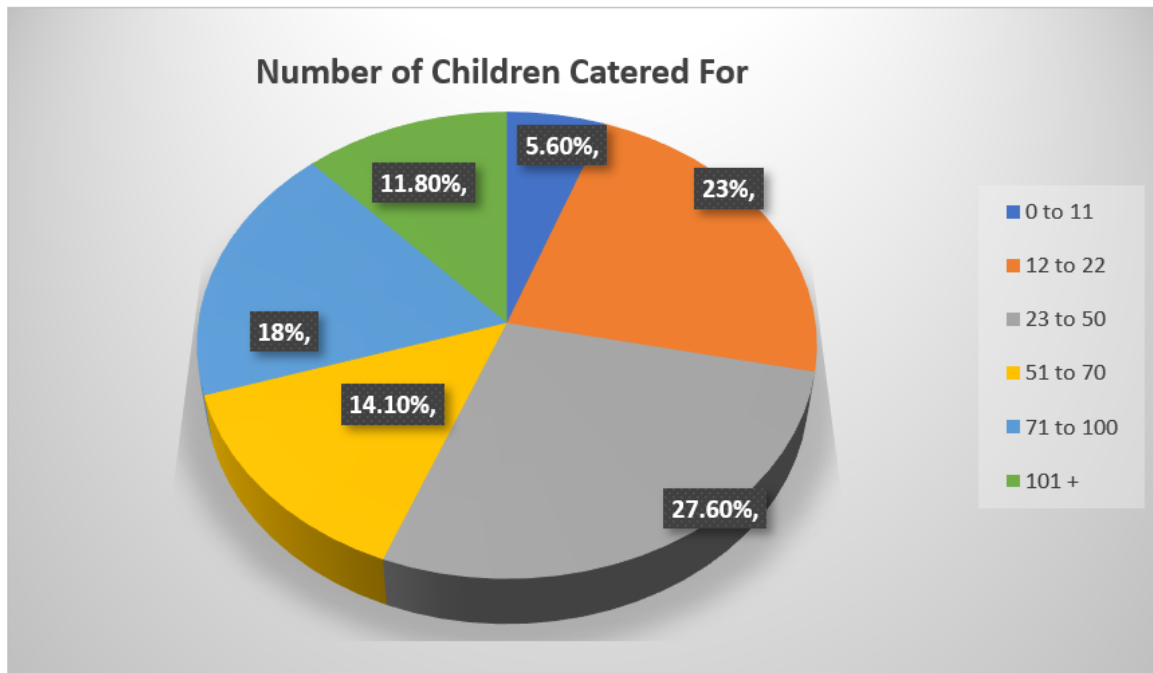
A large majority of 72.4% of services offer a 3.5-hour sessional programme. Further comparison on question 4.4.5 shows that by offering this service, all of this cohort are signed up to the ECCE free preschool year government scheme, further indicating that they are all responsible for fund management.

To expand, 39.1% of participants cater for part-time and 39.5% for full-time care. 45.4% cater for a combination of ELC and SAC children and only 1.6% of participants offer registered childminding services.

#### 4.2.9. Question Nine

How many children does your Early Learning and Care service cater for?

304 Responses



**Figure 4.9 – Number of Children Catered For**

The responses showed a relatively unfluctuating mix of the number of children being catered for in the services within each cohort. As shown in the graph above, the largest category of children being catered for is in the 23 – 50 brackets; following this is the 12 – 20 bracket with 23%.

At 18% is the 71 – 100 bracket, and just behind that again is the 51 – 70 bracket at 14.1%.

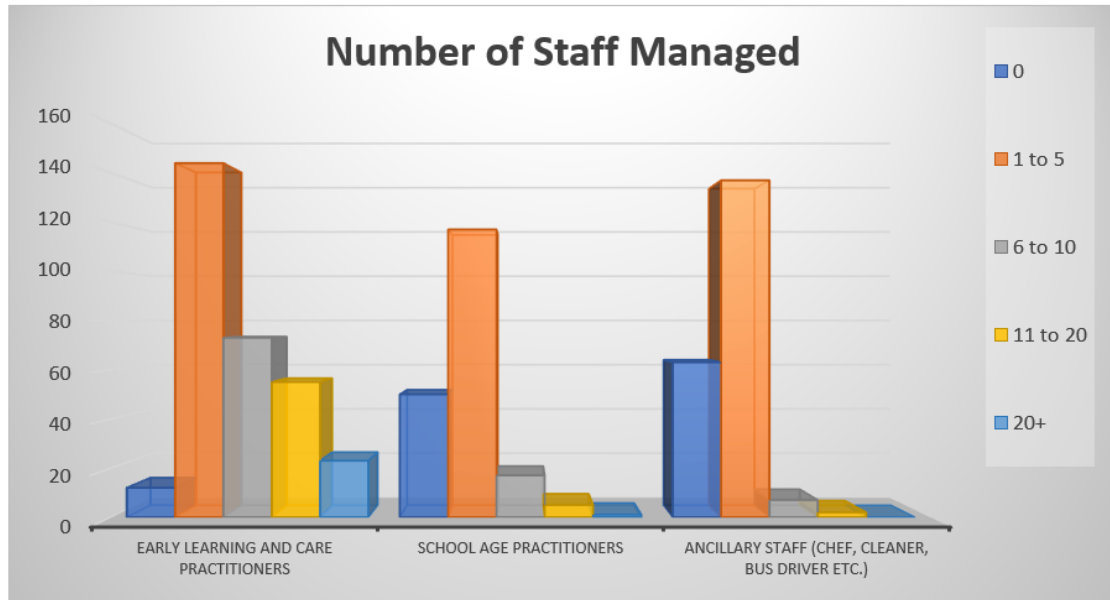
11.8% of participants cater for 101 + children; the smallest cohort of 5.6% came in from the 0 – 11 children catered-for bracket.

These findings show a colourful mix of service capacity, highlighting different levels of responsibilities among the participants, depending on the number of children they are accountable for.

#### 4.2.10. Question Ten

How many staff within each role do you manage?

301 Responses



**Figure 4.10. Number of Staff Managed**

In the ELC practitioner section, the highest level of this cohort that the participants manage falls under the 1-5 section, with n=177 participants responsible for at least one other staff member. The second shows that n=73 participants are responsible for 6-10 ELC practitioners, and n=55 are responsible for 11-20 ELC practitioners. Notably only N=20 participants are responsible for 20+ practitioners, indicating that this cohort caters for extensive services. N=12 participants highlighted that they do not have any other staff to manage; of these 12 participants, the comparison shows that they manage services of 11 ECCE children or less, staff to child ratio allows them to operate and manage their services on their own.

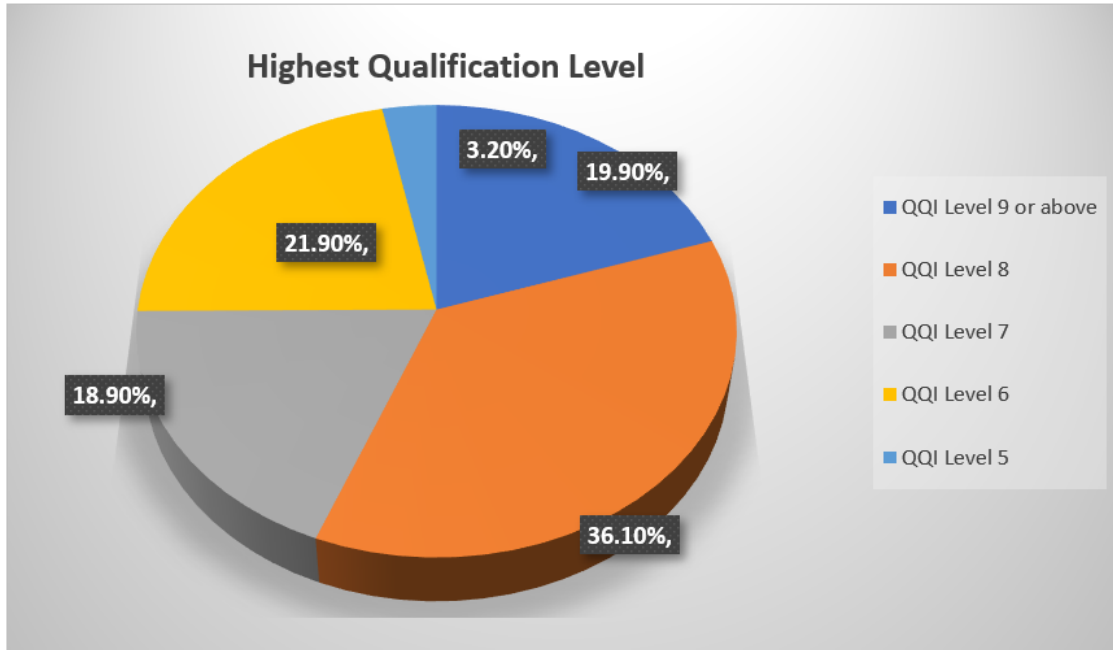
Across the other two categories of school-age practitioners and ancillary staff, it is evident from the graph above that the 1-5 staff-managed category again holds popularity. The n=0 category on both comes in marginally lower, with 50 – 63 participants highlighting they only have responsibility for ELC practitioners or no other cohort. Aside from this, the other three sections in the second two categories show that very few participants are responsible for 6 to 20+ staff in either the school-age or ancillary section.

### **4.3. Qualifications**

#### *4.3.1. Question One*

What is your highest qualification to date?

302 Responses



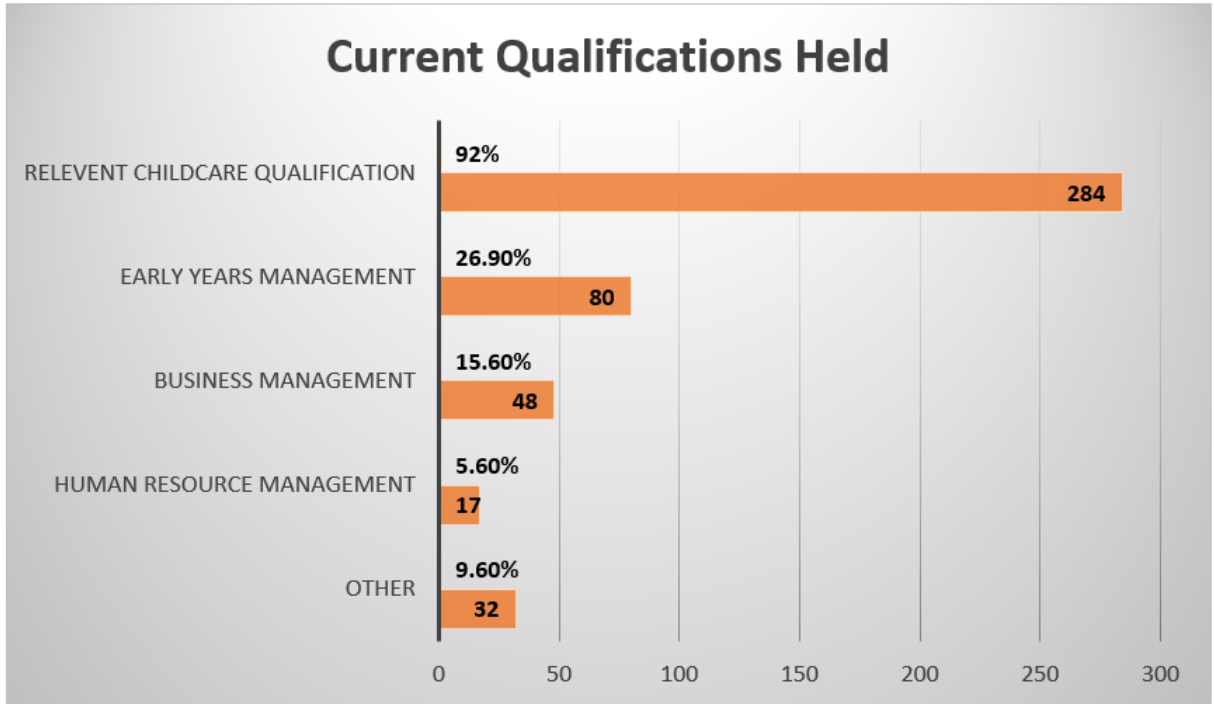
***Figure 4.11. - Highest Qualification Level***

As discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the current minimum requirement for ELC managers qualifications remains at QQI level 5; notably the data analysis indicates that 96.8% of the participants asked, hold a qualification higher than the minimum required standard for their role. While a further 19.9% have obtained a QQI level 9 and 36.1% have acquired a QQI level 8 honours degree. A further 18.9% hold a QQI Level 7, hence specifying that only 23.1% do not have a NFQ degree.

4.3.2. Question Two.

I hold Qualifications in (If more than one, please select each area)

301 Responses



**Figure 4.12. - Current Qualifications Held**

Notably, 92% of participants hold a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Education. Figure 4.12 indicates that 48.1% of the participants that answered also obtained a qualification in a version of management training, with 26.9% of that cohort practising in Early Years management specifically.

While a further 9.6% obtained qualifications in other categories, including school teaching, psychology, social care and hospitality.

### 4.3.3 Question Three

On what scale do you agree with this statement: My qualification has supported me in my role as an Early Years manager.

Responses 304



**Figure 4.13. - My Qualification has Supported Me**

As illustrated in (Figure 4.13), 33.9% of participants strongly agreed and 38.8% agreed that their previous studies have supported them in their role as a manager.

A further 18.1% felt neutral when considering this statement, and 7.6% disagreed with their qualification supporting them. Only 1.6% strongly disagreed with the statement, indicating that most participants felt supported by their studies.

#### 4.3.4. Question Four

My qualification has supported me in my role as an Early Years manager. – Please explain your answer from the above question.

The findings for this question are presented under themes and sub-headings. These were identified during the data analysis stage of this study.

