



**Transition from Preschool
to Primary School:
Audit of Policy in 14 Jurisdictions**



**Dr Mary O’Kane
and
Dr Rosaleen Murphy**



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2 D02 KH36

T: +353 1 661 7177

F: +353 1 661 7180

E: info@ncca.ie

www.ncca.ie

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Dr Mary O’Kane and Dr Rosaleen Murphy

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	10
Themes	11
National policies on transitions including the transfer of information from preschool to primary school	16
Brief points of relevance	20
Australia	20
New Zealand	24
Canada, Ontario	26
England	26
Finland	27
France	28
Ireland	29
Massachusetts, USA	29
Netherlands	30
Northern Ireland	31
Scotland	32
Singapore	32
Sweden	33
Wales	34
National policies and agreed templates for transfer of transition information	35
Possible data protection concerns	36
ECCE curricular framework recommendations for documenting and assessing	37
Conclusion	38
References	39

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The transition from preschool to primary school is recognised nationally and internationally as a very important time in children's lives. This transition is a priority area of work in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Strategic Plan, 2015-2018. A coordinated information-sharing process between the preschool and primary school is an important way of supporting children making this transition. As part of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* the NCCA was assigned responsibility for developing reporting templates and to make these available online to

Improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of students between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings by requiring all settings and schools to provide written reports in standard format to schools and settings to which students transfer (reports to be provided following admission of student to the new school/setting)
(Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.82).

The Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are to make the transfer of information a requirement (DES, 2011, p.82).

As preparation for this work, the NCCA commissioned the following:

- A review of literature nationally and internationally (O'Kane, 2016).
- An audit of policies relating to the transition from preschool to primary school in 13 jurisdictions. The audit looks at data transfer and the transition process. The jurisdictions identified for investigation were Australia (Victoria and Queensland); Canada (Ontario); England; Finland; France; Netherlands; New Zealand;

Northern Ireland; Scotland; Singapore; Sweden; US (Massachusetts); and Wales. For comparison, it was decided to include information on the Irish context also, bringing the total to 14 (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016a).

- An audit of transfer documentation developed in Ireland to support the transition from preschool to primary school. The audit focuses on ten transfer documents that have been developed in a collaborative way and compares and analyses these (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b).

To support and inform its work on the transition from preschool to primary school the NCCA commissioned an audit of policies relating to the transition from preschool to primary school in 14 jurisdictions including Ireland. The audit focuses in detail on those jurisdictions which have more developed policies and practices on transition—Australia and New Zealand—and summarises the remainder, noting brief points of relevance in each jurisdiction.

A variety of terms such as ECCE, kindergarten, pre-primary, preschool and pre-school are used across jurisdictions to refer to the care and education of children under the age of six years. In referring to individual jurisdictions in this audit, where possible, the terminology of that jurisdiction is used even though this means some inconsistencies across the document.

In a small number of cases, a variety of terminology is used within a jurisdiction. Ireland is an example of this with terms like full and part-time day care, pre-school, preschool, playgroup and naíonraí being used. In this audit for ease of reading, the term preschool is used to as a generic term to refer to all of those providing state-funded preschool places under the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2010/2016).

The audit was guided by the following questions:

- Is **state-funded preschool provided**? If yes, for **how many years**?
- Does this provision take place **within the preschool or primary school sector**?
- Is there a state recommended **starting age for preschool attendance**? If yes, what is this age?
- What is the **compulsory primary school starting age**?
- Are there **national policies and agreed templates** for the transfer of information from preschool to primary?

Information is summarised and presented in the document in table format with additional supplementary information provided in order to better understand the context of each jurisdiction. The main findings from the audit are outlined briefly below.

Availability of state-funded preschool

- A state-funded preschool year is becoming increasingly common internationally. Of the 14 jurisdictions examined, 12 offer a minimum of a year of state-funded preschool education.
- Canada, England and Scotland offer two years while France and New Zealand offer the option of three years. From September 2016 Ireland offers up to two years of state-funded preschool education.
- The countries that do not provide a free preschool year all subsidise childcare payments for parents in a variety of other ways.

Location of state-funded preschool

- Most jurisdictions offer state-funded preschool places both within the primary school system and in preschool settings (Ireland, England, Finland, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Wales).
- Ireland offers places mostly in community and private preschools under the ECCE Scheme (DCYA, 2010/2016), except for specially targeted responses in areas of social and economic disadvantage such as

the Rutland Street Project and 40 Early Start classes in primary schools. A small number of special preschools for children with special educational needs are also available.

- Some jurisdictions offer places within the primary school system only (Australia – Queensland and Victoria; Canada – Ontario; France; Sweden; USA – Massachusetts)
- New Zealand is the only jurisdiction to offer places in preschool settings only.

Preschool starting age

- The age at which preschool is offered varies across the jurisdictions, depending on statutory primary school starting age.
- Most jurisdictions offer a state-funded preschool place to a child at some point after they turn three (Ireland, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) while Finland has the latest preschool start commencing at six years.

Primary school starting age

- With regard to compulsory primary school starting age, the lowest age ranges noted are throughout the UK with Northern Ireland having the lowest compulsory school starting age at four years.
- For the majority of jurisdictions, the compulsory starting age is six years, but many children have started school well in advance of the compulsory school starting age, for example, in Ireland, Australia, England, Netherlands, New Zealand, and Scotland.
- Whether children commence in the formal educational system at a young age (such as four years in Northern Ireland) or at a later age (for example, seven years in Finland) children are making a transition which includes organisational, physical, pedagogical, and functional differences.

Nationally agreed templates for transfer of information

- No jurisdiction has a nationally agreed template for the transfer of information on children's learning and development.
- However, the New Zealand Preschool Regulations require preschools to have a 'transition to school' policy. They also require state-funded services to send basic data on the children attending the service to the Ministry of Education, including records of attendance, using the Early Learning Information System (ELI).
- Australia leads the way in the development of transfer documents. The *Victorian Transition Statement* and *Queensland Successful Transitions Initiative* are particularly noteworthy.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that a lot happens locally in relation to the transfer of information, but without national policy input. Consequently, details of locally devised documentation can be difficult to access.
- Nationwide templates to transfer information on children's learning and development at key points within the early years of primary school system do exist (for example, in Canada – Ontario, England, France, and Wales). This information is transferred within a system and does not cross sectoral boundaries.

Data protection concerns in relation to transfer of information

- The absence of well-developed national systems for transfer of information from preschools to primary schools might be due to concerns about data protection.
- In Queensland, Australia, privacy legislation requirements are cited as preventing kindergartens from providing documentation directly to schools. Other Australian states such as Victoria overcome this by making parental consent a pre-requisite for the transfer of documentation.
- In relation to data privacy in the Irish context, the transfer of information concerning a child moving between recognised schools is allowed without

breaching data protection law once it is in the educational interests of the child. For example, the *Education Passport* travels between primary and post-primary schools. It is of some significance that this transfer happens from primary to post-primary schools, and within the period of compulsory education. This may not be the case in the transfer of data from preschool to primary school in relation to children below the compulsory school age of six. Regarding this question of data privacy and the transfer of information from the preschool to the primary school, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (Section 28) (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the (Prescribed Bodies) Regulations 2005 (Government of Ireland, 2005) are key pieces of legislation to consider.

On-going documentation and assessment

- Many early childhood curriculum frameworks highlight the importance of on-going assessment in order to provide documentary evidence of progression in children's learning and development.
- Mention is made in many curriculum frameworks of the importance of sharing this information with other professionals including primary schools. However, little evidence was found internationally or nationally to support the transfer of this information to the next educational level.
- The use of portfolios to document and assess children's learning is a feature of preschools in New Zealand. These are used by many primary teachers to learn more about the child's strengths and interests. While they require mutual understanding of this way of documenting learning, portfolios do allow the child's voice to be heard in a meaningful way as they make the transition to primary school.

Conclusion

The findings of this audit suggest that it is widely recognised that the preschool years provide important foundations for children's life-long learning journeys. This is apparent in the number of jurisdictions which provide a state-funded preschool place for children. The age at which children start primary school varies widely and the audit shows that no matter what age the child transfers at, there are still organisational, physical, pedagogical, and functional differences that the child encounters.

There is a dearth of national policies on the transfer of information from preschool to primary school. While a lot of developmental work happens locally, the absence of more explicit national policies can at times seem puzzling and in stark contrast to the evidence that points to the positive impact that such data transfer and the cross-sectoral relations it fosters can make in supporting the transition. However, Australia and New Zealand are recognised as leading the way in work on transitions and they provide valuable information from which Ireland can learn.

