

Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Microcredential Programme

# Provider details

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| **Provider name** | National College of Ireland (NCI) |
| **Date of report** | 4 May 2021 |

1. Overall recommendations

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| **Programme** | **Title** | Certificate in Leadership, Governance and Change Management for Early Childhood Home Visiting |
| **Award** | Special Purpose Award |
| **Credit** | 10 |
| **NFQ Level** | Level 7 |
| **Recommendation**  *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory* | **Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions** |

1. Expert Panel

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| **Name** | **Role** | **Affiliation** |
| Dr Eric Derr | Chair | QA Officer, Carlow College, St. Patrick’s |
| Dr Sheila Garrity | Subject Matter Expert | Lecturer, School of Political Science & Sociology, NUI Galway |
| Prof Emer Ring | Subject Matter Expert | Dean of Education, Mary Immaculate College |

1. Programme Profile Information (as supplied by provider)

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| **Brief synopsis of the programme** |
| The *Certificate in Leadership, Governance and Change Management in Early Childhood Home Visiting* is a single module micro-credential programme aimed at providing Home Visitor coordinators working with the NCI Early Learning initiative (ELI) with the skills, knowledge and values required to competently lead, support, guide and supervise home visitors in their role of supporting parents. The module being proposed as a micro-credential programme, Leadership and Governance in ECEC Environments, is a mandatory Stage 3 module on the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care. The title, learning outcomes, indicative content and assessment strategy of this module have been modified slightly to reflect the emphasis placed on the early childhood home visiting context in the micro-credential programme.  Home Visiting is a local peer-led community lifeline for most at-risk children (0-4years) and families. Employing early school leavers / former programme parents / migrants as Home Visitors creates skilled cohesive inclusive supportive local communities. Upskilling home visitors and re-imagining child / family interventions is needed to increase future engagement and impact. This programme will give coordinators a professional qualification, encourage them to further their education, as well as enhancing the mechanisms and processes behind Home Visiting in line with the Government’s *First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 [[1]](#footnote-2)* and in response to current and post COVID-19 restrictions and challenges.[[2]](#footnote-3)  The micro-credential programme will be delivered over 12 weeks, providing 36 hours of direct teaching to the learners. Assessments will be 100% based on continuous assessment and will be integrated into the classroom teaching. Through the assessment process, students will be examined on their competencies across the six learning outcomes listed below. In addition to the 36 hours classroom-based teaching, learners will be expected to engage in 214 further hours of self-directed learning, which will comprise of core reading and selective reading tasks, video based learning and reflective practice gained through work experience. |
| **Target learner groups** |
| While the principal programme is targeted at learners who would like to work with or for babies and young children from birth to six in the ECEC sector, the target learners for this micro-credential programme are existing Home Visitors who currently work or will work at some specified point in the near future, as coordinators supporting Home Visitors across different programmes.  It is intended that all potential and practising coordinators will avail of the *Certificate in Leadership, Governance, and Change Management in Early Learning Home Visiting*, including coordinators supporting home visitors employed to deliver Community Mothers, Life Start, Early Childhood Home Visiting and Preparing for Life. Family support workers employed by Tusla or working in Homeless services, direct provision services etc. will also be encouraged to complete the programme. As the programme will be delivered entirely online, it will provide maximum flexible learning opportunities for coordinators in a safe manner in light of the ongoing potential risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| **Rationale for Programme** |
| In 2021, NCI’s ELI Team secured funding from the Rethink Ireland Innovate Fund for the development and delivery of this programme to provide coordinators of NCI’s ELI Home Visitor scheme with the knowledge, skills and competencies to effectively support them in their role providing support and guidance to Home Visitors. This programme will also provide learners with an accredited award upon completion.  The project, ‘From Couch to Screen - Engaging Children and Supporting Families Through High-quality Responsive Hybrid Home Visiting’, aims to support the pivoting of ELI Home Visiting, which was delivered face-to-face in the home pre-COVID-19, to a blend of face-to-face engagement, virtual visits and online learning in current and post-COVID environments.  As well as redesigning the module from the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care for fully online delivery, the module has been redesigned specifically to provide coordinators in the Home Visiting programme that learning opportunities that satisfy their professional and educational needs. The programme is designed to demonstrably support the realisation of the Government’s *First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* vision that those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and wellbeing. Variable quality of initial education and professional learning programmes represent a challenge for the ELC workforce, in particular Home Visitors. |
| **Evidence of learner demand** |
| In 2019-20, 1,200 families received home visiting through Community Mothers (10 sites) / ParentChild+ (9 sites). With the Rethink Innovate Grant, our aim is to upskill 23 Coordinators and 150 Home Visitors to reach at least 1,500 children, 2,250 parents and their extended families, through:   * Community Mothers Programme: 13 Coordinators; 89 Home Visitors; 1,120 children in 10 sites in Dublin, Limerick, Roscommon, Trim, Kerry, Westmeath, Meath, Tipperary, Laois, Offaly, Longford. * ParentChild+ / Home from Home Programme: 10 Coordinators; 61 Home Visitors; 380 children in 9 sites in Dublin, Limerick, Galway, and Louth. (Depending on funding, plans are underway to expand the numbers involved from approximately 20% generally to 50% in Louth. A high-quality responsive hybrid delivery model is critical for expansion).   NCI’s Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Strategic Plan 2020-25 outlines the objective to exponentially increase the number of sites and skilled Home Visitors who have completed the Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting Programme and this is key to doubling the families receiving a responsive high-quality hybrid home-visiting model over the next five years.  We would hope that all potential and practising coordinators could avail of the *Certificate in Leadership, Governance, and Change Management in Early Learning Home Visiting*, including coordinators supporting home visitors employed to deliver Community Mothers, Life Start, Early Childhood Home Visiting and Preparing for Life. Family support workers employed by Tusla or working in Homeless services, direct provision services etc. could also avail of it. |