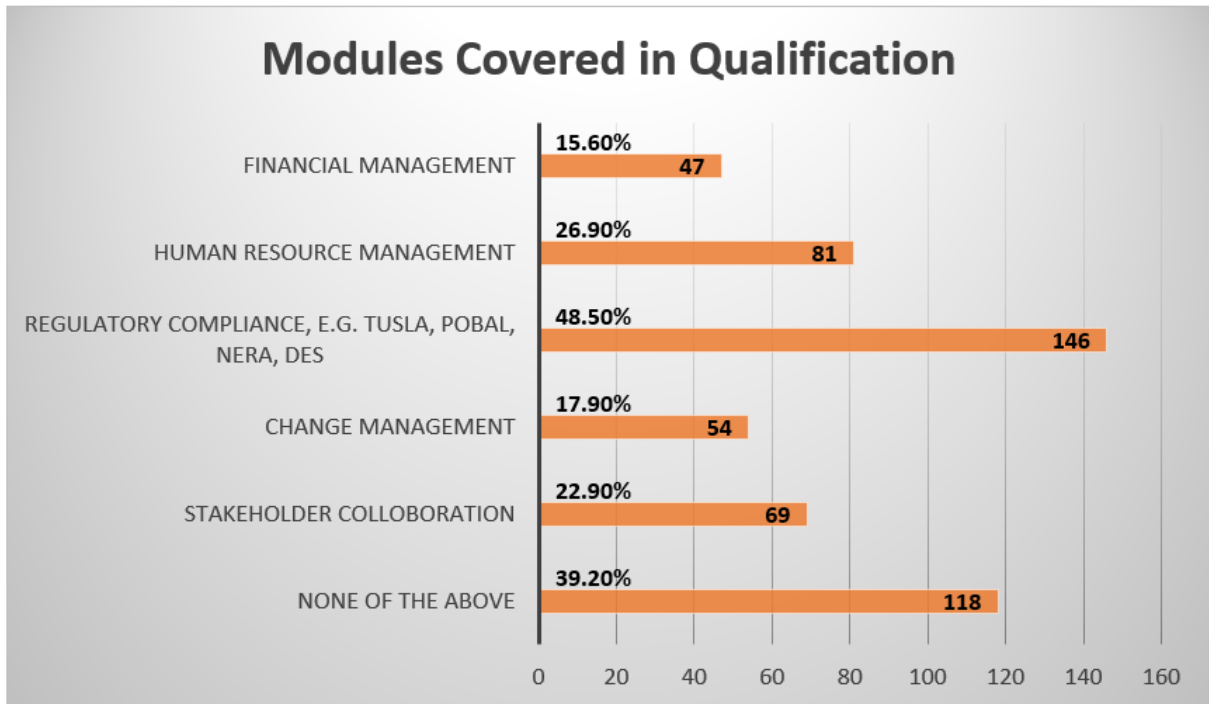
234 Responses

<b>Table 4.2 - How Qualifications Have Supported the Role</b>	
<p><b>Insufficient coverage of their management and business skills –</b> 31% of respondents felt that their ECEC qualification did not adequately prepare them for their management role.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I didn’t learn any managerial skills”</i> (Respondent 22)</li> <li>• <i>“My qualification did not cover many of the responsibilities I am tasked with on a daily basis”</i> (Respondent 288)</li> <li>• <i>“Original qualifications did not support me”</i> (Respondent 302)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Importance of practical experience -</b> 42.7% of respondents emphasised the value of hands-on experience, a number of them believed that their on-the-job experience has benefited them more than their formal qualifications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Hands-on experience has helped me more; I didn’t learn about running a business until I did a master’s in management”</i> (Respondent 110)</li> <li>• <i>“It’s more the hands-on learning g on the job work that has helped”</i> (Respondent 304)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gap between theory and practice –</b> 33% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the content of their Early Years qualifications stating that areas such as HR, financial management and the day-to-day running of an ELC service were not covered in their training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“My qualification does not support me in any HR or accounting roles”</i> (Respondent 104)</li> <li>• <i>“There were no HR, Management for finance modules in my degree”</i> (Respondent 160)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Need for additional training –</b> 19% of respondents highlighted the importance of continuous professional development in management skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Hands-on training is vital in this role”</i> (Respondent 95)</li> <li>• <i>“I would benefit from additional management training”</i> (Respondent 230)</li> <li>• <i>“Would benefit in additional management training”</i> (Respondent 302)</li> </ul>

#### 4.3.5. Question Five

My Qualification covered modules in (please select all appropriate)

Responses 301



**Figure 4.14. - Modules covered in Qualification.**

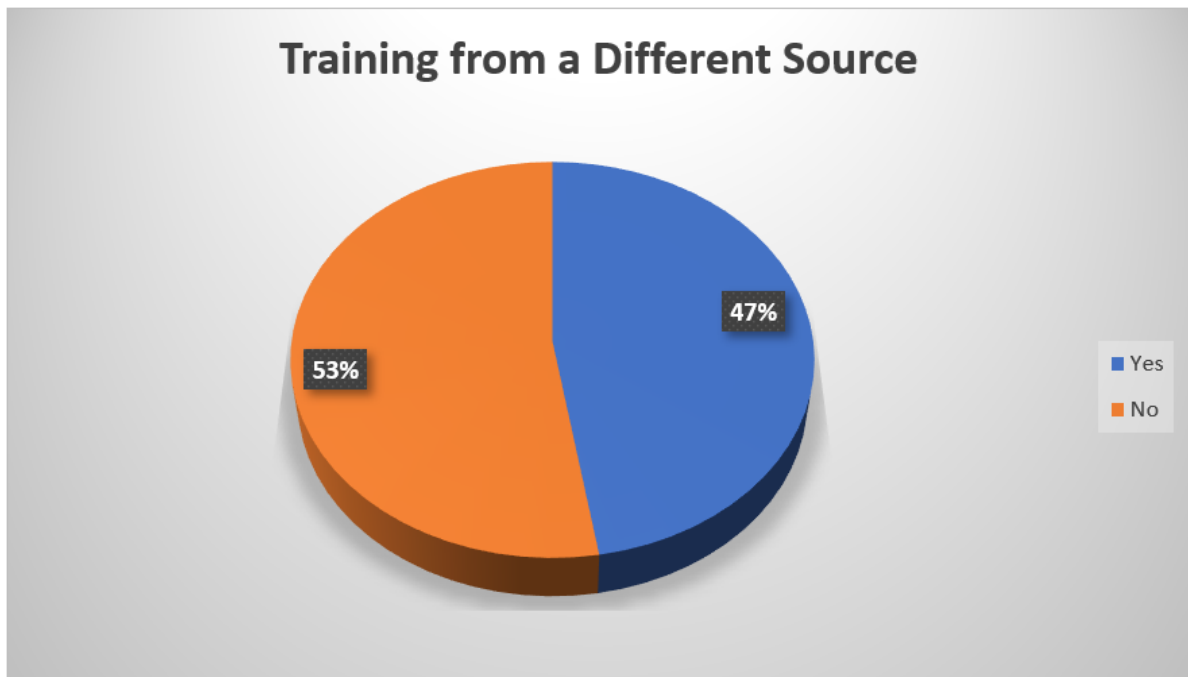
Participants were asked to select all of the areas that their relevant qualification has supported them in their Early Years management role, notably, 39.2% stated that their qualification did not cover any of the identified management areas.

The largest area supported was regulatory compliance, 48.5% of participants indicated that their qualification covered this training; however, only 26.9% covered HR management, a further 22.9% covered stakeholder collaboration, 17.9% covered change management and the smallest cohort of 15.6% covered financial management training.

#### 4.3.6. Question Six

Have you received training from another source to support you in your management role?

Responses 302



**Figure 4.15. – Training from a Different Source**

As illustrated in (Figure 4.15). 53% of participants actively partook in various continuous professional development (CPD) training courses to support their management role, whereas 47% have not partaken in any further CPD to support their role.

#### 4.3.7 Question Seven

If Yes to the Above Question, please name the relevant source.

The findings for this question are presented under themes and displayed in a table indicating the most common sources ranked from 1-7 (1 being the most used) that participants have used to upskill and support them in their role as managers. These were identified during the data analysis stage of this study.

143 Responses

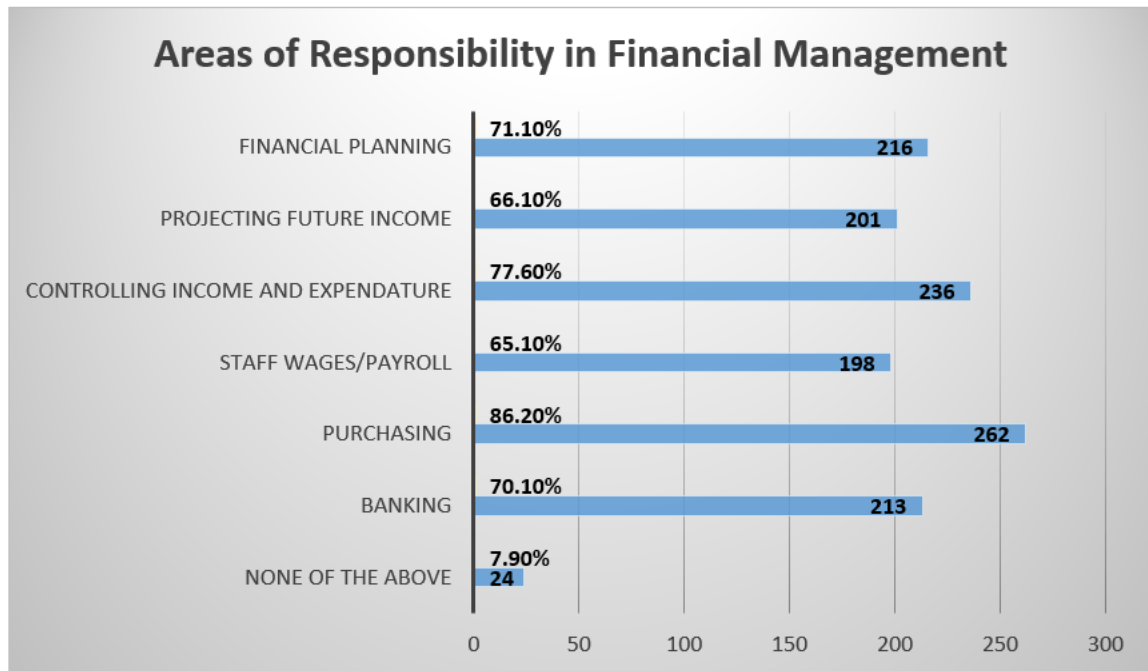
<b><i>Table 4.3 - Main areas of training sources for management support</i></b>
1. County Childcare Committees
2. HR Management and Business Development Training
3. Online Educational Institutes
4. Local Enterprises
5. Short Business Workshops
6. IT Skills/ Excel training
7. County Partnerships

#### **4.4. The Management Role**

##### *4.4.1 Question One*

Please select all areas of Financial Management you are responsible for:

Responses 304



***Figure 4.16 – Areas of Responsibility in Financial Management***

Only 7.9% of participants have no financial management responsibilities within their management role.

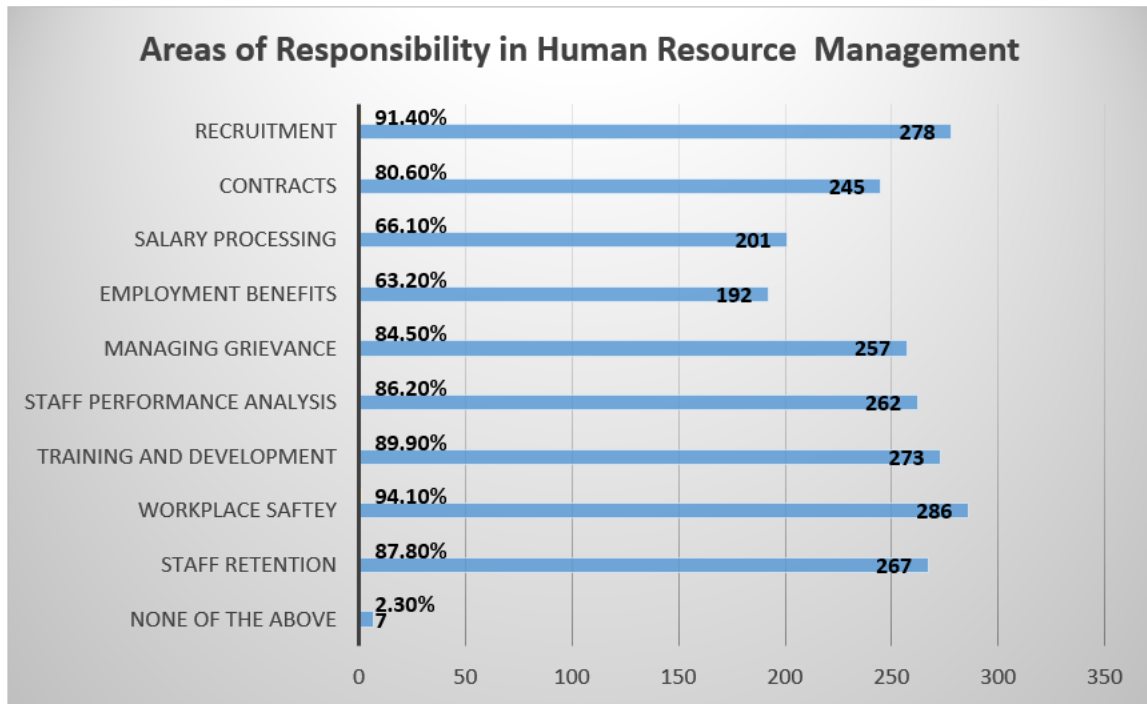
As illustrated in (Figure 4.16), 65.1% of participants are responsible for all areas of financial management and a minimum of 86.2% have at least one financial management responsibility, the most popular area being purchasing.

A further 77.6% control income and expenditure, 70.1% are responsible for banking and financial planning, 66.1% project future incomes and 65.1% manage staff wages/payroll.