This audit along with *Transition from Preschool to Primary School*, Research Report No. 19 (O'Kane, 2016) and *Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Audit of Transfer Documentation in Ireland* (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b) provide a strong foundation on which the NCCA can build when developing reporting templates for transferring information on children's learning and development as they make the important transition from preschool to primary school in Ireland. It also provides valuable information for the NCCA as work begins on developing a new primary school curriculum framework.



Audit of Policy in 14 Jurisdictions

Introduction

As part of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has been assigned responsibility to develop templates to:

Improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of students between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings by requiring all settings and schools to provide written reports in standard format to schools and settings to which students transfer (reports to be provided following admission of student to the new school/setting).
(DES, 2011, p.82)

In this regard, the NCCA has been given responsibility for developing suitable reporting templates and to make these available online, while the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will make the transfer of information a requirement (DES, 2011).

As preparation for this work, the NCCA commissioned the following:

- a review of literature nationally and internationally (O’Kane, 2016).
- an audit of policies relating to the transition from preschool to primary school in 14 jurisdictions. The audit looks at data transfer and the transition process. The jurisdictions identified for investigation were: Australia (Queensland, Victoria); Canada (Ontario); England; Finland; France; Netherlands; New Zealand; Northern Ireland; Scotland; Singapore, Sweden; US (Massachusetts); and Wales. For comparison, it was decided to include information on the Irish context also, bringing the total to 14 (O’Kane and Murphy, 2016a).
- an audit of transfer documents in Ireland. This focuses on ten transfer documents that have been developed in a collaborative way and the audit compares and analyses these (O’Kane and Murphy, 2016b).

This audit presents the findings from the desk-top study of policy in other jurisdictions. The jurisdictions have been chosen either because of their similarity to the Irish system or for their reputation for excellence in early childhood care and education. The audit focuses in detail on those jurisdictions which have more fully developed policies on transition—Australia and New Zealand—and summarises the key features of the remainder noting brief points of relevance for each jurisdiction.

Key questions guiding the audit¹

The audit aims to address the following key questions across the various jurisdictions:

- **Is state-funded preschool provided?** If yes, for **how many years?**
- **Where** does this provision take place - within the preschool or primary school sector?
- Is there a **state-recommended starting age for preschool** attendance? If yes, what is this age?
- What is the **compulsory primary school starting age?**
- Are there **national policies and templates** for the transfer of information from preschool to primary?

¹ As this work began in 2013 when it was envisaged that NCCA would start work on the development of a new primary curriculum framework, many of the questions relate to this as well as to the transition process. Work on the primary framework was then deferred due to other work commitments but NCCA have started to refocus on this area.

Themes

State-funded preschool places

State-funded preschool education is becoming increasingly common internationally. Of the 14 jurisdictions audited, 12 offer a minimum of one-year state-funded preschool education, much of which is offered in both preschool and primary settings (see Table 1). The state-funded preschool year is offered primarily to three- and four-year-olds. England, Scotland and Sweden offer two years, while France² and New Zealand³ offer the option of three years of state-funded preschool. The jurisdictions which do not provide such a year (the Netherlands, and Singapore) subsidise early childhood care and education (ECCE) for parents in a variety of other ways.

A variety of terms such as ECCE, kindergarten, pre-primary, preschool and pre-school are used across jurisdictions to refer to the care and education of children under the age of six years. In referring to individual jurisdictions in this audit, where possible, the terminology of that jurisdiction is used even though this means some inconsistencies across the document.

In a small number of cases, a variety of terminology is used within a jurisdiction. Ireland is an example of this with terms like full and part-time day care, pre-school, preschool, playgroup and naíonraí being used. In this audit for ease of reading, the term preschool is used to as a generic term to refer to all of those providing state-funded preschool places under the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2010/2016).

² There are three 'levels' of pre-school in France, all of which are state-funded: école maternelle, la petite section – (3 to 4 years olds); école maternelle, la moyenne section (4 to 5 year olds); école maternelle, la grande section – (5 to 6 years old).

³ In New Zealand, all three-, four- and five-year-old children can go to an early childhood education (ECE) service for six hours a day, 20 hours a week free of charge.

Location of state-funded preschool places

In terms of the location of state-funded places, New Zealand is the only jurisdiction which offers places in preschool settings only. In France, Canada (Ontario), Sweden and the US (Massachusetts), state-funded preschool places are offered within the primary school system only while the other jurisdictions offer the places both within the primary school system and within ECCE settings. In Australia, England, Finland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales parents can choose whether they will avail of this place in a 'preparatory' type year in the primary school system, or within traditional ECCE settings. For example, in Queensland Australia, from 2007 a state-funded 'Prep' year is offered to 5-year-olds within the primary school system. Prep is a full-time early education programme. Children attend from Monday to Friday during normal school hours, generally from 9.00am to 3.00pm. It is available in all Queensland state schools and most non-state schools, and is integrated fully into the rest of the school. This year is non-compulsory at present, so parents can choose to send their child to a traditional kindergarten setting if they choose instead of this Prep year. However, it is intended to make Prep compulsory from 2017, under proposed legislative changes to make sure 'no child is left behind' (ABC News, 2016).



Compulsory primary school-starting age

The lowest compulsory primary school-starting ages are throughout the U.K. (see Table 1). Northern Ireland has the lowest compulsory age with children who have reached the age of four years by July 1st required to start school the following September. Finland and Sweden have the highest school-starting age of seven years while for the majority of countries, including Ireland, the compulsory age is six years. However, in Finland it is compulsory, since 2015, for a child to attend a year of state-funded preschool education prior to the start of formal schooling. New Zealand is the only jurisdiction not to operate a cohort system of admission to primary school, as children may opt to begin primary school at any time of year once they have reached the age of five, which has particular implications in respect of planning for transitions.

In Ireland, while the compulsory school starting age is six years, children may enrol in primary school from the age of four. A child must be at least four years of age at the start of the school year in September to enrol in primary school (DES, n.d.). With the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme also known as the State-funded (free) Preschool Year, children should be less likely to start school at the age of four years than previously. The age requirements for the ECCE Scheme have meant that children commenced the state-funded preschool year between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months, so generally speaking most should be older when they commence primary school. In October 2015, the government announced an extension of the ECCE scheme. Currently, children are entitled to 38 weeks of state-funded preschool; it is reported that on average, children and families will benefit from 23 additional weeks of state-funded preschool through these changes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015). The increased entitlement may also impact on school starting age.



In Ireland, the Early Start Programme has operated since 1994 in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage. The programme offers a year of preschool education [2.5 hours a day] to children deemed to be at risk of not reaching their potential and is located within the primary school. More recently, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme introduced in 2010 provides 15 hours per week of state-funded ECCE for at least one year, and has meant almost universal access to ECCE, with an uptake of 95% of those children eligible for the scheme (DCYA, 2015). A second year is being offered from September 2016. From then children will be able to start preschool when they reach 3 years of age and continue until they transfer to primary school (provided that they are not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the preschool year). This is an increase in the number of weeks than previously available. Children will be able to enrol at 3 different points (September, January and April) in the school year in order to access the scheme.

It should be noted that a move towards offering early childhood care and education within the primary school system may result in a push-down of academic practices. (See O’Kane, 2016 for more information).

Although they are not the youngest internationally, Irish children have traditionally started school at a relatively young age compared to some Western countries. Looking at a wider data set, Suggate (2009) collecting data from 55 countries as part of the PISA study, noted that only four of these countries had an official school entry age under six, 33 countries had a school entry age of six years, while for the final 19 countries school start age was seven years.⁴

A point of note here too is that there appears to be an anomaly between the mandatory school starting ages identified internationally, and the actual school starting ages. In Australia, England, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland, children all enter the primary school system at some point earlier than the mandatory school-starting age. With the exception of the Netherlands, the other jurisdictions with lower school starting ages are all English-speaking where school-starting age tends to be lower than in non-English speaking jurisdictions. In systems with a later starting age, most children attend some form of preschool or kindergarten provision from age three or four. It is interesting to note that whether children commence in the formal educational system at a young age, such as in Northern Ireland, or at a later age, for example seven years in Finland, it is still recognised at this older commencement date that the children are making a transition which includes organisational, physical, pedagogical, and functional disparities (Ahtolaa, Poikonenb, Kontoniemic, Niemia and Nurmid, 2011).