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| **Duration and Enrolment** | | | | | |
|  | **First Intake Date** | **Duration (months)** | **Cohorts / Intakes per Annum** | **Enrolment i.e. learners per Intake** | |
| **Maximum** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| **Part-Time** | 1st July 2021 | 12 Weeks | 2 | 5 | 15 |

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| **Panel Commentary on Section C: Programme Profile Information**  *This should set out the panel’s views on the adequacy of the case made by the provider for the approval of this programme as a viable, stand alone offering for the target learner group. The panel should take into account the proposed rationale, evidence of market demand, learner numbers, entry criteria, and marketing information. The information on objectives, MIPLO’s and marketing information, rationale, should also be checked.*  *The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind, while also recognising that the programme of which this microcredential is a module, has already been deemed to have met these criteria.*  ***Criterion 3****.The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)*  ***Criterion 2:*** *The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought*  ***Criterion 11:*** *Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.*  ***Criterion 12****: The programme is well managed*  ***The headings below are indicative only and can be removed*** |
| **Rationale, Learner Demand, Viability:**  The panel agree that a strong and convincing argument, from both a national and international evidence-based perspective, was provided, to support the rationale, learner demand and programme viability of the Level Award titled *Certificate in Leadership, Governance and Change Management in Early Childhood Home Visiting*. In particular, the panel note that the rationale for developing an online micro-credential programme is timely given the ongoing potential risks associated with COVID-19 and that the programme has received funding for development and delivery from the Rethink Ireland Innovate Fund.  **Proposed Award - consistency with NFQ:**  The panel is of the view the language used in several of the proposed minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) for this micro-credential programme appear ambitious for the scope of this special purpose award. For example, it is unlikely that a Level 7 Award made up of 10 ECTS will provide sufficient learning opportunities to ‘demonstrate critical understandings’, to ‘clearly articulate’ or to ‘critically analyse’. The MIPLOs should be reviewed and revised to ensure that they reflect the true programme learning outcomes and are both realistic and achievable in terms of the outcomes for a Level 7 Award comprising 10 ECTS.  **Learner Interests: - (Information, QA, Supports, Benefits / Skills accruing from programme):**  The programme validation document provided was comprehensive and the panel is satisfied that the programme will be well-managed and the learners enrolled on the programme will be well informed, guided and cared for. However, as this is a micro-credential programme and is supporting a shift to virtual service delivery, the validation documentation was not clear as to the point at which learners will be supported to develop e-learning skills and digital pedagogies, for both their own learning experience, but also in supporting their work as a Home Visitor. As such, based on the target-client / potential learner, support for developing e-learning skills should be included in the programme. Moreover, the entry requirements do not indicate technical skills / computer proficiency as a stated criteria. Including reference to an induction programme to support learners and ongoing support in this context would be helpful.  Moreover, there are some questions around entry requirements and application procedures. Given the nature of this programme, the entry requirements should indicate technical skills / computer proficiency as a stated criteria. Furthermore, the validation document (Section 2.4) should be reviewed and revised to provide correct sequencing regarding the application process. At the moment the validation document suggests that applicants are offered a place once NCI has received a nomination from an applicant’s line manager, but before NCI actually receives a completed application. |

1. Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment

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| **Summary of specifications for teaching staff** | | |
| **Role** | **Profile** | **WTE** |
| Lecturer | Lecturing staff should normally hold a minimum of a Master’s degree in a related discipline, with some experience/ exposure to Early Childhood Education and Care, or equivalent. | 2 |
| Programme Director | The Programme Director will hold a PhD in Education or related discipline or, at a minimum, a Level 9 award with relevant professional experience. | 1 |
| Programme Coordinator | The Programme Coordinator will have experience in relationship management and providing administrative support to faculty involved in the delivery in the programme. | 1 |