#### 4.4.2 Question Two

Please select all areas of Human Resource Management you are responsible for:

Responses 304



**Figure 4.17 – Areas of Responsibility in Human Resource Management**

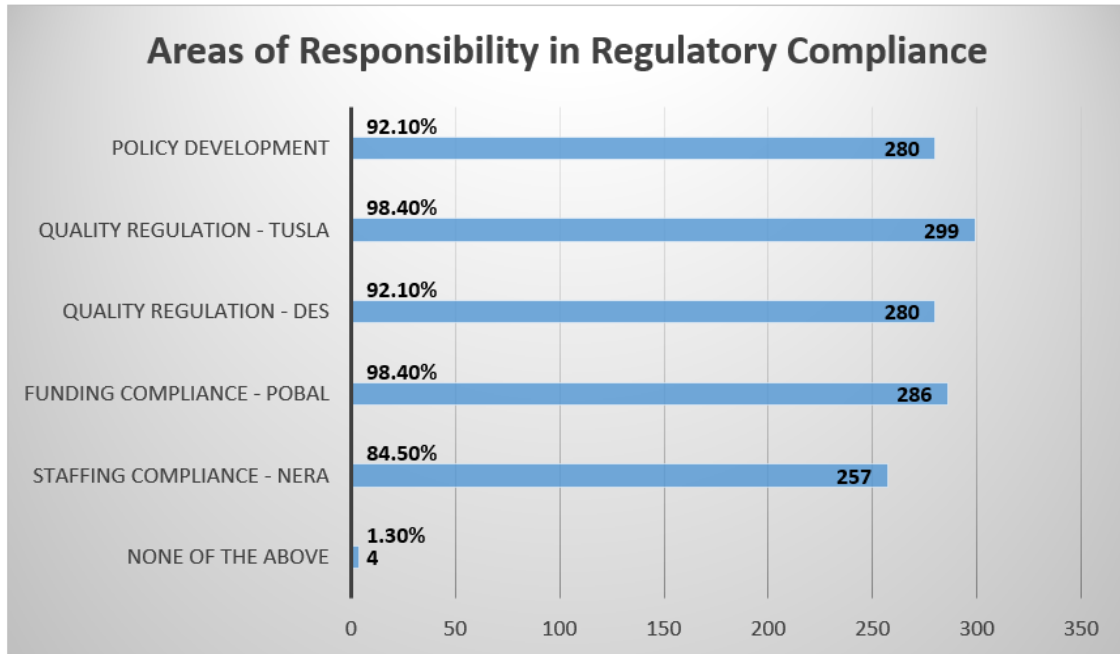
Only 2.3% of participants hold no responsibility for any areas of HR management whereas 63.2% of the cohort are responsible for all areas of HR management. From the graph above it is evident that workplace safety carries the largest level of responsibility with 94.1% holding liability in this area. Next to this at 91.4% is recruitment, all the while 89.9% are liable for training and development for their staff teams.

Aside from this, an average of 84.7% of participants preserve responsibility in the areas of staff retention, performance analysis, managing grievance, and maintaining contracts. 66.1% are responsible for salary processing and 63.2% for employment benefits.

#### 4.4.3 Question Three

Please select all areas of Regulatory Compliance you are responsible for:

Responses 304



**Figure 4.18 – Areas of Responsibility in Regulatory Compliance**

Only 1.3% of participants hold no responsibility for any areas of regulatory compliance whereas 84.5% of the cohort are responsible for all areas of management evident in regulatory compliance.

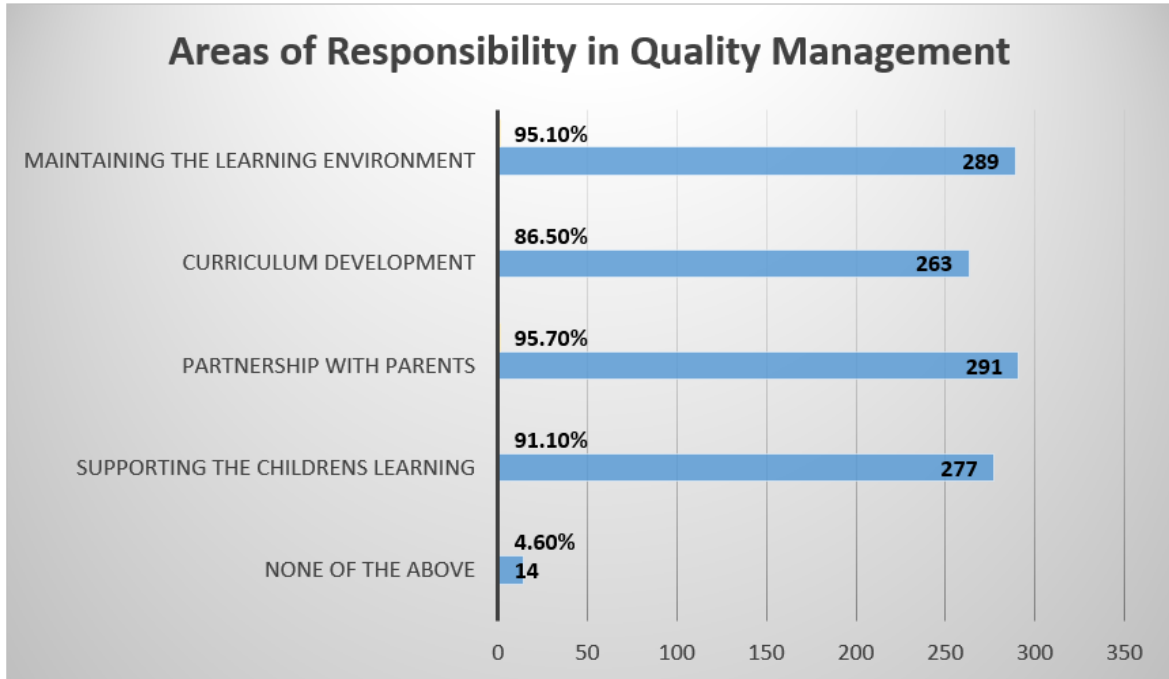
Of the participants asked, 98.4% that responded are offering and maintaining a minimum of one government scheme as they have highlighted funding compliance as a responsibility. This same cohort of 98.4% are also registered with TUSLA and hold responsibility for regulated quality practices within their services.

A further 92.1% have also indicated that they are responsible for policy development and quality monitoring under the Department of Education.

#### 4.4.4 – Question Four

Please select all areas of Quality Management you are responsible for:

Responses 304



**Figure 4.19. – Areas of Responsibility in Quality Management**

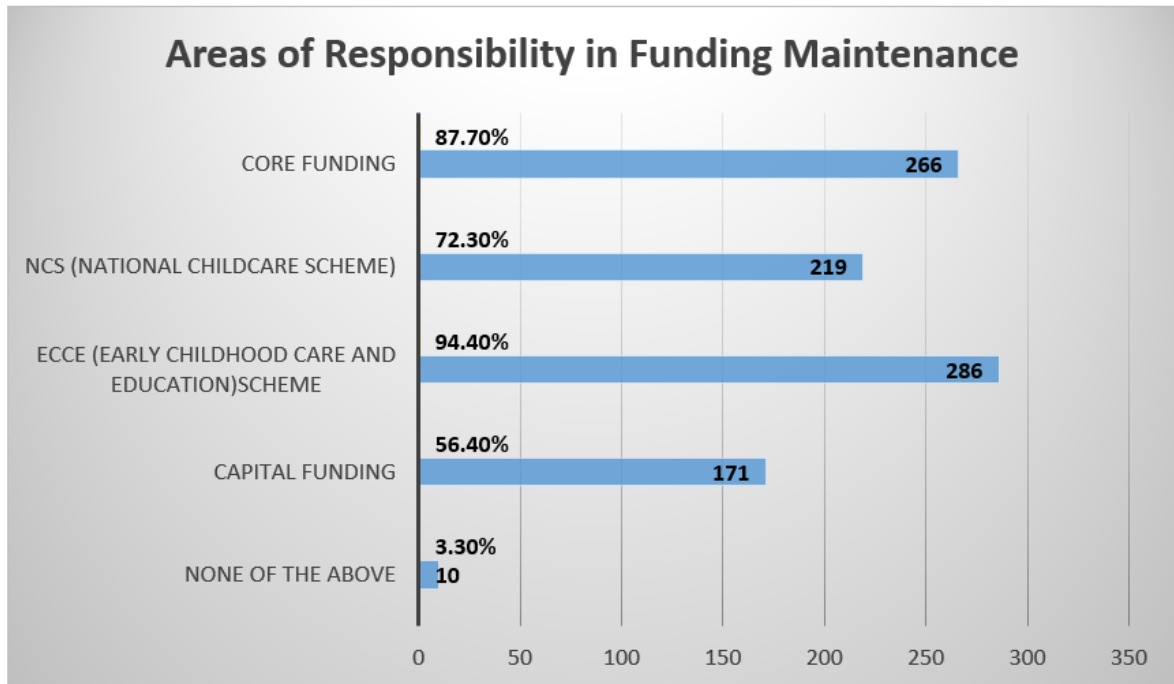
A minimum of 86.5% of respondents have responsibility in one or more areas of Early Years quality management and only 4.6% of the cohort are not required to manage the quality aspect of the service.

Of 304 participants 95.7% are responsible for actively managing partnership with parents and ensuring the learning environments are of quality standard. Aside from that, 86.5% are actively involved in supporting their teams with curriculum development.

#### 4.4.5 – Question Five

Please select all funding/scheme programme applications you are responsible for:

Responses 304



**Figure 4.20. – Areas of Responsibility in Funding Maintenance**

Figure (4.20.) indicates that 94.4% of respondents are signed into the ECCE programme, 87.7% have agreed to partnership with the DCEDIY through the involvement of Core Funding. 72.3% are offering the National Childcare Scheme and 56.4% have applied for capital funding through Pobal.

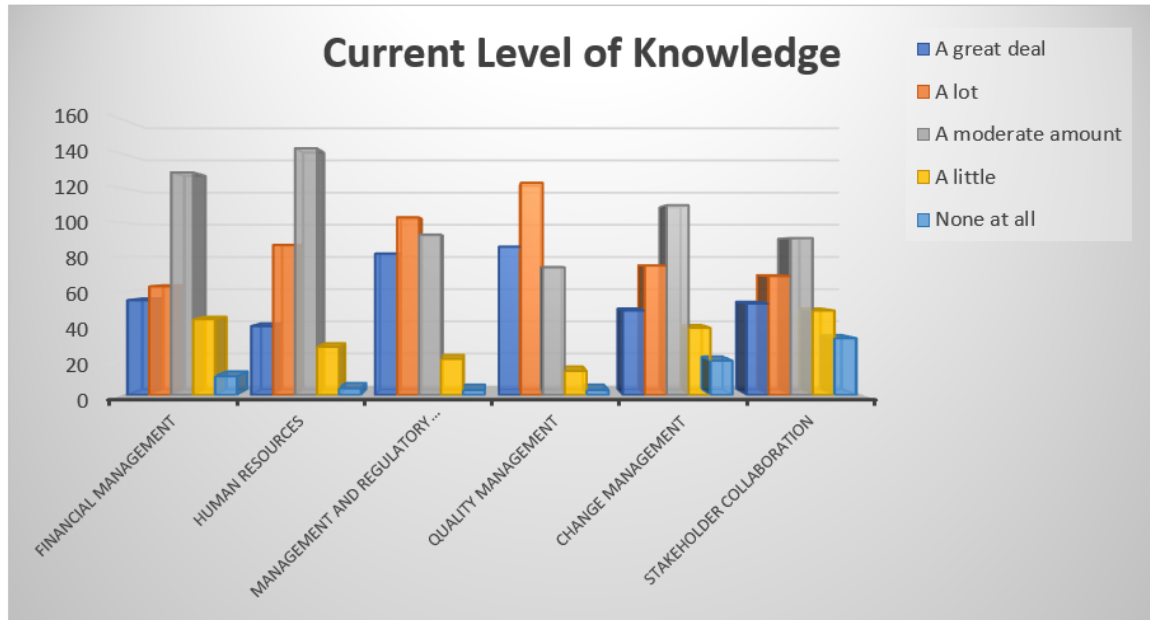
All of these funding schemes require financial management and compliance regulation, as made evident in the literature presented in Chapter Two.

Only 3.3% of the participants who responded hold no responsibility for such funding scheme maintenance.

#### 4.4.6 – Question Six

Please indicate your current level of knowledge in:

Responses 304



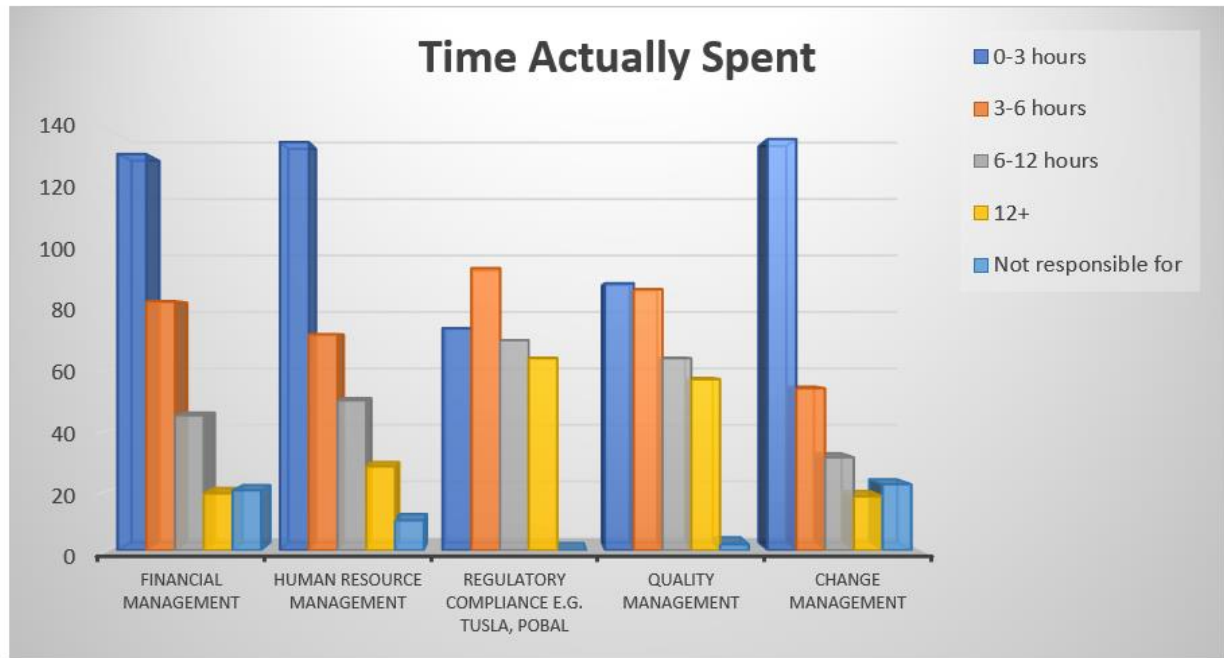
**Figure 4.21. – Current Level of Knowledge**

The majority of all participants rate their knowledge of financial management, change management, HR and stakeholder collaboration at a moderate amount. Both quality and regulatory compliance training have a majority rating of a great deal, however, interestingly, when compared with question 4.5.5 it is regulatory compliance and quality training that comes out most popular as training that should be prioritised.