⁴ School entry age (SEA) for each country was collected from the United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization (Huebler, 2007). The number represents the age at which most children in that country can be expected to begin formal schooling.

Table 1: Overview

Jurisdiction	State-funded preschool provision	If yes, for how many years?	In preschool or primary school system?	Starting age for preschool	Other information	Compulsory primary school starting age
Australia	Yes	1 year	Primary	4 years 6 months (must be 5 years by 30th June – can start previous January)	Prep year offered in primary school system. One year non-compulsory. Also subsidies for low-income families for kindergarten year (age 3-4)	Compulsory from 6 years 6 months. May enter 'Prep' year in primary schools from age 5.
Canada (Ontario)	Yes	2 years	Primary	4 years (full-day kindergarten)	All elementary schools offer non-compulsory full-day kindergarten for 4-5 year olds. The kindergarten class is run by a teacher rather than preschool practitioner and is located within the primary school system. Parents pay for before and after school hours care (subsidies available).	6 years
England	Yes	2 years	Both	3 years (some 2 year olds)	All 3- to 4-year-olds in England can get 570 hours of state-funded early education or childcare per year. It is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible.	5 years
Finland	Yes	1 year	Both	6 Years (for state-funded year)	Providing a place for state-funded pre-primary education for all children is a statutory duty for municipalities, 700 hours annually during the academic year. Participation became compulsory in August 2015. Nearly all 6-year-olds were, however, enrolled already when pre-primary education was voluntary. For younger children parents have the option of municipal day care; private day care; or looking after the child at home, all of which are subsidised to some extent.	7 years (commences in the August of the calendar year of the child's 7th birthday)
France	Yes	3 years	Primary	3 years	Almost all children in France attend preschool (L'école maternelle) from 3 years of age until age 5. May attend from age 2 if places are available.	6 years
Ireland	Yes	2 years	Preschool system and in 40 DEIS primary schools under the Early Start Programme.	3 years (for state-funded place)	Open to all children from age 3, 15 hours per week, for up to 2 years.	6 years
Netherlands	No – child care allowance instead	N/A	N/A	N/A	If both parents working, child care allowance paid for children 0-12, on a sliding scale depending on income. Most children start primary school at age 4 and the first two years of the primary school system (Groep 1 and Groep 2) have a non-academic focus.	Children must start school no later than the first day of the month after their 5th birthday. Although almost all children (98%) begin school at age four.

Table 1: Overview

Jurisdiction	State-funded preschool provision	If yes, for how many years?	In preschool or primary school system?	Starting age for preschool	Other information	Compulsory primary school starting age
New Zealand	Yes	Potentially 3 years	Preschool system	3 years (for state-funded system)	Three-, four- and five-year old children are able to go to early childhood education (ECE) services for six hours a day, 20 hours a week at no charge. 20 hours ECE applies to all teacher-led ECE services, kōhanga reo and Playcentres.	6 (Can start immediately on reaching 5th birthday – most children start at age 5)
Northern Ireland	Yes	1 year	Both	3 years by July of the year	All three- and four-year-olds can receive one year of 12.5 hours per week state-funded preschool education. These hours can be taken as 2.5 hours per day, 5 days per week during term time. Places are provided by nursery schools, primary schools with nursery units, and some voluntary and private providers. (Northern Ireland has earliest compulsory school starting date in the UK. Children start school in September if they have reached the age of 4 by the previous 1st July, and so are aged 4 years and 2 months to 5 years and 2 months on starting.)	4 years
Scotland	Yes	2 years	Both	3 years	Can get a third year if child born in January or February and parent wants to defer school start for another year. Two-year-olds, where the parent is receiving qualifying benefits, may also avail of the state-funded provision.	5 years
Singapore	No, but childcare is subsidised	N/A	N/A	N/A	Up to 3 years non-compulsory subsidised preschool (age 4-6 years). These Kindergartens are run by the private sector, religious bodies, child care centres, and international schools.	6 years (Children enter P1 in the year they turn 7)
Sweden	Yes	1 year	Primary	6 years	One year of state-funded preschool 6-7 years (in school system) specially designed to facilitate the transition to primary school. Lots of other subsidised provision for children before this.	7 years
USA	Yes	1 year	Primary	5 years	1 year state-funded Kindergarten to prepare for 1st grade in school system. Originally offered on a half day basis, most schools now offer this on a full day basis. This entails a minimum of 850 hours a year.	6 years
Wales	Yes	1 year	Both	3 years	At 3 years, one year of state-funded Nursery, 5 mornings per week. Non-compulsory. [Also 12.5 hours a week of state-funded childcare for eligible two- to three-year-olds as part of the Flying Start Programme in disadvantaged areas.]	Start of term following 5th birthday

National policies on transitions including the transfer of information from preschool to primary school

In most of the jurisdictions reviewed, the transition to school has been seen as a crucial time in children's education. Whether the transition is from preschool to primary school, as in New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, for example, or whether the transition takes place within the school system as in France, with the move from the *maternelle* to the first year of formal primary school, the move is generally from a relatively informal, play-based pedagogy to a more formal one with different expectations. In most cases, children are transferring from one system to another, and the consensus is that it is beneficial to transfer information about their learning and development to the new setting. In most jurisdictions also, curriculum or policy documentation recommends that preschools and schools collaborate on supporting this transition.

With regard to the transfer of information, much of the work on developing protocols for the transition to school in recent years has been done in New Zealand (e.g. Peters, 2010; Education Review Office, 2015) and Australia (e.g. Dockett and Perry, 2014; Queensland Government Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016; Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), 2015b; Victoria State Government, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). These jurisdictions are the most developed in terms of transfer documentation, and so are discussed in greater detail below.

In the Irish context, although there is no national template for the transfer of information, research projects across the country have produced templates and resources to support children in making this transition. While a commitment to improving the transfer of documentation between the two settings is apparent in these projects, the fragmented nature of this work has been identified (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b). Northern Ireland has also developed templates for the transfer of information (Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment, n.d.a; n.d.b.). These are not mandatory and it is not clear to what extent they are used. Practice in the remaining countries is summarised in *Table 2: Transitions: Transfer of Information*.



Table 2: Transitions: Transfer of information⁵

Jurisdiction	Transition policy	Transfer of information on children's learning from preschool to primary school: Models and Templates	Contents of transition documentation	Who is involved in compiling the record of learning?
Australia	National position statement on transitions Victoria Gov. Dept. of Education Transitions website	Transition Learning and Development Statement. Sent from kindergarten to primary, with written consent of parents	The statement consists of two parts: Part 1 – Sections A, B and C for the family. Section C is for families of children with additional learning needs, a disability or developmental delay Part 2 – for the early childhood educator	Preschool educator, child, parents. Statement includes information on data privacy and a consent form to allow preschool to forward it to primary school.
Canada (Ontario)	Transition practices recommended. Recommended especially for children with SEN	No standard form. Locally developed templates for completion by parent and child prior to or at school entry	Basic enrolment information from parents For children with SEN: <i>encourage parents of a child with special needs to prepare a portfolio that includes current assessments, samples of the child's work, preschool reports, and a description of strategies used at home</i> (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 16)	Mainly parents.
New Zealand	National report on <i>Continuity of learning</i> (ERO, 2015) Preschools required by the NZ Preschool Regulations to have a transition to school policy	Basic demographic and attendance record recorded and transferred to NZ Ministry of Education using ELI system. No standard form for transfer of information on children's learning and development. Extensive range of transition practices found. Portfolios of children's learning- may include observations/assessments by preschool practitioner	<i>Good practice included services providing parents with a summative assessment report about their child's learning and encouraging them to provide a copy to their child's teacher at school. These were detailed narratives of children's learning, based on Te Whāriki. They included comments on children's dispositions, and literacy and mathematical knowledge and skills. Often these reports included information about any additional support that might be required for a successful transition (ERO, 2015).</i>	Preschool, in collaboration with children and parents. Strongly recommended that information be shared between ECE settings and primary schools.
Northern Ireland	Recommended in <i>Curricular guidance for pre-school education</i>	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA): 1. Pre-school transitions record 2. Pre-school transitions form	1. Pre-school transitions record: brief summary under each learning domain 2. Pre-school transitions form: tick boxes under each domain <i>Preschool staff should liaise with staff in the schools to which the children will transfer. Information which is to be passed on (concerning the child's progress) should be shared with parents. (NI Curricular guidance for pre-school education, p. 18)</i>	Pre-school practitioner.

