



The Early Childhood Ireland National Annual Awards 2021

Judging Panel 2021



Name: Aine Lynch

Organisation: National Parents Council



Áine started her career as a trainee accountant, then changed direction and qualified as a general and paediatric nurse. After a number of years in nursing she went back to fulltime education where she completed an honours degree in Behavioural Sciences. Áine worked for two years in the area of child psychiatry following which she went on to work for the ISPCC as the Childline Manager and the Director of Services. In August 2007 Aine was appointed CEO of the National Parents Council Primary (NPC).

Áine was appointed to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) by the Minister for Education and Skills; served on the Board of the Children's Rights Alliance and was appointed to the Teaching Council in April 2016 and served on the first fitness-to-teach hearing panel.

Áine believes all decisions in schools and early years settings should be child centred and that this will be best achieved by fostering positive relationships between parents and schools, and by ensuring the voice of the child is included. In 2018, Áine oversaw the expansion of NPC's remit into providing services and support for parents of children in the early years' education.





Name: Ms. Annette J. Kearns

Organisation: Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University



Annette J. Kearns is the Placement Co-ordinator and a lecturer on the B.A. in Early Childhood Teaching and Learning in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education in Maynooth University, where she has special responsibility for Professional Practice, Early Years Inclusion and Curriculum. Her experience ranges from working as an educator directly with children for 15 years, to working as an Early Childhood Specialist/Síolta Mentor with Early Childhood Ireland (ECI). Annette also tutored in Early Childhood Education FETAC levels 5 and 6 for both Dublin and Meath ETB's for many years and then began lecturing on the BA in Early Childhood Education, jointly developed between Froebel and ECI.

Annette's research interests include early language and literacy development, special educational needs and inclusion and online programme development and learning. She has presented her research widely, on both the national and international stage. Annette is currently undertaking a Doctor of Education and is researching the impact of a professional development programme for early years' educators on their phonological awareness knowledge and practices, which she is hopeful will contribute to the knowledge of the sector.



Name: Chantal Williams

Organisation: Stepping Stones Children's Services

Chantal Williams founded Stepping Stones in 1996 with a small child care centre in Ulverstone, Tasmania. Over the past 24 years the service has grown to operate 6 child care centres and 15 school aged care programmes across 2 states.

Chantal holds a Masters Degree in Education, with a focus on leadership and is the recipient of state and national awards for leadership. She has been a presenter at national and international forums with a focus on leadership and staff relations.

Her passion lies in a whole of service approach to the provision of care. Empowered families and staff, accessible care and great outcomes for children are the goals.





Name: Delia Goodman

Organisation: Better Start National Early Years Quality Development

Delia Goodman has worked with Better Start National Early Years Quality Development since October of 2014; she is the AIM National Team Lead supporting the coordination and administration of Better Start AIM in ECCE settings. Delia has extensive experience of working in the early learning and care sector, from working with a variety of age groups and services, and has a BA Honours degree as well as a Masters in Early Years Education. Through her work with Better Start she promotes the importance of the sector and ongoing professional development to enhance early years. She sees first-hand the work practitioners do to support children and families and through this work supports the importance of CPD and the capacity building of the sector, whilst maintaining a focus on the strengths, interests and knowledge in the development of the Early Learning and Care sector.



Name: Dr Anne Fitzpatrick

Anne Fitzpatrick worked for many years as a lecturer and tutor on the BA Early Childhood Education programme in the Technological University Dublin (formerly DIT). Before that she worked in a variety of early years services in both the community and disability sectors. Her teaching and research interests focus mainly on early years practice, including intergenerational learning, the professional development of early years practitioners and partnership with families and communities. Since 2012, she has participated in an EU-funded project entitled 'Together Old and Young' (TOY) that promotes intergenerational learning between young children and older people. As part of the project, she contributed to the development of a blended learning course on intergenerational learning that is now available online (www.toyproject.net). Her doctoral studies focused on intergenerational learning in the early years sector from the perspectives of young children and early years practitioners.