#### 4.4.7 Question Seven

Please indicate how often you actually spend on each of these management tasks each week.

Responses 304



**Figure 4.22 – Time Actually Spent**

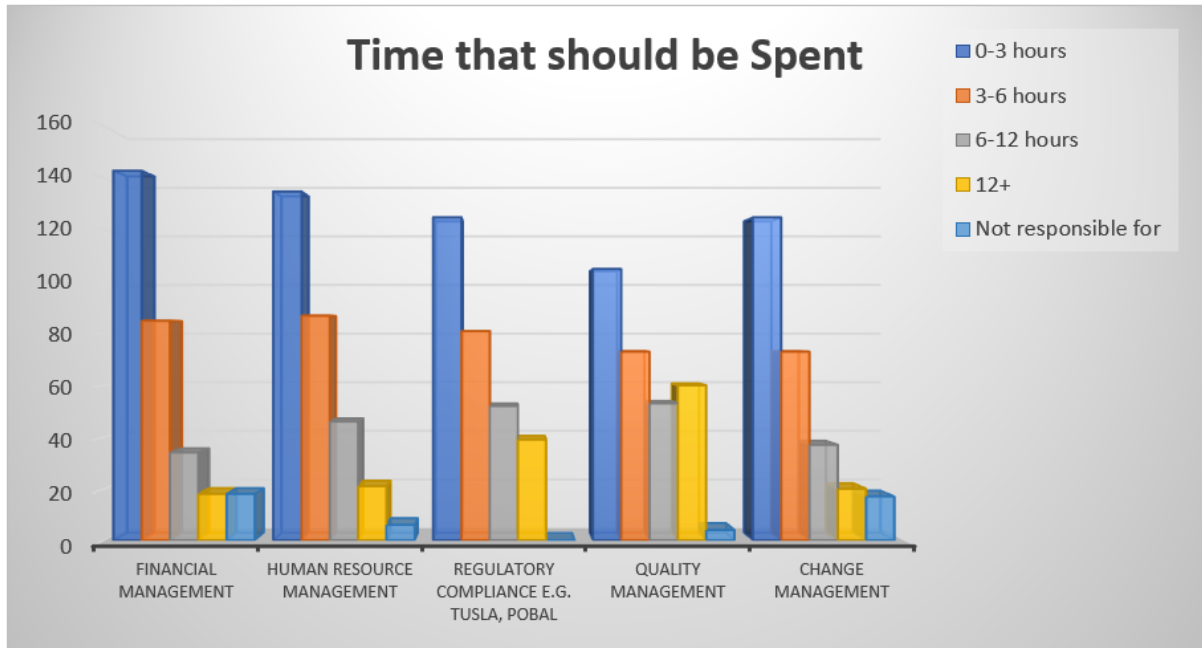
That the majority of participants spend the shortest amount of time on financial management, HR management and change management tasks, with each of these sections only taking up 0-3 hours a week.

According to the responses received, regulatory compliance and quality management take up the most of participants' time with a large selection of respondents selecting 3-6, 6-12 and 12+ mainly on these tasks.

#### 4.4.8 – Question Eight

Please indicate how often you feel you should be spending on each of these management tasks each week.

Responses 304



**Figure 4.23. – Time that should be Spent.**

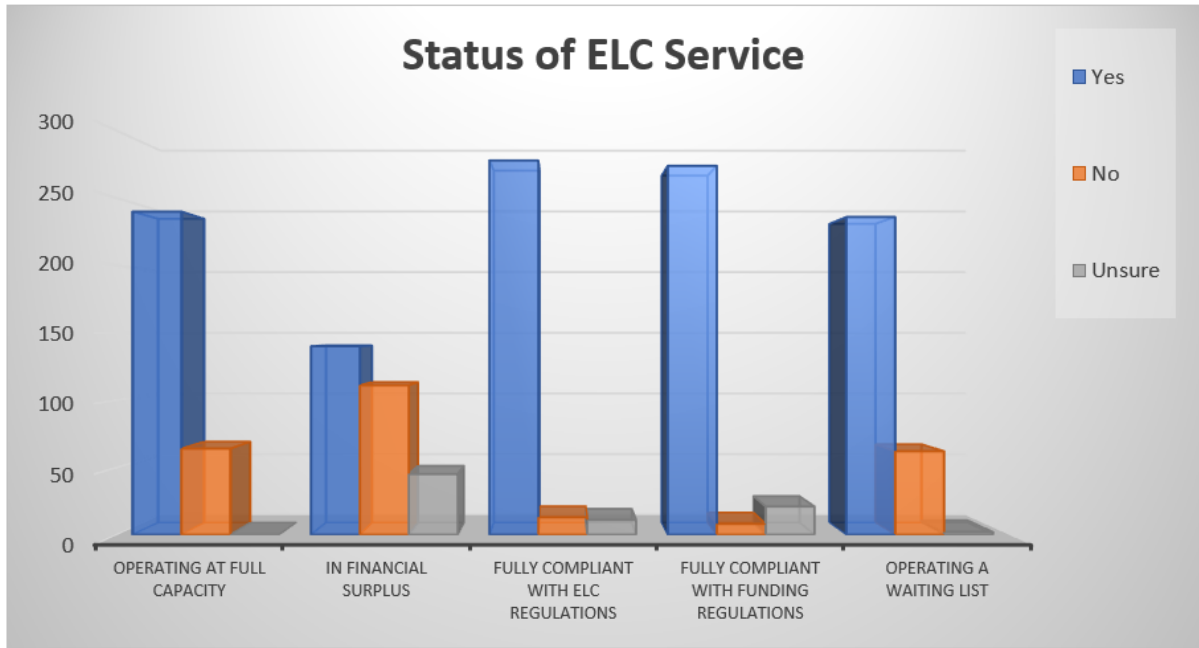
Similarly to the time actually spent on the listed management tasks in question 4.4.7, financial management, HR management and change management still come out on top, with the majority feeling that 0-3 hours is still an adequate amount of time to spend on these tasks.

The number of hours that should be spent on regulatory and quality management has deteriorated compared to the previous question. Respondents have shown a majority of 0-3 hours on these tasks now, and both show significantly less in the other time categories of 6-12 and 12+ hours too.

#### 4.4.9 – Question Nine

Please select yes, no, or unsure in relation to the current status of your service: My service is currently:

Responses 304



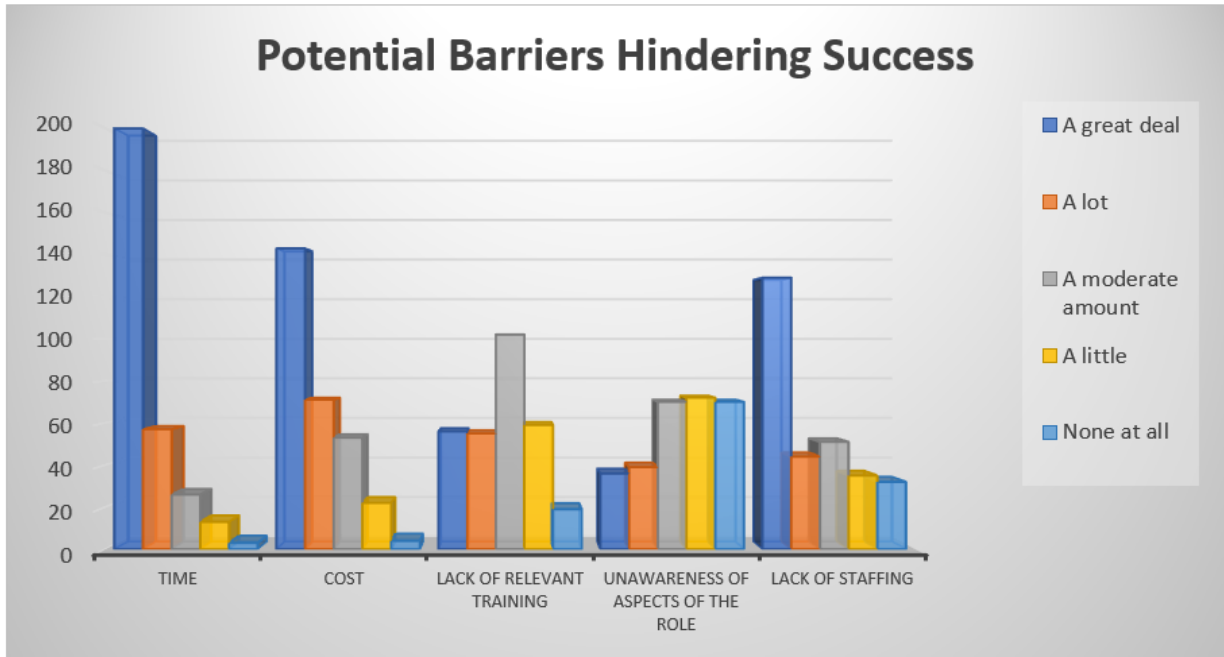
**Figure 4.24. – Status of ELC service.**

A significant majority of participants report that their services are fully compliant with regulatory and funding compliance while also operating at full capacity and operating a waiting list. The only area of status that displayed an even discrepancy in the findings was the section on financial surplus.. A concerning (n=111) participants have stated that they are not in financial surplus and a further (n=45) indicate that they are unsure either way. Figure (2.24) shows that (n=140) services are financially stable.

#### 4.4.10 Question Ten

Please indicate your level of agreement with the potential barriers that may hinder your success as an early year's manager.

Responses 304



**Figure 4.25 – Potential Barriers Hindering Success.**

Time was selected as the largest potential barrier with (n=257) participants selecting it as the main factor to hinder success as an ELC manager. Cost (n=213) and staffing (n=173) were the second highest factors, with significant numbers of the respondents selecting a great deal of effect.

Lack of training (n=111) and unawareness of the role (n=75) were the least categories selected however, to gain further insight into potential barriers, the next question asked for information on additional barriers that may hinder the role.

#### 4.4.11. – Question Eleven

Other barriers that hinder your success as an early year’s manager (free text)

The findings for this question are presented under themes and sub-headings. These were identified during the data analysis stage of this study.

136 Responses

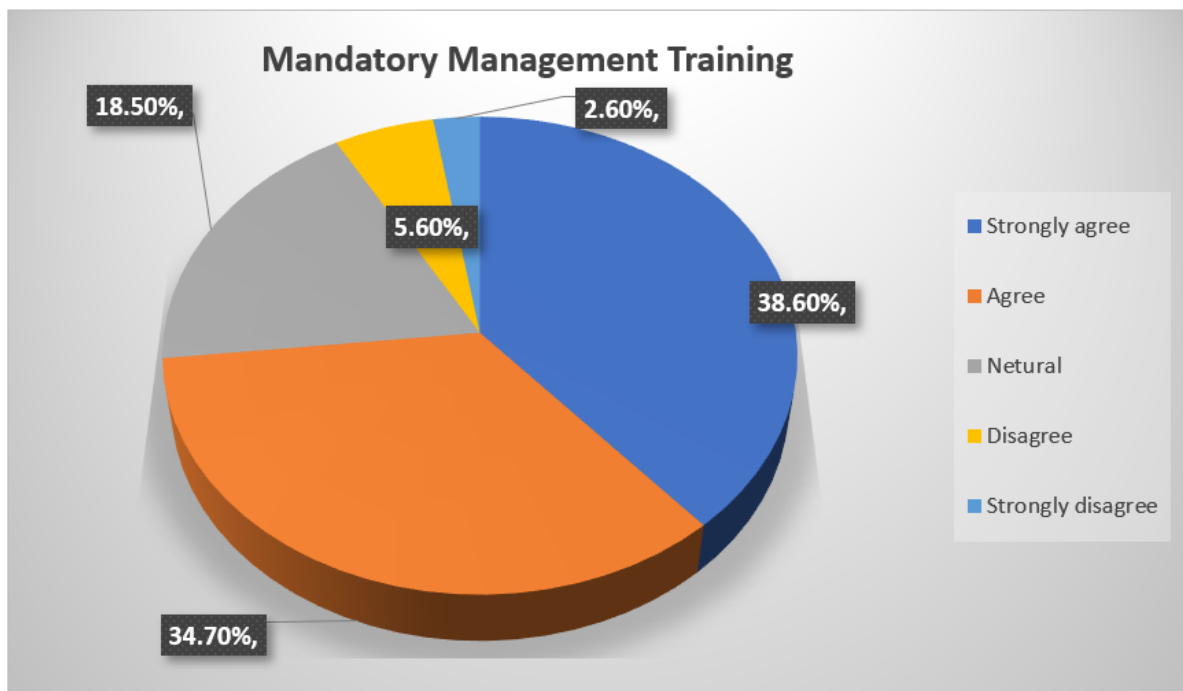
<b>Table 4.4 – Additional Feedback on Barriers the Hinder Success</b>	
<p><b>Funding and financial constraints –</b> 29% of respondents highlighted funding as an issue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The funding is an absolute disgrace and makes it very difficult to manage the service”</i> (Respondent 47)</li> <li>• <i>“Lack of funding in the early years sector”</i> (Respondent 57)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Compliance and regulation –</b> 17% of respondents stressed compliance and regulation as a stress to their role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Too much compliance and regulation”</i> (Respondent 18)</li> <li>• <i>“Too many inspections. Too many regulations.”</i> (Respondent 228)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Staffing challenges –</b> 53% of respondents reiterated staffing as a barrier issue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Staffing crisis”</i> (Respondent 27)</li> <li>• <i>“having to cover the floor each day because of lack of staff”</i> (Respondent 45)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Time management –</b> 34% of respondents also spoke about having no time to achieve tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“My time and stress level on a daily basis”</i> (Respondent 97)</li> <li>• <i>“Time is a huge one”</i> (Respondent 198)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of Support and Respect –</b> 21% of respondents wrote about how they feel they are not respected or supported in their role.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Lack of respect from gov bodies”</i> (Respondent 161)</li> <li>• <i>“Lack of respect for the sector”</i> (Respondent 192)</li> </ul>

## 4.5. Future Training

### 4.5.1 Question One

On what scale do you agree with this statement: It should be mandatory for Early Years Managers to complete some form of business management training.