⁵ Note: In all jurisdictions with developed policies on transition from preschool to primary school, transfer of information using templates or portfolios is only one element of the transition process. Other important factors mentioned are the development of relationships between preschool and primary sectors, partnership with parents and families and increased alignment of curriculum and pedagogy between the sectors.

Table 2: Transitions: Transfer of information

Jurisdiction	Transition policy	Transfer of information on children's learning from preschool to primary school: Models and Templates	Contents of transition documentation	Who is involved in compiling the record of learning?
England	Focus is on transfer from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1, rather than from preschool to reception class.	The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile is compulsory, at age 5, at the end of the Foundation Stage.	The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requires early years practitioners to review children's progress and share a summary with parents at two points: between the ages of 24 and 36 months via the Progress Check; and at the end of reception (i.e. at about age 5) via the EYFS profile.	Practitioners mainly.
Finland	Preschool curriculum recommends co-ordination (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health)	No standard template	N/A	N/A
France	Preschool curriculum recommends coordination	From 2016, there is a new nursery school programme for children from 3 years (Ministry of National Education, 2013a). This has involved a redesigned evaluation process which shares critical information with parents and teachers. In order to facilitate the continuity of children's education during the transition to primary school, nursery school teachers pass on a summary of each child's' achievements at the end of their nursery school education to the primary school.	Two tools are used to monitor learning and communicate child's progress: a booklet that is updated throughout nursery school and a summary of the child's achievements, completed at the end of nursery school. Both documents are shared with the student's parent or legal guardian (Ministry of National Education, 2013a).	Practitioners in kindergarten or nursery programmes. Locally, collaboration between teachers at both levels to ease transition.
Ireland	<i>Aistear</i> , <i>Siolta</i> recommend coordination	No standard template	Various local templates and initiatives.	See <i>Transition from Preschool to Primary school: Audit of Transfer Documentation in Ireland</i> (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b)
Netherlands	Co-operation between sectors encouraged	No standard template	N/A	N/A

Jurisdiction	Transition policy	Transfer of information on children's learning from preschool to primary school: Models and Templates	Contents of transition documentation	Who is involved in compiling the record of learning?
Scotland	Curriculum for Excellence: pre-school into primary transitions (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010)	No standard template	<i>Transfer information/individual profiles must be carefully considered in order to provide information to enable progression and sharing of information must always respect issues of confidentiality</i> <i>Transfer information could be recorded in an agreed 'learning vehicle' such as a 'learning story', 'e-profile' or personal profile' between parents, practitioners and children. This record could be continued for the first term (or longer) in primary 1, to improve continuity. Transfer information/individual profiles should provide a holistic picture of the child and could include progression in relation to the four capacities and a focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Information may include some 'stepping stones', 'next steps' or 'suggested next steps'. Reference may be made to preferred learning styles, behaviour and social patterns.</i> (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010, n.p.)	Ministry of Education responsible for developing policy. Local Authorities encouraged to provide practical guidance and support on what information should be shared (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010, n.p.)
Singapore	No	No standard template	N/A	N/A
Sweden	Statutory preschool curriculum specifies that preschools, schools and 'leisure-time centres' (after school care) should collaborate in order to smooth transitions for children	No standard template	N/A	N/A
USA (Massachusetts)	Transition policies main focus is SEN	No standard template	Local templates in use.	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has policies on transition for children with SEN

Brief points of relevance on transitions

The audit reveals interesting points regarding the transition from preschool of primary school and Australia and New Zealand are leading the way as set out in *Transition from Preschool to Primary School*, Research Report No. 19 (O’Kane, 2016). This points of relevance section begins with these two jurisdictions and then moves on to the other jurisdictions looked at in the audit, including Ireland.

Australia

Much of the work on researching and supporting transitions in recent years has been led by Australia, and in particular by the *Educational Transitions: Continuity and Change* research team. At national level and building on the 2011 *Transition to School Position Statement* produced by a group of international researchers (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group⁶, 2011), the Australian Government’s Department of Education published a document entitled *Continuity of Learning: A resource to support effective transition to school and school age care* (Dockett and Perry, 2014a). In conjunction with the national early years curriculum and quality standards, this resource supports the development of transition policies and practices throughout Australia. The state Departments of Education—notably Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales—have also developed resources for use by settings within their jurisdictions. It is worthwhile here to look in-depth at some of this work, and at how families, schools and early years settings are supported in two of these jurisdictions in particular: Victoria and Queensland. The New South Wales Transition to School project operates in much the same way with some minor differences, and the *NSW Transition to School Statement*

⁶ This ETC are a group of national and international transition to school researchers who have been working in the area over the last 20 years. The authors were assisted in the task of developing the Position Statement by a wide range of educators and policy makers, who also reviewed and commented on the document.

is similar to those used in Queensland and Victoria. (See Table 2 for a summary.)

Victoria: Developing a Transition Statement

The Victorian ‘Transition Statement’ was created following an extensive process of development, trialling, and evaluation. The Transition Statement summarises the strengths of the child, identifies their interests and individual approaches to learning, and indicates how the child can be supported to continue learning. The Statement reflects the five learning and development outcomes identified in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which is a guide for families and practitioners involved with children’s learning and development from birth to eight years of age (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2011). The five outcomes are:

- Children have a strong sense of identity (Identity)
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world (Community)
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing (Wellbeing)
- Children are confident and involved learners (Learning)
- Children are effective communicators (Communication).

The Statement takes a strength-based approach, identifying what works for the child and how it works so that appropriate strategies can continue to be developed to match the child’s abilities. Strengths are defined as a child’s intellectual, physical and interpersonal skills, capacities, dispositions, interests and motivations.

The process commences when parents complete ‘Part 1: The Family’ section of the statement. This includes information such as: the child’s background (for example, family members, language spoken at home, etc.); the child’s experiences at home and in the community; parental views about the

child starting school; what the parent thinks might help the child settle into school. It also gives parents the opportunity to highlight the strengths of the child and possible areas requiring support, and offers information on how best to support their child. Then the early childhood educator completes 'Part 2: The Early Childhood Educator'. Here the educator commences by outlining the context of the early years setting including the philosophy of the learning environment; a description of program delivery; and the child's attendance history. Suggestions on how to support the individual child on transition to school are then offered. After this, the educator is free to outline any relevant information under the headings: *Identity, Community, Wellbeing, Learning and Communication*. When completed, the family is given a copy of the full Statement. With their consent, the early education setting then give it to the child's school and to any outside-school-hours care service (if applicable). It is recommended that schools commence the process by contacting local early education settings to agree the best time for transition statements to be received (DEECD, n.d.).

A full evaluation of the project was conducted (DEECD, 2012) and found a positive perception of the Transition Initiative in its first year. However, practitioners identified the Statement process as the most challenging aspect of the initiative. A key recommendation of the final report was to develop material that further explains the strength-based approach to writing Statements. Training was given to all practitioners on how to complete the Statements, and follow-up documentation was sent to any practitioners who could not attend training. There is also full guidance given online to practitioners on how to write up Transition Statements (DEECD, 2012).

It is mandatory for all preschool services that receive state funding in Victoria to prepare Transition Statements for all children. However, the statement, which commences with a consent form, cannot be shared with schools without parental consent. Information on privacy issues is clearly outlined online for staff and parents (DEECD, 2013).

Queensland: Successful Transitions initiative

In keeping with national policy in Australia, Queensland has also introduced Transition Statements which are written in collaboration with parents, child and Kindergarten staff (QCAA, 2014b). When children complete Kindergarten, parents are provided with a Transition Statement and they are encouraged to share this with the child's Prep/school teacher. The Queensland Department of Education has introduced a state-wide approach to supporting transitions, stating: *Transitions promote continuity between settings e.g. from home to kindergarten, between kindergarten and long day-care services, or family day care, and from the Kindergarten Year to the Preparatory Year* (QCAA, 2015). The approach taken is multi-faceted and wide-ranging, and there are supports for families, schools and early years settings. The material for families and schools is hosted by the Early Childhood Education and Care department of the Queensland government (Queensland Government Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016) (see Panel 1 and Panel 2 for more information). As part of the effort to promote successful transitions and continuity between settings, Queensland has also conducted an *Age-Appropriate Pedagogies* pilot project initiative in 2015 which is to be extended to the Prep year in all schools. The characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies include: active, agentic, collaborative, creative, explicit, language-rich and dialogic, learner focused, narrative, playful, responsive, and scaffolded (Queensland Government Early Childhood Education and Care, 2015, p.6).

