

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 Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting |
| **Award** | Special Purpose Award |
| **Credit** | 20 |
| **NFQ Level** | Level 6 |
| **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**  |
| This is a 20-credit programme delivered through an e-learning model over the duration of one semester (12 weeks). The programme consists of two 10-credit modules taken from the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Childhood Education and Care: (i) Music, Movement, Art and Drama and (ii) Core Pedagogies and Curriculum in ECEC. These modules are from Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the principal programme, respectively. The titles, learning outcomes, indicative content and assessments strategies of the modules have been modified slightly to reflect the emphasis placed on the early childhood home visiting context in the micro-credential programme. The *Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting* is designed to provide Home Visitors who deliver the ParentChild+ and Community Mothers Programmes around the country (Dublin, Limerick, Roscommon, Trim, Kerry, Westmeath, Meath, Tipperary, Laois, Offaly, Longford, Wexford, Galway and Louth) with a solid grounding in early childhood education and care, and the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to deliver a high-quality hybrid home visiting model. The programme is structured around three core competences of professional practice: knowledge, practices and values. By mirroring the structure and learning outcomes of the existing “Music, Movement, Art and Drama” and “Core Pedagogies and Curriculum in ECEC” modules from the principal programme, learners will have the opportunity to develop a range of knowledge, practices and values centred on supporting young children’s holistic learning and development within a range of unique and diverse contexts related to home visiting.The curriculum provides a rich and varied set of teaching, learning and assessment experiences to enable Home Visitors to develop the knowledge, skills and competences required to deliver hybrid home visiting experiences indoors, outdoors, and remotely that effectively engage families and have a comparable impact on child and family outcomes as face-to-face home visiting. The programme introduces a range of curriculum and pedagogical practices appropriate to achieving a high-quality hybrid home visiting model that integrates remote, online, doorstep, couch / floor delivery (indoor, outdoor, and remote pedagogies). Curriculum and pedagogical practices will include strategies to support virtual parent-child engagement; trauma informed practice, and parents to enable their children’s holistic learning and development. |
| **Target learner groups** |
| While the parent programme was 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 Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Home Visitors, and former programme parents, migrants, school leavers and mature learners returning to education to upskill as Home Visitors. Target learners for this programme will initially be working Home Visitors from the north Dublin area working for NCI’s ELI but will also include other Community Mothers Programmes, ParentChild+ and Home from Home Programmes being run in different areas and counties. The needs of working Home Visitors, the ease of access to study and balancing required to undertake part-time study have been taken into consideration in the development of the programme. The option for wholly online e-learning delivery provides a flexible and feasible opportunity for further study for target learners and will facilitate a nationwide delivery of the micro-credential programme. This option of being wholly online also mitigates any ongoing potential risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.  |
| **Rationale for Programme** |
| Funding has been received from the Rethink Ireland Innovate Fund for the development and delivery of this programme. The project, ‘From Couch to Screen - Engaging Children and Supporting Families Through High-quality Responsive Hybrid Home Visiting’, aims to support the pivoting of Home Visiting Programmes, which were delivered face-to-face in the home pre-COVID-19, to a blend of face-to-face engagement, virtual visits and online learning. As well as redesigning the existing curriculum / pedagogy to incorporate blended delivery methods (e.g. indoors, outdoors and online), existing and future Home Visitors need to be upskilled to effectively engage with more families using this flexible blended model; thereby providing better outcomes for more vulnerable children. Home visiting is a local peer-led community lifeline for most at-risk children (0-4years) and families. Employing early school leavers, parents who formerly participated in the scheme and migrants as Home Visitors creates skilled, cohesive, and inclusive local communities that support their members. Upskilling Home Visitors and re-imagining child / family interventions is needed to increase future engagement and impact. The *Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting* will give Home Visitors a professional qualification, thereby positioning them on the professional education continuum and potentially motivating them to progress their own personal learning journey, while also enhancing the mechanisms and processes behind home visiting in line with *First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028[[1]](#footnote-1)* and in response to current and post COVID-19 restrictions and challenges.[[2]](#footnote-2) Home visiting pivoted immediately to virtual home visits during COVID-19 restrictions. It became a vital lifeline for families, ensuring that parents, particularly those experiencing intergenerational educational poverty, continued to receive the support needed to meet their children's developmental needs. Demand is continuing to increase; data indicates that the new social reality requires high-quality hybrid home-visiting experiences that incorporate virtual parent-child engagement; addresses post-pandemic health risks and stress disorders; while developing the parental skills required for children to reach their development / educational milestones.While virtual home visits were a lifeline, COVID-19 exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for families. Vital support services including schools were withdrawn. With limited play / educational resources available, housebound parents felt stressed and worried about their children's education. Continuing high quality stimulating educational parent-child interactions remotely, supported by trusted Home Visitors, helped families address the childhood trauma, educational and developmental delays created by COVID-19. However, remote delivery of virtual home visits was initially extremely challenging. Engagement dropped for parents (84% to 70%) and children (69% to 32%). Engaging very young children in educational activities through phone / video calls was difficult for the most skilled / experienced Home Visitors and enthusiastic parents. Data collected during COVID-19 suggests that while engaging children was difficult, blended home visiting worked short-term with assessment increases (54% child development / 33% high-quality parent-child interactions) similar to previous years. This has highlighted the need to reimagine the existing home visiting curriculum and pedagogy practices to create a hybrid home visiting model. Upskilling the Home Visitors to deliver blended home visiting is required to enrich remote engagement and have a comparable impact on child and family outcomes as face-to-face home visiting.Our plan is that the 12,400 babies born into poverty in Ireland each year will receive home visiting. In 2019-20, 1,200 families received home visiting through Community Mothers (10 sites) / ParentChild+ (9 sites). With the Rethink Ireland Innovate Fund, 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 Home Visitors will complete the programme, including home visitors employed to deliver Community Mothers, Life Start, ParentChild+ 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. |
| **Evidence of learner demand**  |
| In 2019-20, 1,200 families received home visiting through Community Mothers (10 sites) / ParentChild+ (9 sites). With the Rethink Ireland Innovate Fund, 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.
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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 | 35 |