303 Responses



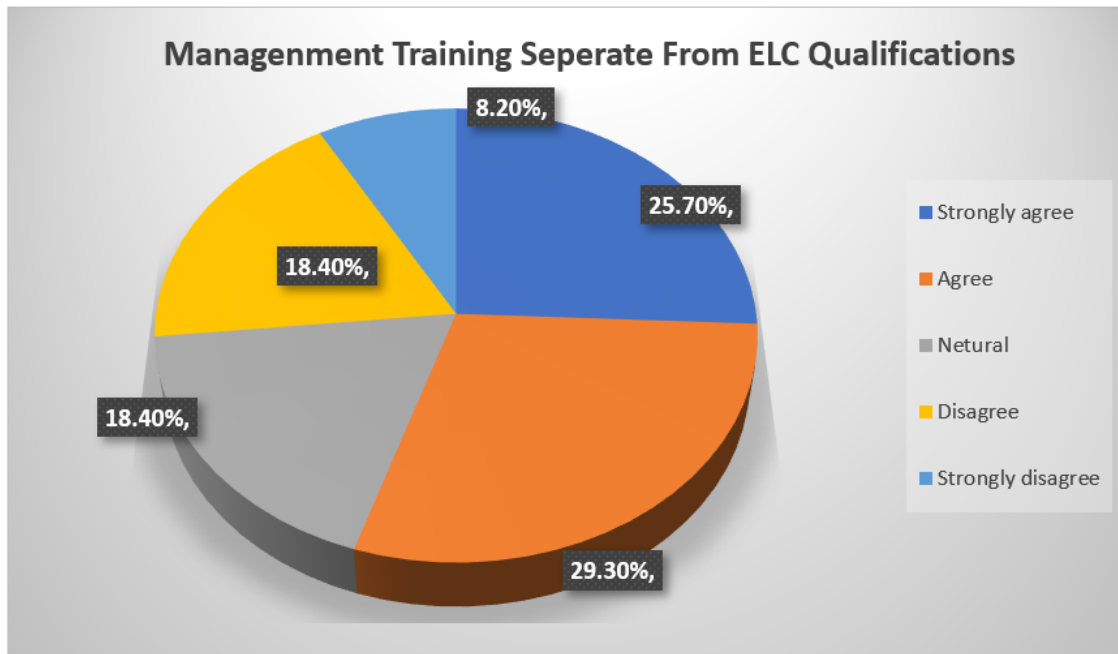
**Figure 4.26 – Mandatory Business Training.**

When participants were asked if managers of Early Years services should have to complete some form of mandatory business training, 38.6% strongly agreed and 34.7% agreed, hence bringing a total of 76% of respondents agreeing that business management should be mandatory for this cohort. 18.5% were neutral in their thinking, however only 2.6% strongly disagreed and 5.6% disagreed.

#### 4.5.2 Question Two

On what scale do you agree with this statement: Early Years Management training should be separate from Early Learning and Care qualifications?

304 Responses



**Figure 4.27. – Management Training Separate from ELC Qualification.**

Data from findings indicated that:

When participants were asked if Early Years management training should be separate from an Early Education qualification 25.7% strongly agreed and 29.3% agreed that it should, hence suggesting that over half (55%) of the participants felt that management training should be separate.

On the opposing side, 8.2% strongly disagreed and 18.4% disagreed with the statement. A portion of 18.4% were neutral in their thinking.

### 4.5.3 Question Three

Please Explain your Answer to the above choice (free text)

The findings for this question are presented under themes and sub-headings. These were identified during the data analysis stage of this study.

197 Responses

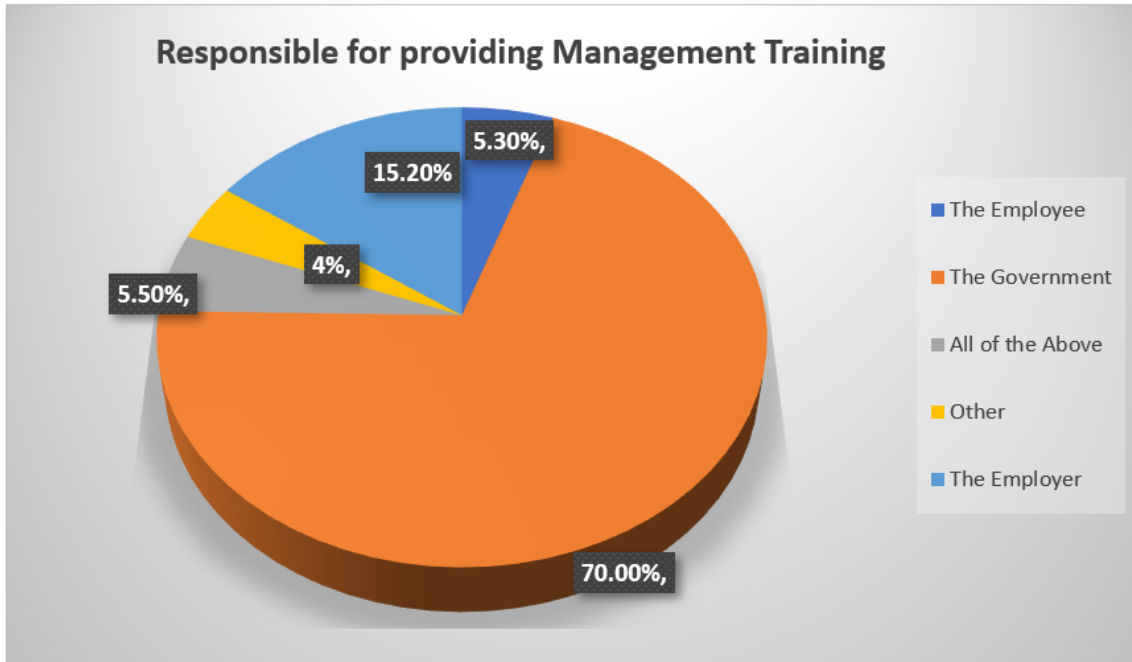
<b>Table 4.5 – Management Training Separate from ELC Qualification</b>	
<p><b>A need for managerial skills –</b> 25% of respondents highlighted the need for managerial skills, describing the complexity of the role and discussing that when equipped with such skills, it enhances the quality of the ELC setting</p>	<p><i>“A lot of practitioners fell into the management role, and as a sector that is very important, there should be more emphasis on running a quality service” (Respondent 53)</i></p>
<p><b>Different roles and responsibilities –</b> 43% of respondents pointed out the difference between the roles and responsibilities of a manager and an Early Years practitioner, highlighting that the training should be separate.</p>	<p><i>“Not everyone wants to be a manager, but I do feel that some will want to progress and knowing what the roles and responsibilities are important, it should be an add-on optional module if students want to take it on” (Respondent 26)</i></p>
<p><b>A need for a balanced approach –</b> 12% of respondents suggest the need for a balanced approach. They advocated for a combination of management and Early Years training to provide a whole understanding of both aspects of the role.</p>	<p><i>“It should be part of the training so educators can manage the classroom as well as the parents and regulations” (Response 164)</i></p>

The main themes all reflected the diversity of each participant’s perspectives, some argued that management training should be separate, while others strongly proposed an incorporation of management training within the current ECEC qualification.

#### 4.5.4 Question Four

Who do you feel should be responsible for providing Early Years Management training?

302 Responses



**Figure 4.28. – Responsible for Management Training.**

When participants were questioned on who should be responsible for providing management training, 70% felt that the responsibility lay with the government bodies that head the sector. 15.2% felt the responsibility lay with the employer and 5.3% felt the employee should take responsibility.

Aside from considering individual responsibility, 5.5% felt that all three parties held some of the responsibility collectively whereas 4% chose an 'other' category. The 'other' category responses displayed a trend that suggested that educational institutes should maintain the responsibility.

#### 4.5.5 Question Five

What elements of Early Years Management training should be prioritised? (Please rate level of importance for each)

Responses 302



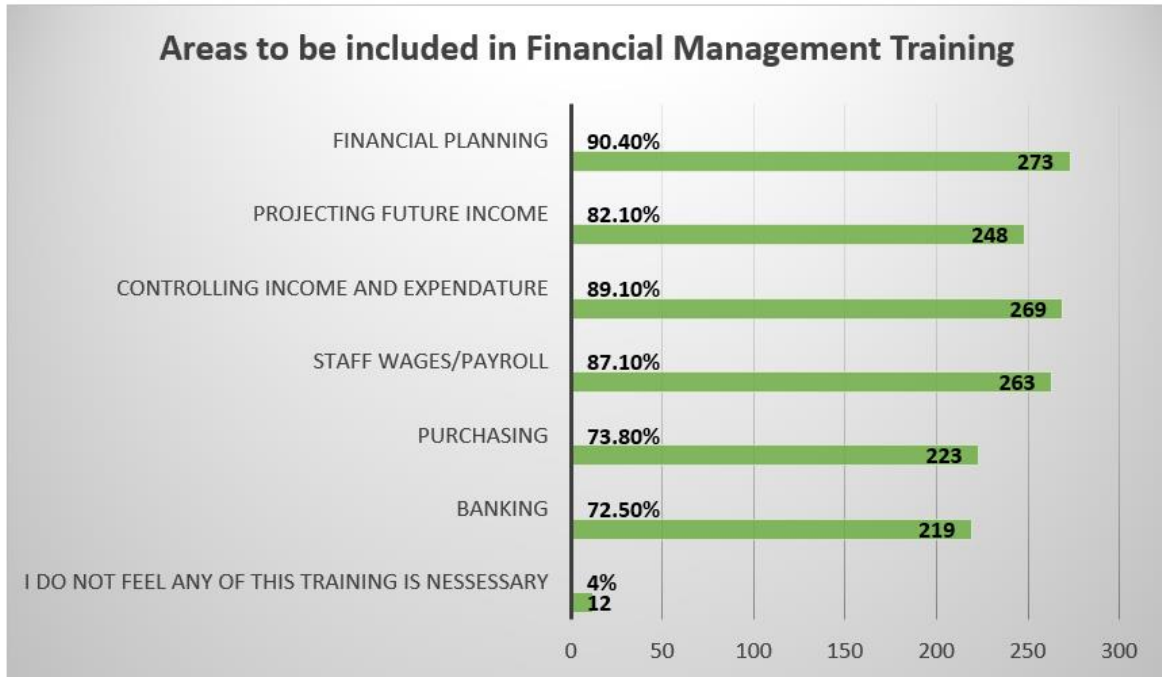
**Figure 4.29. – Training Elements to be Prioritised.**

The above graph shows that a majority of all sections rate highest in the extremely important category with the very important category coming in second on all. The most popular area of training to be prioritised is regulatory compliance, second to that is quality, third is HR and fourth is financial management. The lowest-scoring element was change management, this was the only category that any respondents selected not at all important in. Interestingly also, when asked for any additional feedback in question 4.5.12. three participants mentioned that they were “*unsure of what change management was*” (response 15 of 79).

#### 4.5.6 – Question Six

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Financial Management training module.

Responses 302



**Figure 4.30. – Areas to be included in Financial Management Training**

A minimum of 72.5% of participants felt that all areas of management training listed above should be covered in a specific management training module. The highest requested area for training was financial planning with 90.4%, second to this was controlling income and expenditure at 89.1%. Although slightly lower, staff wages still had a very high request rate of 87.1%, as did projecting future income with 82.1%. Banking was rated as the lowest need with 72.5% and just above that was purchasing at 73.8%. Only 4% overall felt financial management training was not necessary as a specific training requirement.

4.5.7 – Question Seven

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Human Resource Management training module.