Queensland Government Early Childhood Education and Care (2016)

Transition to School website: Information for families

- **Tip sheet:** Transition to school: Information for families
- Support your child's transition to school with some **simple tips and fun activities**.

Links to:

- **Continuity of Learning: A resource to support effective transition to school and school age care** (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014)
- An introductory **leaflet** and **video** for parents on **transition statements** (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA))
- **Resources for parents** which provide information and advice for families on topics related to transitions across childcare environments, preschool, and school. (Early Childhood Australia (ECA))
- A series of **videos** and **information sheets** offering support for children and their families in adapting to school routines. (KidsMatter)
- **Resources on preparing for the start of school.** Links to practical tips on how to manage the first few weeks of term, including how to help your child make new friends (Raising Children Network: The Australian Parenting website)
- **Resources which share parent and child experiences** of transition to school, including a video and an information booklet on starting school. (Illawarra Transition to School Project)
- **Step up into Education** initiative under which 24 Queensland schools from areas of disadvantage are receiving funding to deliver school readiness and transition initiatives to suit the needs of their local community.

Source: <http://www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/info-families.html>

Transition to School website: information for schools

Queensland Government Early Childhood Education and Care (2016)

What, How and Why of Successful Transitions: three inter-linked aspects

Why? The importance of transitions

- Video clips on importance of transitions
- Links to research, fact sheets, case studies and other support materials under five headings:
 - Respect for diversity
 - Effective Use of Data
 - Responsive environments
 - Effective pedagogy and practice*
 - Reciprocal Relationships

What? State-wide approach to transitions

- Supporting successful transitions - school decision-making tool
- Newsletters, Posters, Case studies
- Video clips
- Links to additional resources and research

How? Strengthening transition practices

- Video clips
- **Supporting Successful Transitions** tool for schools
 - Step 1: Assess current transition practice
 - Step 2: Plan collaboratively to assess strategies based on data
 - Step 3: Develop and implement a transition plan
 - Step 4: Measure the effectiveness of your transition plan
- Links to additional resources for schools

Source: <http://www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/successful-transitions.html>

*Link to Age-appropriate Pedagogies research project: <http://www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/age-appropriate-pedagogies.html>

New Zealand

Following an extensive review of the literature on transitions by Peters in 2010, a national report *Continuity of Learning* by the Education Review Office (ERO, 2015b) looked at what was, and what was not, working well in relation to transition from preschool to primary school in New Zealand. The New Zealand government, recognising the importance of Early Care and Education (ECE), has introduced several initiatives in recent years with the aim of enhancing collaboration between preschools and primary schools and to improve continuity of learning for children. Twenty hours of state-funded ECE is available to all three-, four- and five-year-old children. The government fully funds the cost for these children for up to six hours per day, and up to 20 hours per week from the date of their first birthday up to the date they start school (Ministry for Education, 2013).

In 2014, the New Zealand Ministry of Education introduced an on-line Early Learning Information system (ELI), through which ECE services are required to send data on the children attending their service to the Ministry. The data collected includes basic demographic information about each child, as well as how long they have been attending the setting. The aim is to build a body of data on early childhood education which will allow the Ministry to monitor and forecast expenditure, and design new policies to allow for future research and planning. Children are now allocated a national student number on first enrolling in an ECE setting, rather than when they first attend school. Their attendance at the ECE setting will be recorded and form part of their school record.

Most children in New Zealand start school on or shortly after their fifth birthday although school is not compulsory until they are six. This situation means that teachers of this age cohort in New Zealand face an on-going enrolment of children, as compared to an annual intake in many other countries (Peters, 2010).

The 2013 *Statement of Intent* from the Ministry of Education is clear on the importance of supporting transitions:

We know that the early years are a period of vulnerability for children, and we are focused on making sure education experiences are positive and rewarding, and set all children on a successful education pathway. We will focus on transitions within and through education for children and young people, and their parents, families, whānau and iwi. Smooth and supported transitions from early childhood education to primary schooling, from primary to secondary schooling, and from secondary schooling into tertiary education and/or the workforce will support students to succeed (Ministry of Education, 2013, p.6).

All ECE settings in New Zealand are required by the early childhood regulations to have a transition to school policy in place (Marry, 2007). The emphasis in developing transition policies and programmes is on relationships, on supporting children and families at times of transition, and reflecting on practice through the lens of the themes of the *Te Whariki* framework. *There is no one 'best' way of supporting good transition to school (Advisory Group on Early Learning, 2015, p.30).*

As discussed in *Transition from Preschool to Primary School*, Research Report No. 19 (O'Kane, 2016), another way in which information about children's learning is transferred from preschool to primary school in New Zealand is through the portfolios (profile books) of learning that children bring with them. (See Panel 3). The report of the *Advisory Group on Early Learning* (June, 2015) also made recommendations on transitions; these included greater alignment between *Te Whariki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*, schools establishing reception or transition classes for five year olds and the use of *Te Whariki* in the first year of primary school and the establishment of a repository for case studies of effective transition to school policies and practices. The Advisory Group also made a number of recommendations on early intervention and smoothing transitions for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Improving and using assessment and records of learning (New Zealand)

Assessing children in supportive ways and using this information are very important to a child's continuous learning.

- Good practice includes focusing early childhood assessment on an individual child's interests and ways of learning, and on their learning in relation to the early childhood curriculum Te Whariki, rather than just on participation.
- Assessment information and records of learning - such as profile books - should be shared with parents and schools, as well as information about any extra support the child might need for a successful move to school.
- It's important that new entrant teachers use the information provided from early childhood services and make links between how a child learns and the key competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum.

(Education Review Office, 2015b, p.5)

Canada, Ontario

In September 2010, the Ontario government began phasing in full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds (Junior and Senior Kindergarten). Since September 2014, all elementary schools offer the programme. Classes have an average of 26 children with a teacher and an early childhood educator in each room (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). These years are designed to help children broaden their base of information, form concepts, acquire foundation skills and positive attitudes to learning, and begin to develop their abilities and talents in a wide range of areas. The children then move to a more 'formal' school curriculum with a more academic focus at age 6 years, when they move to Grade/Year 1.

The Ontario Student Record (OSR) is required under Policy/Programme Memorandum No.11, and each school undertakes to transfer information on children through the school system, from Year 1 (age 6-7) to Year 8 (age 13-14). This template identifies each child's level of development, learning abilities and needs. It is initiated when a child is first enrolled in school or no later than the beginning of a programme of studies immediately following Kindergarten and continues to be completed each year through to year 8 (Ontario Ministry for Education, 2013a). The tool highlights learning skills and work habits which consist of: responsibility, organisation, independent work, collaboration, initiative and self-regulation, and can be applied across grade and curriculum subject. However, interestingly although the two kindergarten years are based within the primary school system, the form is not intended to transfer information from these two years to the formal system. Although policy documents refer to the process as developing from Junior Kindergarten through to Year 12, specific policy information actually commences at Year 1, not Kindergarten (Ontario Ministry for Education, 2010. p2.).



England

At present all 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to 570 hours of state-funded early education or childcare per year. This is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible if they have special educational needs, or where the family is in receipt of special welfare benefits. The Childcare Bill (2015) will double state-funded childcare available for all working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds to 30 hours a week—available to up to 600,000 families and worth around £5,000 a year—including the £2,500 they can already save from existing state-funded childcare offers. Plans are being drawn up to introduce the changes for some families a year earlier than planned, with pilots in some areas offering 30 hours of state-funded places from September 2016 (Gov.uk, 2015). These state-funded places are available in a variety of settings including state nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes within primary schools, as well as settings outside the state sector such as voluntary pre-schools, privately run nurseries or childminders. The state-funded allocation applies until the child reaches compulsory school age.



Children reach compulsory school age at the start of the school term following their fifth birthday which may be in September, January or April, although the law does allow that children start earlier. If they turn five in September to March, they will start in the reception class. Most children enter primary school before they reach compulsory school age, most commonly in the September following their fourth birthday and thus spend a full year in the reception class (National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2013).

Although there is no national template to transfer information from preschool to primary school, transfer of information is done in a formal way at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) includes nursery classes (3-4 years) which are considered preschool classes, and reception classes (4-5 years) which are considered the first year of primary education and are located in the primary school system. Foundation years providers must complete an EYFS profile for each child during the academic year they reach the age of five with a view to supporting the transition from the EYFS to Key Stage 1.