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| **Mode(s) of Delivery** |
| The programme will be delivered through an online learning mode, comprising synchronous online (50%) and directed e-learning (50%) activities. This delivery mode allows for greater accessibility for prospective learners and greater flexibility for enrolled learners, while also mitigating future risks to classroom provision potentially arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. |

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| **Assessment Strategy** |
| The assessment strategy is designed to incorporate continuous practice-related learning, reflections and tasks, thereby enabling the participants to integrate theory and practice in a holistic way throughout the programme. Assessments include written assignments, multiple-choice quizzes, reflective practice and the development of practical materials. The focus will be on linking practical knowledge of working as a co-ordinator of a Home Visiting programme to the micro-credential programme content. Students will be assessed on their development skills, knowledge and their ability to convey understanding of the course content and apply theories and class learning to practice. |

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| **Panel Commentary on Section D: Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment**  *This should set out the panel’s views on the programme content, mode(s) of delivery and assessment, human and ICT resources. If the parent programme is more than a year old, the currency of module content and supporting technology should be checked.*  *The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind, while also recognising that the programme of which this microcredential is a module, has already been deemed to have met these criteria.*  *Criterion 5: The programme’s written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose.*  *Criterion 6: There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned*  *Criterion 7:* *There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned*  *Criterion 8: The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme’s learners*  *Criterion 10: There are sound assessment strategies*  *The headings below are indicative only and can be removed* |
| **Currency of content:**  The panel is satisfied that the programme’s written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose. Including reference to an induction programme to support learners and ongoing support in this context would be helpful. The panel finds that the inclusion of the ‘virtual environment’ at relevant points throughout the documentation would enhance the relevancy of the micro-credential programme’s aims / objectives.  **Delivery mode(s):**  The panel is of the view that the online delivery model will support learners to develop their skills of delivering their home visiting programme in a virtual manner. However, some attention should be given to ensuring that the e-learning pedagogies of the programme are fully considered and their alignment with key principles of instructional and universal design specified.  **Assessment strategy:**  The panel is of the view that an appropriate assessment strategy is proposed. However, it is suggested that the danger of over-assessment is considered throughout in terms of learners’ workload and that the purpose of each element of assessment is clear and linked to programme outcomes.  **Human and ICT resources:**  The panel is of the view that there are sufficient Human and ICT resources to implement the programme as planned. |

# Overall recommendation to QQI

## Programme:

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| **Select one** |  |
|  | **Satisfactory** (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training; |
| **X** | **Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions** (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (**minor**) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination); |
|  | **Not satisfactory**. |

### Reasons for the overall recommendation

1. The panel agree that there is a strong and convincing rationale, from both a national and international evidence-based perspective, to deliver this online Level 7 Special Purpose micro-credential programme. Moreover, the statistical data provided indicate that there is a demand for a micro-credential programme in this sector and the face-to-face module currently offered at NCI has the capacity to be offered online as a mice-credential programme. The panel is of the view that the Validation Criterion are satisfactory subject to the proposed minor special conditions detailed below.

### Any other observations:

1. The inclusion of the ‘virtual environment’ at relevant points throughout the documentation would enhance the relevancy of the micro-credential programme’s aims / objectives.

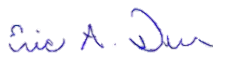
### Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

1. The MIPLOs are reviewed and revised to more closely reflect learning outcomes that are realistic and achievable in a Level 7 Award made up of 10 ECTS.
2. Based on the target-client / potential learner, the entry requirements are revised to indicate technical skills / computer proficiency as a stated criterion and the e-learning pedagogies be more fully considered in the programme documentation and their alignment with key principles of instructional and universal design specified. Including reference to an induction programme to support learners and ongoing support in this context would be helpful.
3. Acknowledging the attention that has been directed to ensuring the purpose of each element of assessment is clear and linked to programme outcomes to mitigate the potential for over-assessment and learners’ workload.
4. The validation document (Section 2.4) is reviewed and revised to provide correct sequencing regarding the application process.

## Declarations of Evaluators’ Interests

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Eric A. Derr Date: 4 May 2021



Signed:

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1. Government of Ireland. (2018a) *A whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families 2019-2028*, Dublin: Government Publications Office, available: <https://assets.gov.ie/31184/62acc54f4bdf4405b74e53a4afb8e71b.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020). *Lessons for*

   *education from covid-19. A policy maker’s handbook for more resilient systems*. OECD Publishing, available: <https://doi.org/10.1787/0a530888-en> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)