Responses 302



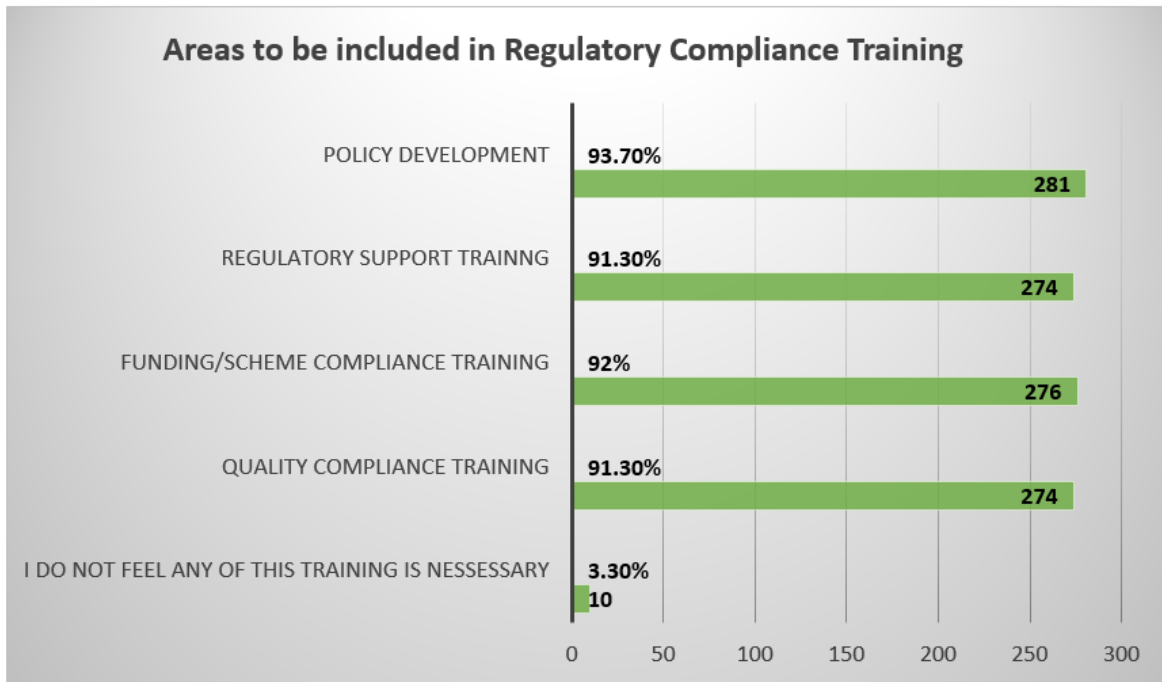
Figure 4.31. – Areas to be Included in Human Resource Management Training

A minimum 76.2% of all participants felt that all areas of Human Resource Management listed should be covered in a HR management training module. A further 90.4% felt that recruitment and contracting should be covered, similarly 90.1% felt training and development would be beneficial. Although slightly lower, managing grievances still had an extremely high request rate of 89.4%, as did staff performance analysis at 88.4%, workplace safety at 84.8%, staff retention at 81.5% and employee benefits at 80.8%. The lowest request was for salary processing at 76.2%. Only a minute 2% of all respondents felt HR management was not necessary.

4.5.8 – Question Eight

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years-specific Regulatory Compliance training module.

Responses 300



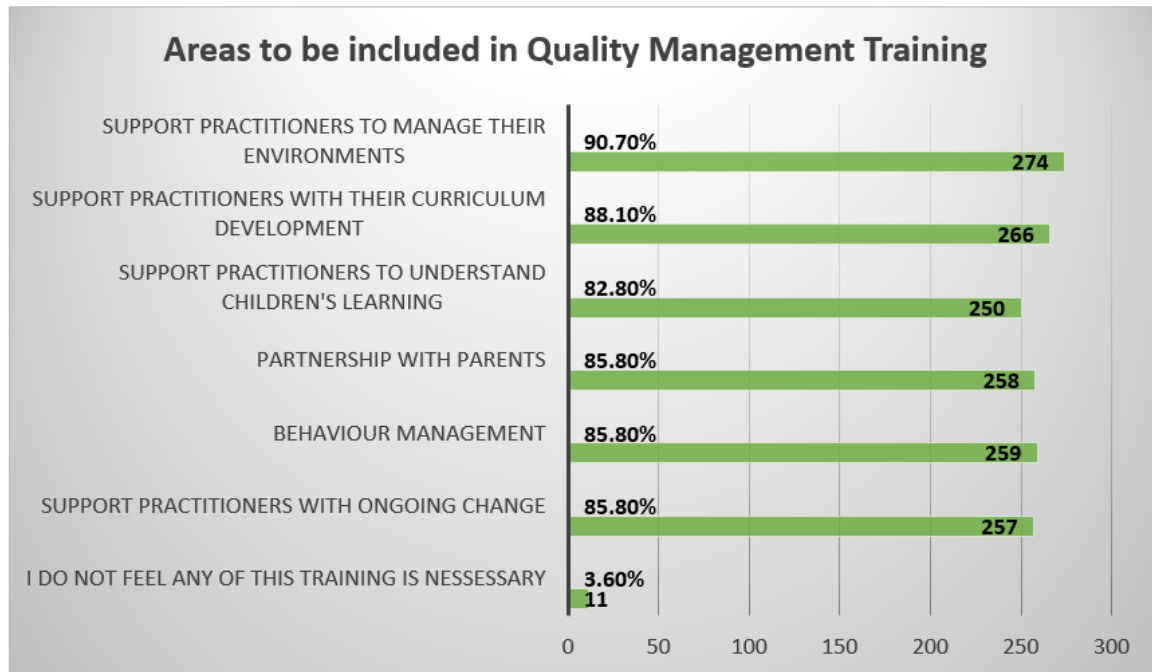
**Figure 4.32. – Areas to be Included in Regulatory Compliance Training**

As illustrated in (Figure 4.32) 91.3% of participants felt that all areas of regulatory compliance training should be covered as a specific early years management training module. The highest request was for policy development at 93.7%. Next to this was funding/scheme compliance training at 92% and just behind that were quality compliance and regulatory support both at 91.3%. Only 3.3% of all respondents felt that regulatory compliance training was not necessary.

#### 4.5.9 – Question Nine

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Quality management training module.

Responses 302



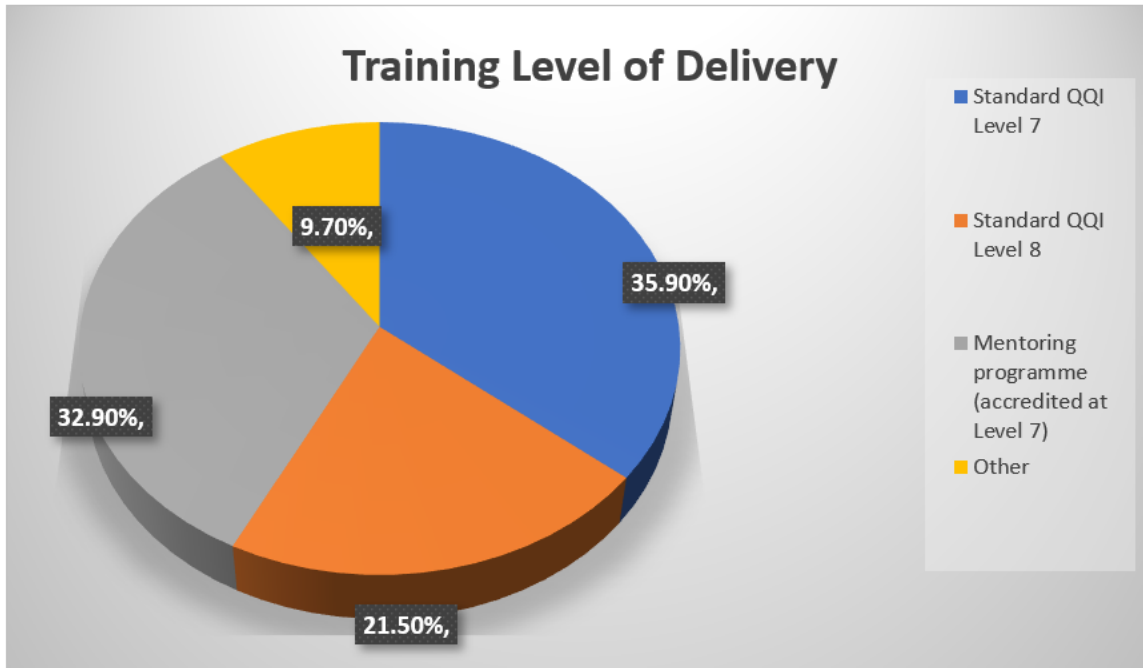
**Figure 4.33 – Areas to be Included in Quality Management Training**

A high minimum of 82.8% felt that all areas of quality management training should be covered in a specific Early Years management module. The highest interest was evident in supporting practitioners to manage their environments with 90.7% feeling this should be covered. Next to this was supporting curriculum development with 88.1%. 85.8% felt that partnership with parents, behavior management and support with ongoing change should be covered, while 82.8% felt supporting practitioners to understand children’s learning should be covered. Only 3.6% of overall respondents felt none of this training is necessary.

#### 4.5.10. Question Ten

At what level should the management training be delivered?

298 Responses



**Figure 4.34. – Training Level of Delivery.**

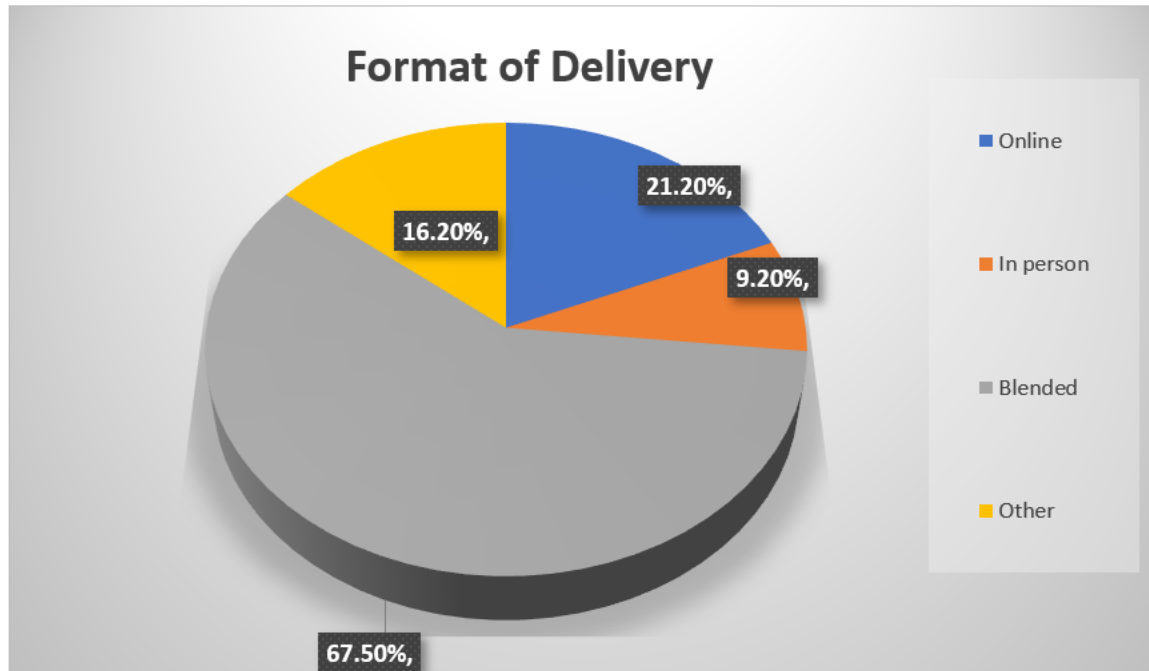
When asked at what qualification level should this new training programme be pitched at, a majority of 37.9% selected the category for a standard QQI Level 7 training. In conjunction with that, a further 32.9% selected a Level 7 accredited qualification delivered through a mentoring programme.

21.5% selected a preference of a QQI Level 8 programme, whereas 9.7% selected that they would prefer a different standard level. From reviewing responses in the emerging trends of the other category the main popular choice for delivery was stationed at QQI Level 6.

#### 4.5.11 Question Eleven

What format should the training be delivered??

302 Responses



**Figure 4.35. – Format of Delivery**

Of 302 participants, 67.2% think an Early Years specific management programme should be offered through blended delivery, 21.2% show preference to an online delivery option, only 9.2% would choose a fully in-person delivery option.

16.2% selected the other category, highlighting that the decision should be left up to the individual who is partaking in the training, and for that purpose, all of the above options should be available.

#### 4.5.12 Question Twelve

Any Additional Comments (Free Text)

79 Responses

<b>Table 4.5 – Additional Comments at the End of the Questionnaire</b>	
<p><b>Need for adequate qualifications –</b></p> <p>12% of respondents reiterated the need for a minimum degree standard of training, with some emphasising the need for training to happen prior to stepping into the management <a href="#">role</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“There should be a minimum standard of qualifications for the sector, in particular management” (Respondent 198)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I have worked under a manager with no qualifications in childcare or business and it was near impossible to do my job as an educator, to put into practice what I was learning from my degree” (Respondent 303)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Shift towards compliance management –</b></p> <p>12% of respondents discuss themes of being pushed into compliance management and how it is impacting the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The industry unfortunately in my opinion has pushed the service toward a management of compliance rather than a management of people.” (Respondent 11)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of time for training –</b></p> <p>25% of respondents highlight the lack of time available for training, including CPD or formal qualifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I would not have the time or strength to do further training <a href="#">at the moment</a>. The sector is on its knees trying to get staff” (Respondent12)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Insufficient preparation for management –</b></p> <p>8% highlight that they didn’t feel prepared for their role in management without sufficient training of some kind.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I feel we as managers are thrown in in the deep end and expected to know it all. My Level 8 did not prepare me to be qualified as a manager.” (Respondent 55)</i></li> </ul>

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the disseminated questionnaire, the next Chapter will discuss the finding against the previous literature reviewed.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion of Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter casts a discussion on the research findings that were presented in the previous chapter. The discussion will take place under the four main themes that were identified in Chapter

One of this study:

- The role of the ELC manager
- Current qualifications/training
- Barriers affecting success.
- Informing future training

These themes are also positioned in and discussed against the background of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### **5.2 The Role of the Manager**

The role of the Early Years manager is discussed fluidly throughout the literature. At both the macro and micro sections of the primary research, several reports have shown the diverse requirements of the ELC manager's role. Moloney and Petterson (2017) describe it as occurring within an ecological framework, where the manager needs to operate within and between different layers of an ecosystem. The findings from this study highlight several key aspects that back up this description. The questions asked in the background section of the questionnaire give insight into the range of different types of ELC services the participants operate, from 29% offering sessional services up to 3.5 hours and the remaining 71% catering for staff and children for a minimum of 5 hours or more. The information also informed the participants' different levels of responsibility, with only 6% catering for a minimum of 11 children. Due to regulated ratios of a minimum of 1 staff member to 11 ECCE children, these finding alone confirmed that a striking 94% of participants hold management responsibilities for the business and additional staff. The

literature showed that these responsibilities must incorporate extensive skills, including human resources, finance, planning, dealing with parents, caring for children, quality improvement, collaboration with partners and cooperation with external agencies (Government of Ireland, 2021b). Yet when asked what level of training managers had embarked on under these headings, the findings were remarkable. To begin, 39% of participants received no training at all in any of these listed managerial areas.