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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 6 Award titled *Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for 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 inseveral 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 6 Award made up of 20 ECTS will provide sufficient learning opportunities to allow participants to ‘demonstrate a broad knowledge of concepts, theory and legislation’ or ‘demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised etc’. It is advised that this language is revisited to ensure that it is aligned with what is both realistic and achievable in terms of learning outcomes for a Level 6 Award. **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 and the role of the drop-in clinics clearly delineated also in this context.  |

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 for the programme consists of 100% continuous assessments scheduled throughout the semester, including quizzes, reflective exercises, practical scenarios, creating resources and participating in group activities. Each module includes six distinct assessments in specified areas, thereby balancing the workload across the module and allowing learners to demonstrate achievement of module and programme learning outcomes. Embedded quizzes provide opportunities to demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and understanding and encourage learner engagement with the topics and lessons. Engagement in small group work promotes learner engagement, shared learning, communication skills, and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and application of knowledge. Engagement in forum discussion provides learners opportunities to demonstrate application of knowledge on key concepts and roles, share learning, resources and communicate ideas, practice and values and engage in reflection. |

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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. However, the panel finds that the following amendments made to the MIPLOs will better reflect the required knowledge, skills, practices, and values of the Home Visiting role: MIPLO 2 be amended to include ‘specialised technical skills’ to provide the space to address e-learning skills of learners; MIPLOs 4 and 5 be amended to note that these environments include ‘virtual platforms’ and MIPLO 7 be amended to include the knowledge, theories, practices and values related to strength based Family Support practice and partnership working. The panel further notes that the table found in Section 2.14 (Knowledges, Practices and Values) can be enhanced by the following amendments: adding ‘family support theories’ under Knowledges; ‘e-learning skills’ under Practices and ‘Empathy Strengths-based approaches’ and ‘Parental-partnership’ under Values. Regarding the ‘Music, Movement, Art and Drama for Early Childhood Home Visiting’ Module, LO 2 should include ‘virtual environment’ and LO 4 should consider ‘building partnership with families to extend home-learning environment’. Regarding the ‘Core Pedagogies and Curriculum for Early Childhood Home Visiting’ Module, a lacuna was identified and the concept of ‘co-constructed knowledge, including the key stakeholders of children parents along with professionals’ should be addressed and in supporting transitions, consideration should be given to ‘partnership with families’.  **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. Moreover, it is noted that there are six hours of drop-in clinics provided for on both modules, but scope and purpose of these clinics are not articulated in the validation documentation. It is recommended that more information is provided in the programme documentation to indicate the scope / purpose of these clinics. **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 6 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 two face-to-face modules currently offered at NCI have 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. More information should be provided in the programme documentation to indicate the scope / purpose of the six drop-in clinics.

### 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 6 Award made up of 20 ECTS and better reflect the required knowledge, skills, practices, and values of the Home Visiting role.
2. Based on the target-client / potential learner, the entry requirements are revised 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.

## 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:

## Disclaimer

The Report of the External Review Panel contains no assurances, warranties or representations express or implied, regarding the aforesaid issues, or any other issues outside the Terms of Reference.

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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-1)
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-2)