Finland

In Finland, children do not begin primary school until they are seven years old. However, children have the right to start education one year earlier if their readiness to attend school has been proved through psychological tests. Based on these tests, the education provider can also grant permission to start school one year later (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2013). Providing a place in pre-primary education free of charge for all children is a statutory duty for municipalities, and participation became compulsory in August 2015 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2). The pre-primary year is considered to be a year of transition from a play-based curriculum to a more structured and formal one.

National guidelines do not specify transition practices, although they advocate continuity and co-operation. In Grades 1 and 2, teaching is expected to consider the knowledge children have acquired and the skills and dispositions developed in pre-primary education. The two educational contexts are expected to make up a consistent unified whole (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2013).

Ahtola *et al.* (2011) examined the transition practices implemented by preschool–elementary school pairs [school settings partnered for the research study with a local preschool setting] and found that the most common practices were discussions about children and familiarising them with the school, and the least common practices were co-operation over curricula and passing on written information about children. In the preschool system, an individual educational plan is made for every child as a basis for co-operation between the early childhood service and parents (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2004) but this is rarely passed on to the primary school. However, Ahtola *et al.* (2011) found that *passing on written information, e.g., an education plan or growth portfolio, about the child from preschool to elementary school was one of the best predictors of academic development in grade one of the primary school* (p.300).

France

Almost all children in France attend preschool (*L'école maternelle*) from three years of age until age five (Ministry of National Education, n.d.). The three-year cycle is referred to as the *cycle des apprentissages premiers*. The main aim is to teach the child some degree of autonomy and how to live in a social situation. In the *grande section*, activities are geared toward preparing the child for primary school including pre-reading, writing and elementary maths. Children then enter the formal primary school system at age six. The first two years are CP (*cours préparatoire*) and CE1 (first year of *cours élémentaire*) and constitute the second two-year cycle, the *cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux*. It is in the first year (*cours préparatoire*) that children learn to write and further develop their reading skills.

At the end of CE1 children undertake their first formal assessments generally based on the skills of reading and writing (Ministry of National Education France, 2013). The pre-primary curriculum sets out learning outcomes that children should have achieved by age six. Acquisition of this knowledge and skills is not formally tested but is assessed by teachers. The Ministry of Education has published a guidebook to help teachers to develop their assessment techniques (Ministry of Education, 2010).

From 2016, a new nursery school programme for children from three years has been implemented (Ministry of National Education, 2013a). This has involved a redesigned evaluation process which shares critical information with parents and teachers. In order to facilitate the continuity of children's education during the transition to primary school, nursery school teachers pass on to school teachers a summary of children's achievements at the end of nursery school. Two resources are used to monitor learning and to communicate student progress: a booklet that is updated throughout nursery school, and a summary of the student's achievements completed at the end of nursery school. Both documents are shared with the children's parent/s or legal guardian (Ministry of National

Education, 2013a). The revised programme for the *maternelle* (Ministry of National Education France, 2015) also emphasises the need for the *maternelle* and the primary school to work together to promote continuity of learning and to identify and address any difficulties children may be experiencing.



Ireland

Almost all children in Ireland attend some type of preschool provision mostly in private, community and voluntary settings. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme is a national initiative introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2010 to provide early childhood care and education for children prior to enrolment in primary school. The State pays a capitation fee to participating early years settings. From September 2016, a second year is available (DCYA, 2010, 2016).

Compulsory education in Ireland begins at the age of six years, but many children start school before this. Nearly 40% of four-year-olds and virtually all five-year-olds attend primary school, where early education is provided in infant classes (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The primary school system can be best described as publicly funded and privately managed. In recent years the State has made efforts to provide greater choice of educational providers for the primary sector. A State-based multi-denominational school model was established in 2008 called Community National Schools (CNSs). While this model is still in its infancy, in the recent Programme for Partnership Government a commitment to provide up to 400 non-denominational and multi-denominational schools by 2030 was made (2016, p.89).

In 2009, *Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support the care and education of all children from birth to six years of age. This age span means that the framework also has relevance for infant classes in primary schools. Preschool settings have been engaging with the framework since development on a voluntary basis without the support of a national training plan. In the case of four to six-year-old children enrolled in primary schools, teachers continue to use the *Primary School Curriculum* (Department of Education and Science, 1999). The curriculum focuses on what to teach while teachers have flexibility in deciding how they teach. Many primary school teachers are using

Aistear to support teaching and learning in infant classrooms. The structure of the primary curriculum and the use of time across it, are being looked at by the NCCA. In time, the whole curriculum for infant classes will be redeveloped and *Aistear* will be a key part of this (for more information see O’Kane, 2016).

In the Irish context, although there is no national policy on transition, the two practice frameworks, *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development [CECDE], 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) both impact on practice with regard to this transition. In addition, a number of projects and initiatives have taken place that focus on transitions and many of these include the development of transfer documentation. (For more information see O’Kane, 2016 and O’Kane and Murphy, 2016a).

Massachusetts, USA

The Massachusetts Department of Education requires all public school districts to offer a state-funded kindergarten programme for children of five years of age. Schools are encouraged to offer this on a full-day basis. Current Massachusetts regulations mandate that 425 hours of kindergarten be provided by all public school districts and be made available to all children (about 2.4 hours per day). There is some local variation from district to district in how kindergarten is offered in terms of hours per day and days per week. Full-day kindergarten is defined as a minimum of five instructional hours, for five days per week, for 180-days of the school year. In Massachusetts, 93% of five-year-olds are enrolled in full day kindergarten (Early Education for All, 2016). Although full-day kindergarten is not mandatory by law, state funding has supported:

- the expansion of kindergarten programs to full-day
- the improvement of existing full-day programs

- initiatives aimed at strengthening the alignment between preschool and kindergarten curricula and the curriculum for older grades (EnlightenMe.com, 2016).

Under Massachusetts state law, the Board of Early Education and Care is required to develop a kindergarten entrance assessment for all preschool children getting ready to make the transition to kindergarten. This is to assess whether they might need specialist services. The screening checks for difficulties with hearing and vision, gross motor and fine motor skills, ability to communicate, and ability to think and learn. Screening results are sent to parents.

Limited places are also available for four-year-olds in K1 classes, a pre-kindergarten class. First Grade is the first formal compulsory academic year and children must start at six years of age. The curriculum in public elementary education is determined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011a). Much of the focus on transition in Massachusetts has been in the area of SEN and early intervention, but several local districts have developed transition programmes in the context of the P-3 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Project (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011b).

Netherlands

The compulsory school starting age in the Netherlands is 5 but virtually all (98%) children start school at four (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE), n.d.; NFER, 2013). In the Netherlands, early childhood education and care for children from birth to 4 years old is characterised by a dual system of general childcare and childcare focused on children at risk.

Kinderopvang, or general child care, consists of *kinderdagverblijven* (childcare centres) and *Gastouders* (family care hosts) for children from a few months to 4 years old. Additionally, the *kinderopvang* sector includes the out-of-school-hours care for children aged 4 to 12 (European Parliament, 2013). There are three

types of childcare facilities available outside the education system. These are:

- playgroups: subsidised by the local government, these are open to all children aged two-to-four years, and are the most popular form of pre-primary provision
- preschools: offer development stimulation programmes and have a more educational focus, particularly intended for children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- day nurseries: take care of children in order to allow parents to work.

The funding of childcare is the joint responsibility of government, employers and parents. Parents are eligible for a childcare subsidy, which is paid by the central government to the parents and is income based (European Parliament, 2013).

Concern about the quality of some provision and an increase in the numbers of children at risk of language disadvantage (being behind expected milestones for language and vocabulary development) led to the establishment of a pilot project in 30 schools nationwide in 2011/2012 to enable young children at risk of language disadvantage to get off to a good start at primary school. The children taking part are assigned to a so-called 'starter group', where a primary school teams up with local playgroups or childcare centres to enrich the learning environment. The primary school is responsible for overseeing the continuity of learning and the child's overall development from the start of early childhood education to the end of their primary school career. Children develop their language and communication skills in Dutch through 12½ hours of guided play per week. Some 30 schools are participating in this nationwide trial (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2015). The responsibility for childcare facilities as a policy area has recently been transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (EADSNE, n.d.).