*"I get HR and business duties that I am not qualified in and expected to carry out for no extra pay" (Respondent, 45) and "My training has not supported me in any HR or accounting roles" (Respondent, 104).*

The next piece of discussion will look at the main areas in isolation.

### *5.2.1 Financial Management*

Surprisingly, Although Herron and Hildebrand (2015) claim that ELC settings cannot survive unless the manager applies financial understanding, evidence from this study shows that only 16% of participants have received any training in the area. Furthermore, when asked to select the areas of financial management the participants were responsible for, a disturbing 86% said they were responsible for purchasing, 76% control income, 71% plan finances, and 70% were in charge of banking, to name a few. It is unsurprising, however, that reports such as the one referenced in the literature from DCCC in 2015 highlighted that not one service they reviewed financially was making any profit (DCC, 2015). How can they when they do not know what they are doing? However, It could be argued that DCCC's report and Moloney's (2015) study from Chapter two are dated. Nonetheless, evidence in this study shows that 57% of participants still stated that they were not in financial surplus, and 23% did not know if they were or were not making a profit. Combining these, it shows that potentially 80% of managers are unsure of their financial stability, for this purpose a strong argument can be made for the imminent need for

financial training. The finding from the study show that 96% of participants selected more than one specified area in financial training that they would like to see covered.

### *5.2.2 HR Management*

Following the literature presented, Maloney (2015) argues that the capabilities of ELC managers in HR roles are learned through trial and error when faced with day-to-day HR issues. Findings from this study support this argument, with only 26.6% of participants reporting to have received training in HRM. Intriguingly however, 94% of participants also reported being responsible for at least one area of HR management, yet when asked to rate their learned knowledge of HR, only 14% reported they had a great deal. Worryingly, however, 60% of participants reported only having a moderate amount to no knowledge at all in this management area. Comparison of these findings with that of the literature, suggests that the reported abundant staffing problems and the ignoring of proficient HR practices (Knox, 2021) could be due to the fact that no specific HR training is available to ELC managers. Respondent (274) concretes this suggestion by stating,

*"...HR is the key for any Manager coming in, and in my opinion, this would be one of the most important modules in a specific course."*

When respondents were asked what training they would like covered in HR, 98% selected a minimum of one area that they feel should be covered to support their practice.

### *5.2.3 Quality Management*

Throughout this study, ongoing reference has been made towards the importance of quality practice. Although difficult to measure, as quality appears in many ways, the current investigation found that quality training was most apparent. A reported 48% of participants had experienced some form of training concerning quality regulation. However, none of the findings showed consistency in what that training looks like. With that said, this study backs up the request for training highlighted in the review carried out in 2018 by DES on quality inspections. Findings

from that study highlighted that managers “*would like a course or training in the area of quality inspections*” (DES, 2018, p21.). Findings from this study strengthen the case, with 98% of participants believing that training in quality regulation is either extremely or very important, and 90% believe on-the-ground quality curriculum training is also an extremely important factor to be considered.

To conclude, It is imperative to reiterate that the ultimate goal of any ELC service, regardless of its make up is to provide a quality setting for children and families (Moloney and Petterson, 2017), and for that purpose, the researcher agrees with both the research reviewed and findings presented. Respondent (73) says it perfectly

*... “There needs to be a dedicated course to support and guide managers. If the government want graduate-led workplaces and high-quality services, they need to provide the appropriate training so the manager can actually lead to the best of their ability”.*

### **5.3 Current Qualifications**

From the introduction of this research piece, it was highlighted that there are currently no qualification or training requirements for persons specifically in ELC management roles (Government of Ireland, 2021a) and that the overall minimum standard qualification level in the sector remains at QQI Level 5. Due to this, a common theme discussed throughout the literature was the importance of qualification in supporting quality and professionalism. Surprisingly though, when investigated, evidence from the findings of this study showed that an overwhelming 97% of participants actually held a qualification higher than the regulated minimum of QQI level 5. Furthermore, of that 97%, a significant 77% of participants hold a qualification at degree level 7 and above, with 20% qualified to Master's level. As these findings are contrary to expectations and already display more than two-thirds of a graduate-led workforce, it must be asked where the problems lie.

Throughout the literature, the researcher produced evidence from undercover Prime-Time documentaries (RTE, 2014, cited in Moloney, 2014 and RTE, 2019 cited in Knox, 2021) that displayed images of gross incompetence, carelessness, and negligence from ELC managers and their staff. After these investigations were aired, relevant government bodies pointed fingers towards the lack of relevant training and qualifications (TUSLA, 2019), yet when further investigated, findings from this study showed that 92% of participants currently hold a relevant Early Childhood qualification. This evidence allows the researcher to hypothesize that it is not the lack of professional qualification that is instigating practice breakdown; it is the lack of Early Years management training relevant to the direct role of the ELC manager. Respondent (54 ) backs this theory by stating,

*"I feel we as managers are thrown in at the deep end and expected to know it all, My Level 8 did not prepare me to be qualified as a manager".*

When asked if their qualifications supported their current role, 67% of participants expressed similar feelings to the above respondent, reiterating that their qualifications either did not support their role or only provided limited support.

*"An EY qualification alone did not equip me with the skills, knowledge and attributes required for the role of a manager. The EY manager wears so many hats on a daily basis and is continuously trying to navigate through the complexities of the role"*  
(Respondent 6).

Another stimulating discovery when comparing findings was that of the 97% of participants with higher qualifications, 92% partake in the ECCE scheme. It can therefore be assumed that the initial incentive to upskill was instigated by the capitation premiums available to support funding. The courses that fund the ECCE higher capitation are limited to a government list of qualifications that must cover specific modules (Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth, 2023). These modules are based directly on Ireland's quality frameworks Aistear (NCCA, 2008)

and Siolta (CEDCE, 2006), which, already evidenced in Chapter Twos's literature, proved to hamper managers' ability to implement structure due to insufficient training and qualifications. (Unit, Early Years, Education Policy [EYEP] 2013).

These results strengthen the above findings, which outline that the professional qualifications ELC managers are embarking on are not fully meeting the needs of their role. Evidence from the literature and findings has shown a wide gap between learned theory and management practices. The proper training needs to be offered to shorten the gap, hence reiterating that the workforce needs to be "*fully prepared to take on the complex challenges of practice in this field*" (DES, 2019, p.8).

Participants in this study have actively selected the areas of training they want to see in the future, the main being financial, HR and regulatory compliance.

#### **5.4 Barriers Affecting Success**

This study confirms that several barriers hinder ELC managers from performing successfully. Arguably, the main areas in this study that were reported are; funding and financial constraints, compliance and regulation, staffing challenges, time management and a lack of support and respect. An astonishing 84% reported that time hindered their performance a great deal or a lot. Nevertheless, further investigation of the findings highlighted that 59% felt that the staffing crisis within the sector significantly impacted this reported time constraint. Staff turnover, staff shortage, and the ongoing CPD need for new staff presented a significant challenge for managers. Respondents discussed issues such as

*"having to cover the floor, due to lack of staff, takes up my time to manage other tasks"*

(Respondent 19) and "*Lack of staff and time holds me back from reaching full potential*"

(Respondent 60).

Limited time and staff stretch the workload and, in turn, affect the quality of service. These findings are consistent with the literature explored; Chapter Two highlighted that 53% of

services are struggling to hire and are under extreme pressure (Pobal,2020) while Jovanovic (2013) reported that such strain is causing difficulty in achieving a work-life balance, which is majorly affecting management performance.

According to the present results, financial constraints are another area affecting management performance. Inadequate funding and limitations on finances can restrict the availability of resources such as quality materials, staffing and training (ECI, 2021). This study identified that 73% of participants felt the cost required to manage their business was a major barrier. What is curious about this result is the reported influx of €259 worth of funding that the government has invested in the sector since last year (Oireachtas, 2023). The literature found that the introduction of Core Funding in 2022 (Government, 2021) and the ERO should have begun to see stability for services in maintaining overheads, staff wages and training opportunities; however, the findings of this study do not support this. Respondents reported that

*"Funding is an absolute disgrace and makes it very difficult to manage a service"* (Respondent 21), and *"Financial cost is a major barrier..... and the cost of staff in relation to Core Funding"* (Respondent 23).

This proves that the literature stated by Moloney (2020) that the Irish government is underspending significantly does, in fact, carry weight. To strengthen the discussion, the researcher compared the findings further between the respondents that mentioned funding as a barrier as well as compliance and regulation. Notably, throughout the research, it has been emphasized that Government funding directly impacts the level of regulatory inspection. Interestingly, although 90% of respondents reported that their services are fully compliant with regulation and funding compliance, 58% state that the requirements under regulatory and compliance rules are causing significant strain on their role and their finances.

Navigating complex inspection frameworks can be time-consuming and challenging. The expectation of managers to meet reporting standards can divert their role, and failure to comply can result in sufficient recouping of funding. Respondent (16) backs this by asking,

*"How can you manage finances if you fear thousands can be recouped after an inspection after the money has been spent".*

Further observation showed paperwork as a burden and fear of failed compliance, causing business closure.

*"We work a lot of extra hours unpaid, we don't have a choice as without the level of management deemed necessary for compliance, our doors will close to the children and their families" (Respondent 188).*

These findings, collocated with the literature provided, could concreate the need for 'professional development within a coherent and professional system' (Government of Ireland, 2021b), and not the fractured system that the respondents of this study have evidenced. It is time for a management programme that will help tackle the barriers rather than create more.

### **5.5 Future Training**

Evidence in both the literature and findings so far has supplied clear proof of the gapped need for management training, yet most compelling is that the managers of this study also notice that gap. A significant 76% of participants agreed with the requirement for future mandatory training in Early Years management, and 55% agreed it should be separate from their ECEC qualification.

*"I am the General Manager, but we have 4 other Senior Managers who take on various roles. In a smaller service, the Early Years Manager would have to manage all areas themselves. I think that an Early Years Management course is an excellent idea. The difference in my job now compared to 20 years ago is incredible" (Respondent 273).*

As well as investigating the current roles and qualifications of an ELC manager, this study was also designed to determine what future training is required, what topics it should involve, how it should be delivered and who should be responsible for offering it. The final section in the previous chapter (presentation of findings) clearly displays what topics participants feel should be covered in the new training, with areas of regulatory compliance, quality management, HR management and financial management carrying the most focus. These findings will be presented as recommendations for the modules that need to be covered in the planned '*dedicated management training*' (Government of Ireland, 2022b).

Surprisingly, though, the area that fell short of focus was change management. Although the research points to understanding change as being a necessity (Hujala and Eskelien, 2023), only 42% of participants rated it as an important topic. This is disappointing, considering 85% of the participants have worked in the sector through a minimum of 16 turbulent years of change. These results, however, maybe because the participants do not understand what change management is and how becoming *change agents* Lee *et al.*, (2022, p2.) may benefit a service. Evidence in the study strengthens this theory through Respondent (61).

*"Regarding a previous question, I was unsure what change management refers to" (Respondent 61) and Respondent (285) who states, "I don't know what you mean by change management".*

What is essential from the findings, however, is a majority of 70% of participants believe it should actually be the government that supplies new ELC management training, hence meaning the

findings from this study will be in fact be a beneficial input to the development plan the legislators are foreseeing.

The research throughout has spoken about a '*split system*' of governed support (Moloney & Petterson, 2017); maybe now it is time for policymakers to begin plastering the cracks by actively delivering what is an evidenced need. 2014).

## **5.6 conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has offered a comprehensive analysis of the research and findings introduced throughout this study.

The discussion emphasised the complexities and diversity of the ELC manager's role and their vast responsibility level. From the review of literature and findings, a significant need for essential ELC management training became evident. Managers have clearly highlighted the areas of training they require to support their businesses. These are financial, HR, quality and regulatory management training.

Worryingly, indication has shown that there is a gaped knowledge, combined with barriers such as staffing issues and funding constraints, which are all hampering the successful performance of ELC managers. For this reason, the requirement for dedicated comprehensive management training has become an urgent need. Furthermore, the evidence highlights that participants feel Government is responsible for developing this training and submission is made that if these issues are addressed at policy level, managers will be more equipped to navigate the complexities of their role. By reviewing what the managers want from the evidence provided in this study, the dedicated management training programme may just be what is needed to shift the divide and build the professional relationship between the government and the sector that is '*key to providing quality care and education for all children*' (Urban et al., 2019, p.10).

The final chapter will offer recommendations to support the conclusive outcomes of this study.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This research study sought to explore what elements of early years management training should be prioritised to ensure the ELC sector is professionally led. Over the past two decades, the sector has experienced rapid turbulent change, causing the role of the early years manager to evolve at speed. By utilising a pragmatic approach, this mixed-method study provided findings that underscore what training and support managers are now calling for to ensure quality provision prevails.

This final Chapter will therefore present the key finding and provide recommendations for future practice.

### **6.2 Key Findings**

This study's findings support existing research highlighting the need for management skills to be taught to ELC managers (Ang,2012).

- The study confirmed that the manager's role does, in fact, expand within and between different layers of an ecosystem (Moloney and Peterson 2017), and their responsibilities are diverse at both the macro and micro practice levels. Yet concerningly, the literature also revealed the lack of formal training managers have had to support this role, with 39% of managers having none.
- The research set out to discover what training elements should be prioritised, and all of the findings linked back to a demand for financial training, HR training and Regulatory support.
- One key finding was the uncertainty managers have when managing finances. An astonishing 80% reported being at a loss or unsure of their finances. A majority of

90% requested learning in future planning, controlling income and expenditure, wages and payroll, with a further 75% looking for training in banking.