In terms of communication and cross-sectoral coordination, McKenney, Letschert and Klopogge (2007) argue that quality within the early childhood education sector in the



Netherlands is not consistent. They note that this, combined with a deep-rooted division between care and education results in a lack of communication between the two sectors. However, they argue that educators are ready to explore ways of strengthening connections and improving continuity between preschool, day-care and primary school education. Indeed, the European Parliament (2013) reports that various municipalities in the Netherlands are working at a local level to improve coordination between pre-school programmes and the primary education sector.

Northern Ireland

A non-compulsory part-time state-funded pre-school year is targeted at children in the year immediately before they enter Primary One. Northern Ireland has the earliest compulsory school starting age in the UK, and one of the earliest in Europe. Children start school in September if they have reached the age of

four by the previous 1st July, and so are aged 4 years and 2 months to 5 years and 2 months on starting (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2012). The compulsory school starting age was changed from five to four years in 1989 because it was thought that all children would benefit from spending a total of 12 full years at school (seven years at primary school and five at secondary school) (NFER, 2013). Calls have been made to raise this starting age (Belfast Telegraph, 16/12/2014; Early Years, 2015). Although there is no legislation governing the transfer of information, pre-schools are encouraged in the *Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education* to liaise with primary schools and share information.

Towards the end of the children's pre-school education, parents and staff should discuss the move to primary school. Pre-school staff should liaise with staff in the schools to which the children will transfer. Information which is to be passed on (concerning the child's progress) should be shared with parents. (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2014, pp.17-18).

Although there are links made between many pre-school and primary settings in managing the transition, *there remains a variation in the practice and effectiveness regarding the sharing of information on the children's progress and achievements between preschool settings and primary schools* (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2012, p.38). Two versions of transfer documentation were identified, first a 'Pre-school Transition Form' (Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA), n.d.a) and the second, the 'Pre-school Transition Record' (CCEA, n.d.b). Both are reported to be widely used by schools (Personal Communication), although their use is not mandatory. Reporting to parents, however, does formally take place at the end of the Foundation Stage. From 2010 an annual report became the statutory means for reporting to parents of all children in primary school, including the Foundation Stage, although most schools had implemented the annual report since June 2009 (Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment, 2013).

Scotland

In Scotland, the school year begins in mid-August. Any single school year group consists of children born between the beginning of March in one year and the end of February the following year. As such, children in Scotland usually start school between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years (The Scottish Government, 2012). Since April 2002, Local Authorities have had a duty to secure a funded part-time preschool education place for every three- and four-year-old whose parents wish it (Scottish Family Information Service, n.d.). The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced new early learning and childcare entitlements to replace the funded 12.5 hours per week during term time of pre-school education for 3- and 4- year olds. Since August 2014, all 3- and 4-year-olds, and 2-year-olds under a care order, or with a parent in receipt of qualifying benefits, are eligible for 600 hours/year early learning and childcare (the equivalent of around 16 hours/week during term time) (The Scottish Government, n.d.).

The transfer of information from preschool to primary school is recommended but not compulsory. Local authorities are encouraged to provide practical guidance and support on the information that should be shared. It is also recommended that a dedicated transitions co-ordinator is identified in every pre-school and primary setting to ensure the transition process is managed effectively (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009).

Singapore

Children in Singapore usually attend non-compulsory pre-school from age four up to six years, commonly called *Nursery*, *Kindergarten 1 (K1)* and *Kindergarten 2 (K2)*. They then move to formal primary school education at age 7. The pre-school years are subsidised by the Singapore Government, and in April 2013 these subsidies were increased for middle and lower income families (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2013).

The *Educator's Guide to the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, Republic of Singapore,

2012, p.92) talks about *working with primary schools to smoothen transition*. The focus is on getting children ready for school and the *Guide* suggests ways in which kindergartens and schools can work together to smooth transitions – joint activities, visits, preparing children for school routines and so on (Ministry of Education, Republic of Singapore, 2012).

There is no formal policy for the transfer of documentation from pre-school to primary school, although it is noted that a systematic screening process is carried out at the beginning of the first primary school year to identify any pupils who might need additional support (Ministry of Education, Republic of Singapore, 2013a).



The Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) was set up in April 2013 to oversee the regulation and development of kindergarten and other ECCE programmes. One of the tasks set to the ECDA is to facilitate the transition of children from pre-school to formal education (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2013). The ECDA is also responsible for an Early Childhood Research Fund working on research in various strands across the ECCE sector. One of these strands is Assessment in the Early Years and includes a study on some of the processes or assessment tools that teachers use in evaluating their teaching and the children's outcomes (ECDA, 2013a). This may have an impact on the transfer of documentation from the pre-school to the primary sector.

Commenting on the fact that Singapore's pre-school education was placed 29th amongst 45 countries on the starting well index, the Lien Foundation (2012) noted that in terms of weaknesses, *linkages between the pre-school and primary school* (p.2) was one of those cited. Addressing the weak link between pre-school and primary school it was suggested that Kindergarten 2 could come under the Ministry of Education's wing as pre-primary classes in order to ensure a smoother transition to Primary 1. Yeo Lay (2013) also cites a pedagogical discontinuity between pre-schools and primary schools in Singapore as an issue impacting on children's transitions between the two settings that needs addressing (2013).

Sweden

Preschools are open throughout the year, with daily hours adjusted to meet the needs of working parents. These are non-compulsory, and are aimed at children from one year to five years. Settings aimed at children from birth are primarily aimed at working parents, but the majority of children do not attend preschool until aged three years (Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d.). A one-year state-funded preschool class (*förskoleklass*) for six- to seven-year-old children was specially developed to facilitate transition to the primary school. It is non-compulsory, within the public school system, and is designed to prepare children

for formal schooling. Children are entitled to 525 hours per school year. It combines the pedagogical methods of the preschool with those of compulsory school.

The majority of six-year-olds in Sweden are enrolled in preschool classes, and compulsory education commences when the child is aged 7 years (OECD, 2006; Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d.). Unlike some other countries, including Ireland, the Swedish preschool curriculum (*Läroplan för Förskolan – Lpfö 98*, revised in 2010) is legally binding. It is not, however, over-prescriptive; rather it is a broad framework that sets out the values and principles that guide ECCE programmes across the different types of preschool settings and allows flexibility in its implementation (Skolverket, 2010). It places the child and play at the centre of the curriculum, and emphasises the importance of social and emotional development as well as respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based (Taguma, Litjens and Makowiecki, 2013).

With regard to transitions, the Swedish statutory curriculum specifies that preschools, schools and 'leisure-time centres' (after school care) should collaborate in order to smooth transitions for children.

In order to support the all-round development of children for the future, the preschool should strive to establish good working co-operation with the preschool class, the school and the leisure-time centre. Co-operation should be based on national and local goals, and the guidelines applicable to the different activities. As the time approaches for the child to transfer to the preschool, the school and the leisure-time centre, the preschool has the special task of facilitating the transition and completing the preschool period. In the transition special attention should be given to those children needing special support (Läroplan för Förskolan, 1998/2010, p.13).

Wales

Children in Wales reach compulsory school age at the start of the school term following their fifth birthday, which may be in September, January or April. If they turn five in September to March, they will start in the reception class. Most children enter primary school before they reach compulsory school age, most commonly in the September following their fourth birthday and thus spend a full year in the reception class (NFER, 2013). In 2008 a new curriculum, the Foundation Phase, was rolled out to all schools in Wales. It is the statutory curriculum for all three to seven-year-old children in both the reception year and Years 1 and 2 of primary school providing a degree of continuity for this age group. The Foundation Phase is based on experiential learning, in small groups, with a teacher ratio of 1:8 for the youngest ages (Welsh Government, n.d.). An expert group has been set up to develop a strategic action plan with regard to the Foundation Phase, which will put in place a strategy to develop consistently good and effective practice across all settings and schools in order for the Foundation Phase to reach its full potential. This action plan is due to be published in 2016 (Welsh Government, 2015a).

The Foundation Phase Profile (FPP) was introduced on a statutory basis in September 2015, based on learning outcomes in four areas of the Foundation Phase curriculum. The FPP supports summative assessments at statutory points and is intended to be used to support the statutory baseline assessment during reception year from September 2015. The assessment will be in the form of observations and formative assessments. As in England, it was planned to introduce compulsory baseline assessments for children when they enter the reception class, but this was opposed by teacher unions and other campaign groups (National Union of Teachers, 2015; Too Much Too Soon Campaign, 2015). This proposal has now been withdrawn.



There are no formal policy guidelines on transitions in Wales, but inspection reports on preschools comment favourably where good local arrangements are in place (Estyn, 2016). Like elsewhere there are a number of local initiatives that focus on the transition from preschool to primary school.

National policies and agreed templates for transfer of transition information

While policies encouraging the sharing of information between preschools and primary schools are in place in many of the jurisdictions included in the audit (see Table 2), no nationally agreed template for transfer of information was found in any jurisdiction. Interestingly, the New Zealand Preschool Regulations require preschools to have a transition-to-school policy (Marry, 2007), although it should be noted that no specific requirements are outlined as to what information should be included in this policy. At local level, however, recommendations for kindergartens within the Wellington area include references to co-ordination, communication and sharing of information (Wellington Kindergartens, 2011). At the time of transition, the links between preschools and primary schools are frequently at a local level, making it difficult to get a clear picture of exactly what happens. However, this absence of nationally agreed templates should not be taken to mean that at local level no information is transferred between preschools and primary schools.

It is interesting to note that although no national tools were identified for transfer of information from preschools to primary schools such tools are very commonly used once the child enters the primary school system. In Ontario, Canada, schools use an early-screening tool that includes a teacher's guide, forms for interviews and data collection, and transition forms that accompany children from one grade to the next, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). A similar process also takes place in France at the end of C1, the first year of primary school. In England and Wales there is a move towards a statutory formal assessment once the child has entered the primary school system. In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016) is an assessment of each child's development and learning achievements at the end of the academic year in which they turn

five. The EYFS Profile outlines attainment in relation to 17 early learning goal descriptors. In Wales, the Foundation Phase Profile (FPP) has been developed as a national assessment of all children to establish a baseline within the first six weeks of entry to school (Welsh Government, 2015). EYFS profile results were also intended to be collected by local authorities and by the Department for Education in order to monitor national and local trends in children's learning outcomes. There has been much controversy with respect to the use of baseline assessments in both jurisdictions and this has led to the withdrawal of a proposal for statutory baseline assessments in reception classes (Department for Education, (UK) 2016). The emphasis at policy level in England and Wales has been more on assessment and accountability than on easing transitions for children. However, it is important to point out that there are also many transition initiatives at local level in England and Wales.

Possible data protection concerns

The absence of well-developed national systems for the transfer of information from preschools to primary schools might be due to concerns about data protection. Indeed, it is possible that data privacy may be a significant concern in this regard. In Queensland, Australia, parents are advised about the importance of sharing children's transition statements with the primary school in order to give them the opportunity to understand children's learning and to support their transition to a new learning environment. However, privacy legislation requirements prevent kindergartens from providing statements directly to schools, and instead parents are requested to share this information themselves (Queensland Studies Authority, 2012). The Victoria State Government (2015a, 2015b) has addressed data privacy issues in their jurisdiction by including a consent form for parents to sign, and by giving them the option to choose to what extent and with whom it can be shared. It also provides practitioners with extensive guidance on data privacy and data sharing (Victoria State Government, 2015c).

In England, Northern Ireland, and Wales a Pupil Profile on each child is completed after the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and because this happens within the school, data privacy concerns appear to be less of a concern, and parental permission for the transfer of this information is not required. In Ontario, Canada, the *Consortium Régional de l'Est de l'Ontario* has developed an early-screening tool and transition forms that accompany children from one grade to the next. Here again parental consent is not required for the transfer of information within the school system. In Canada, the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information about children in the formal education system is governed by the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2016).

The issue of data privacy is one that needs to be considered in the context of an Irish transfer document for children moving from preschool to primary school. It may be instructive to note

in this regard that the 6th Class Report Card is now a mandatory document used to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and transferring pupil information to post-primary schools. This sharing of information is intended to ensure that records of the child's achievements and abilities are available to the new school in order to support continuity for students. This transfer of information includes results of 6th class standardised tests in order to ensure that schools can put additional supports in place for students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Regarding data privacy, the Education (Welfare) Act (Section 28) (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the (Prescribed Bodies) Regulations 2005 (Government of Ireland, 2005) are key pieces of legislation to consider. They allow schools to share relevant information concerning a child transferring between recognised schools without breaching data protection law. This is contingent on the information being provided in order to support the child's learning and development. However, it is not clear if they will have the same impact on the transfer of data from preschool to primary school in relation to children below the compulsory school age of six.

ECCE curricular framework recommendations for documenting and assessing

ECCE Curricular Frameworks from many of the jurisdictions reviewed highlight the importance of observation as part of on-going assessment in order to provide documentary evidence to show the progression in children's learning: Scotland, Singapore, Ireland and Ontario, for example. Preschool practitioners are given advice about collaboration with families in documenting this evidence, interpretation of evidence, and how to link it to the learning goals identified for children. Ways in which this evidence can be systematically organised and documented, the various methods which can be used for documentation, and the importance of sharing this information with families are all considered. Mention is made of the importance of sharing this information with other professionals, and of the importance of links between preschools and primary schools. For example, the *Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore* (Ministry of Education, 2012) contains *learning goals that establish what children should be able to do at the end of their kindergarten education, to ensure that they have a smooth transition from preschool to primary one* (p.14). Indeed, in the Irish context, *Aistear* notes that assessment should be an *on-going process of collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and using information to develop rich portraits of children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning* (NCCA, 2009, p.72). However, little evidence was found nationally, or indeed, internationally to support the transfer of this information from preschools to primary schools to support children's learning and development or to make their transition easier.



The fact that there is a dearth of national policy statements on the transfer of information from preschools to primary schools suggests that the value of this transfer is not recognised as a policy priority nationally or internationally. There are many possible reasons for this, which could include the view of the two settings (preschools and primary schools) as very separate entities (O'Kane, 2007). Research indicating that the preschool system is still undervalued in terms of professional practice (see O'Kane, 2016) may be of some significance too in this regard. As researchers internationally argue the case for greater levels of coordination and communication between the two sectors to facilitate smooth transitions for children (The Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011), it is clear that transfer of relevant documentation is an important and useful part of this collaboration. Yet, this is not happening in a coordinated way in many of the jurisdictions reviewed in this audit.

Conclusion

In summary, a state-funded preschool year is becoming increasingly common internationally, although the age at which this is offered varies, depending on statutory school starting age. Most jurisdictions offer state-funded preschool places both within the primary school system and in preschool settings. Those jurisdictions that do not provide a state-funded preschool year subsidise childcare payments for parents in a variety of ways. With regard to compulsory primary school starting age, the youngest age ranges noted were throughout the UK. For the majority of jurisdictions, the compulsory age is six years but it was noted that many children start school well in advance of the compulsory school starting age. No jurisdiction reviewed has a nationally agreed template for the transfer of information on children's learning and development though New Zealand and Australia are leading the way in work on transitions. It was noted in the jurisdictions reviewed that within the formal primary school system, a nationwide template to transfer information on children at key points is available in many cases. The value of transferring such information from preschools to primary schools does not as yet appear to be recognised. Some transfer takes place at local level in many jurisdictions but in an uncoordinated way with little clarification on the level of collaboration or research about how the information is used when it is passed on to the primary school.

Yet collaboration in the process of transferring information has been identified as being of value across many of the jurisdictions reviewed. Clearly, transfer documentation not only helps to smooth the transition for children and their families preparing to enter the primary school system, but also has a use in terms of building cross-sectoral relationships once both sectors are open to building the relationship. An important consideration highlighted in New Zealand and Australia is the need for greater continuity and understanding between preschools and primary schools. In the Irish context, practitioners and teachers have agreed that the transfer of information between preschools and primary schools is important on many levels (O'Kane and Murphy,

2016b). However, at present this type of work happens in an uncoordinated way and in many cases, does not happen at all. Building links with *Aistear* in transfer documentation has the potential to support greater coordination and consistency across the preschool and primary sectors. The development of national templates along with greater consistency in how and when information is shared would be welcome. Ensuring that the information is used to support children's learning and development after they move to primary school and building relationships between preschools and primary school is also critical. This audit along with *Transition from Preschool to Primary School*, Research Report No. 19 (O'Kane, 2016) and *Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Audit of Transfer Documentation in Ireland* (O'Kane and Murphy 2016b) provide a strong foundation on which the NCCA can build when developing reporting templates for this important transition in young children's lives. It also provides useful insights for the NCCA as work begins on developing a new primary curriculum framework.

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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2 D02 KH36

T: +353 1 661 7177

F: +353 1 661 7180

E: info@ncca.ie

www.ncca.ie