- Another key finding is the HR management gap. The literature and findings addressed the need for imminent training in this area. A reported 94% of managers are navigating through HR issues as part of their role, with only 14% feeling confident in doing so. As stated, 90% of managers asked are requesting training in recruitment, contracting, training and development, and managing grievances, with a further 80% asking for staff retention, workplace safety, benefits and salary processing.
- Another key finding was the demand for regulatory compliance training. Several managers reported the burden that compliance has on their role; although regulation is required to ensure quality practice, managers have reported a major gap in training to support the navigation of quality inspections. A call of 91% of managers are requesting modules in policy development, quality compliance training, regulation support and funding compliance.
- A further finding is the fact that some managers are unaware of what change management is and the benefits being change agents can bring to their service. To avoid remaining stagnant and embracing change rather than resisting it (Maloney and Petterson, 2017), the majority of ELC managers need to begin manifesting change and promoting that positive outlook on their services and their team.
- The final key finding was the discovery of the level of qualification already obtained by managers in the sector. A reported 97% of managers hold a qualification higher than the minimum regulated requirement, with a further 77% holding a degree level or above. This finding would indicate an evident need to review the current ECCE training managers are availing of and consider potential elements of required management training to be added to support those who upskill in their role.

### **6.3 Limitations**

As Deanscombe (2007) suggests, the potential way to strengthen further studies is to consider any possible weakness in the current one. Like all studies, this one, too, has its limitations. Pobal (2022a) reports 3,574 managers working in the ELC sector; this study only gained insight into 10% of that cohort. As this is only a sample of managers in the sector, it must be noted that findings could be very different if all managers took part.

A second limitation is self-reporting and response bias. This study relied on data being self-reported by the ELC managers; this can sometimes encourage response bias by interpreting questions differently, which could lead to inaccuracies in the findings.

Furthermore, a final limitation the researcher found was inexperience in questionnaire design. The researcher found that due to how some of her questions were worded, it was challenging to retrieve the data being sought; for that purpose, some of the questions became null and void.

### **6.4 Recommendations**

#### *6.4.1 Government and training body recommendations*

- There is an apparent need for an ELC-specific management training programme that needs to encompass the unique make-up of the sector and review it in its parts rather than as a whole. By understanding the required elements, role-specific training could build effective capacity so managers can execute their roles while gaining in-depth knowledge of policy interpretation and implementation. As reported, managers clearly need specific financial and HR training to ensure they remain sustainable; these two pieces should be evident in the new dedicated management training. Without this training, the sector will remain turbulent in its quality practice.

- The new training should be mandatory comprehensive training at a minimum QQI level 7. These recommendations come directly from the questions asked about future training. The sector is speaking in cohesion and should be heard. The programme's delivery should be the government's responsibility and encompass regulatory compliance training to support managers in the ongoing strive for quality and compliance. By signing up as a 'Partner Service' with the Government (Government of Ireland, 2021a), the expectation lies with those partners to raise quality standards across the sector.
- The development of a change management training module should be developed imminently. To build cohesion between policymakers and the ELC sector, the people driving the sector need to positively embrace the new changes coming. This training can be rolled out cost-effectively by using support agents such as County Childcare Committees or Betterstart that the Government already have available.
- A supply of funding should be made available to third-level universities, colleges and institutes to review current QQI level 7 and 8 ECEC programmes. An introduction of two quality training modules could begin preparing managers for their role; there would then be an opportunity to progress into the management training programme if that role is obtained.
- A mentoring programme should be considered when considering the development of the training. Managers preferred a mentoring programme accredited at level QQI Level 7. Institutes could review current mentoring programmes and explore the possibility of this kind of model for the ELC sector. This will keep staff in their role and encourage growth in-house.

- Finally, a review of practices across the water should be investigated. It was highlighted in the literature that countries such as Norway and Australia do not practice the same 'split system' approach (Moloney and Petterson, 2017); Ireland does. A review of our current quality frameworks and the addition of management support within could be stop-gap support while developing the much-needed management programme.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

It is apparent throughout that ELC managers have learned their role on the job. They report to be working in busy environments, navigating their way through complexities beyond expectations. They have monumental responsibility, action and accountability concerning a varied range of stakeholders such as children, parents, families, funders, inspectorates, legislators, and external agencies (Moloney and Petterson, 2017), all of whom bring different demands of them while they grapple for ongoing quality provision. The current system that they operate in brings a burden of numerous state inspections and vast amounts of funding administrative directives, all of which are brought on through macro-level policy. With such a high macro-level expectation, this study has shown that the complexity of the ELC manager's role at a micro-level now exceeded the possibility of a learned on-the-job approach. For this purpose, this research study highlighted the need for prioritising certain elements of Early Years management training to support the professionalism of ELC managers' future practice.

The research identified three critical areas of management training that need prioritisation: financial management, HR management and regulatory compliance. Managers emphasised a lack of knowledge and uncertainty in financial management, illuminating a need for sector-specific training in areas such as income and expenditure, financial planning and banking. Likewise, there

was a similar demand for HR training with areas to include managing grievances, training and development and workplace safety. In addition, managers expressed the requirement for regulatory compliance training to support the navigation of quality inspections and build knowledge of policy development and regulation.

As the state is responsible for placing such onerous responsibility, they are now aware of the requirement to support it. With the proposed plan for dedicated management training present in the future workforce development plan, the findings of this study have made it a concrete need to consider the training that is being requested.

In conclusion, recommendations have been made to develop a QQI Level 7 mandatory sector-specific training for ELC managers that encompasses the abovementioned requirements. As the majority of the sector is already qualified to degree level, a review of current scripture should be undertaken to begin understanding where introductory training could sit to support practice breakdown in the interim. Furthermore, the Level 7 programme should have a mentoring element in its delivery. This will support managers' development and promote in-house growth, which will positively impact the current staffing crisis that is impacting the sector.

If achieved, these recommendations could support the beginning of change for ELC managers, and the growth of sustainable positive, regulated environments will blossom into robust education and care for future generations.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1 – Participant Information Sheet



GRIFFITH COLLEGE

### Participant Information Sheet

Dear Early Years Manager

My name is Debbie Stapleton, and I am a master's Student in Education, Learning, and Development. I am also interested in ensuring the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector grows as a recognised profession.

As part of my studies, I want to examine what elements of Early years management training should be prioritised to ensure the workforce will be professionally led in the most effective way.

The findings of this study will aim to inform the development of the 'dedicated leadership training' that is currently under construction at government policy level.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what taking part involves.

Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me at [debbie.stapleton@student.griffith.ie](mailto:debbie.stapleton@student.griffith.ie) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the purpose of the research?**

Research has shown that the quality of any Early Learning and Care service is directly linked to effective management and leadership. Nevertheless, until now, there has been very little support for managers, despite such research. I want to gain insight into the current role of the ELC manager and investigate what areas of support are required to encourage the development of effective management practices in the future.

The results of this research will be shared with the government bodies that are responsible for creating policies in the ELC sector. The aim here is to ensure the development of future training programmes will have input from managers like you. I plan to collect these results through an online questionnaire.

#### **Why have I been chosen to participate?**

I am interested in gaining insight into the role experiences of Early Years Managers. You are invited to participate in this research because you work as a manager in an Early Learning and Care setting.

As part of my research, I am conducting an anonymous survey which hopes to engage 100+ EY managers. It is important to note that if you decide to take part, no personal data will be collected.

### **What does taking part entail?**

If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

- I will send you a link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire.
- There will be a series of questions for you to complete.
- The first part of the survey will be about your setting and your ELC background.
- The second part of the survey will ask you questions about your qualification and training experiences.
- The third part will cover your role as a manager
- And finally, there will be a couple of short questions about future training.
- Your survey answers will be recorded by Google Forms, where data is stored in a password-protected electronic format. Your responses are confidential Google Forms does not collect identifiable information such as your name, email and/or IP address.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

### **What will happen to the results of this research?**

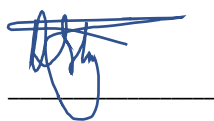
The results of this research will be submitted to Griffith College for grading as part of my dissertation. The results will also be shared with the DCEDIY Quality Unit via email to consider in the development of ... "A dedicated leadership training programme" for managers.

### **What do I do if I have any further questions?**

At a later date, if you have any questions or concerns about the study or your responses to the survey, you can contact me at [debbie.stapleton@student.griffith.ie](mailto:debbie.stapleton@student.griffith.ie).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Warm Regards



Debbie Stapleton

## Appendix 2 – Copy of Questionnaire



### Section 1 of 5

## What Elements of Early Years Management Training Should be Prioritised? ✕ ⋮

Dear Early Learning and Care Manager,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire aimed at exploring what elements of Early Years Management Training should be prioritised to ensure the workforce is professionally led. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. We assure you that your anonymity will be maintained throughout the study and personal information will not be gathered. Please answer all questions as honestly and accurately as possible. Your feedback is greatly appreciated. Thank you again for your time and valuable contribution.

### Section 2 of 5

#### Part 1: Background Information ✕ ⋮

Description (optional)

Please select your current management role.

- Owner/Manager in ratio
- Owner/Manager out of ratio
- Manager/ Supervisor in ratio
- Manager/ Supervisor out of ratio

What is your age range?

- 18-24
- 25-35
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-65

How many years have you worked in the Early Learning and Care sector?

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26+ years

Did you work as an Early Learning and Care practitioner before becoming a manager?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

If yes, how many years

Short answer text

---

What type of Early Learning and Care service do you manage or supervise?

- Private Service (For profit)
- Community Service (Not-for-Profit)

What province is your Early Learning and Care service based?

- Leinster
- Munster
- Connacht
- Ulster

Please select all care types your Early Learning and Care service caters for.

- Sessional up to (3.5hrs)
- Part- time (up to 5 hrs)
- Full - time (Over 5 hrs)
- Combined Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare
- Registered Childminder
- Other...

How many children does your Early Learning and Care service cater for?

- 0-11
- 12-22
- 23-50
- 51-70
- 71-100
- 101+

How many staff within each role do you manage?

	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	20+
Early Learning an...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Aged Prac...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ancillary Staff (c...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

After section 2 Continue to next section

Section 3 of 5

Part 2: Qualifications



Description (optional)

What is your highest qualification to date?

- QQI Level 9 or above
- QQI Level 8
- QQI Level 7
- QQI Level 6
- QQI Level 5

I currently hold qualifications in (if more than one, please select each area).

- Relevant Childcare Qualification
- Early Years Management
- Business Management
- Human Resources Management
- Other...

On what scale do you agree with this statement: My qualification has supported me in my role as an Early Years manager.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your answer

Long answer text

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My qualification covered modules in (please select all that are appropriate).

- Financial Management
- Human Resource Management
- Regulatory Compliance, e.g. Tusla, Pobal, Nera, DES
- Change Management
- Stakeholder Collaboration
- None of the above

Have you received training from another source to support you in your management role?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify

Short answer text

---

Section 4 of 5

Part 3 - The Management Role



Description (optional)

Please select all areas of Financial Management you are responsible for:

- Financial Planning
- Projecting Future Income
- Controlling Income and Expenditure
- Staff wages/payroll
- Purchasing
- Banking
- None of the above

Please select all areas of Human Resource Management that you are responsible for.

- Recruitment
- Contracts
- Salary Processing
- Employment Benefits
- Managing Grievance
- Staff performance analysis
- Training and Development
- Workplace Safety
- Staff Retention
- None of the above

Please select all areas of Regulatory Compliance you are responsible for.

- Policy Development
- Quality Regulation - TUSLA
- Quality Regulation - DES
- Funding Compliance - Pobal
- Staffing Compliance - NERA
- None of the above

Please select all areas of Quality Management you are responsible for

- Maintaining the Learning Environment
- Curriculum Development
- Partnership with Parents
- Supporting the children's learning
- None of the above

Please select all funding/scheme programme applications and maintenance you are responsible for

- Core Funding
- NCS (National Childcare Scheme)
- ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education)
- Scheme
- Capital Funding
- None of the above

Please rate your current level of knowledge in:

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amo...	A little	None at all
Financial Managa...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Management Reg...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stakeholder Colla...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how often you actually spend on each of these management tasks each week

	0-3 Hours	3-6 Hours	6-12 Hours	12+ hours	Not responsible for
Financial Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Resource...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regulatory Com...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how often you **feel you should** be spending on each of these management tasks each week

	0-3 Hours	3-6 Hours	6-12 Hours	12+ hours	Not responsible for
Financial Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Resource...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regulatory Com...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please select yes, no, or unsure in relation to the current status of your service: My service is currently:

	Yes	No	Unsure
Operating at full capacity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Financial Surplus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fully Compliant with Early ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fully Compliant in all Fund...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Operating a waiting list	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the potential barriers that may hinder your success as an early years manager.

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amo...	A little	None at all
Time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of Relevan ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unawareness of a...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of staffing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other barriers that hinder your success as an early years manager

Long answer text

After section 4 Continue to next section

Section 5 of 5

Part 4: Future Training



Description (optional)

On what scale do you agree with this statement: It should be mandatory for Early Years Managers to complete some form of business management training.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

On what scale do you agree with this statement: Early Years Management training should be separate from Early Years Care and Education qualifications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your answer

Long answer text

---

Who do you feel should be responsible for providing Early Years Management training?

- The Employee
- The Employer
- The Government
- Other...

What elements of Early Years Management training should be prioritised? (please rate level of importance for each)

	Extremely import...	Very important	Somewhat impor...	Not so important	Not at all import...
Financial Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Resource...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regulatory Com...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change Manage...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Financial Management training module

- Financial Planning
- Projecting future income
- Controlling income and expenditure
- Staff wages/payroll
- Purchasing
- Banking
- I do not feel any of this training is necessary

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Human Resource Management training module.

- Recruitment
- Contracting
- Salary Processing
- Employment Benefits
- Managing Grievances
- Staff Performance Analysis
- Training Development
- Workplace safety

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Regulatory Compliance training module.

- Policy Development
- Regulations Support Training.
- Funding/scheme Compliance Training
- Quality Compliance Training
- I don't feel any of this training is necessary

Please tick all areas that you feel should be covered in an Early Years specific Quality Management training module

- Supporting practitioners to manage their environments
- Supporting practitioners with their curriculum development
- Supporting practitioners to understand children's learning
- Partnership with parents
- Behavior management
- Support practitioners with ongoing change
- I don't feel any of this training is necessary

At what level should the management training be delivered

- Standard QQI Level 7
- Standard QQI Level 8
- Mentoring programme (accredited at level 7)
- Other...

What format should the training be delivered?

- Online
- In person
- Blended (mix of online and in person)
- Other...

Is there any additional comments you would like to add

Long answer text

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