Name: Dr Anne-Marie Brooks

Organisation: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Anne-Marie is the Assistant Secretary of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Division in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. She has overall responsibility for operational, policy and legislative developments relating to improving access to high quality and affordable Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare and for First 5, a whole of government, 10 year strategy for babies, young children and their families.



Name: Dr Judith Butler

Organisation: Cork Institute of Technology & President of OMEP Ireland

Dr Judith Butler graduated from UCC with a PhD (Education) in 2003, having gained prior qualifications in Montessori Teaching, Special Education and Early Childhood Studies.

Judith currently coordinates and lectures the BA in ECEC, and on the B.Ed in Montessori Education in MTU. Judith's lecturing activities centre around Psychology including Developmental, Child and Educational Psychology, Holistic Health and Development.

Judith also supervises research for Master and PhD awards. Judith's postgraduate supervision covers areas related to her core research interests including; Relationships in the learning environment, Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), Trauma informed practice in action (in ECEC) and holistic health and wellbeing

Judith has vast experience working with and on behalf of children in ECEC. She is also the editor of An Leanbh Óg: The Irish Journal of Early Childhood Studies and is a member of the scientific committee of World OMEP. Judith can be contacted at Judith.butler@cit.ie or on twitter @Dr__Jude.





Name: Dr Leah O'Toole

Organisation: Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University

Dr Leah O'Toole is Assistant Professor in Early Childhood Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. She is Programme Coordinator of the BA in Early Childhood Teaching and Learning, a level 8 degree delivered in partnership with Early Childhood Ireland. Her doctoral study investigated transitions and parental involvement in children's education, and recent research projects include THRIECE (Teaching for Holistic, Relational and Inclusive Early Childhood Education – Erasmus+), Parental Involvement, Engagement and Partnership in Children's Education in the Primary Years (NCCA / NPC), Contested Childhoods across Borders and Boundaries (SCoTENS) and an Evaluation of Partnership Schools Ireland (NPC). She is highly influenced by the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and is co-author of *Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A Guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education*. Her most recent book is called *Supporting positive behaviour in early childhood settings and primary schools: Relationships, reciprocity and reflective practice*, and she has also authored a number of book chapters and journal articles. The defining theme of her work is the crucial nature of relationships and interactions for learning and development in early childhood and beyond.



Name: Julie McNamara

Organisation: Kildare County Childcare Committee

Julie McNamara is the CEO of Kildare County Childcare Committee. Julie is passionate about working for young children and families and values the rights of the child. Julie works from the principles of community development and believes everyone has the right to be heard, included and empowered. Julie believes Early Childhood lays the foundations for the rest of the life cycle and is committed to working towards ensuring young children in Kildare receive the best outcomes possible.

Julie is a UCC graduate, of the first BA in Early Childhood Studies Degree in Ireland. Julie also holds a M.Soc.Sc in Youth and Community work and a Diploma in Community Leadership.

At Kildare County Childcare Julies work includes managing KCCC, responding to the needs of the childcare sector and representing the organisation at National and Local Fora to develop childcare in Ireland.

Julie also works with Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI) at a policy level.



Name: Lorraine Sands

Organisation: Educational Leadership Project / Greerton Early Learning Centre



Lorraine Sands is a Professional Learning Facilitator at Educational Leadership Project, New Zealand. In this role she has worked alongside teachers in a wide range of early learning settings, particularly to strengthen teaching teams' pedagogical engagement with the Principles and Strands of Te Whāriki (NZ National Early Childhood Curriculum). She supports teachers to use thoughtfully written Learning Stories to grow children's identities as life long learners. These narratives embed children's learning inside the context of their communities. They are written from the perspective of teachers who have strong, enduring relationships with them. These emotionally connected descriptions of learning, over time, have a powerful effect, both on the quality of the learning environment offered, and on the opportunities created for children to learn together, in ways that sustain and nurture their collective wellbeing. Lorraine's other life long professional role is as a learner/ teacher/researcher inside Greerton Early Learning Centre. Shared leadership for all is an embedded feature of this community of learners. The Greerton teaching team have been involved in many research projects, most notably as a New Zealand Ministry of Education, Centre of Innovation.



Name: LINC Programme Team:

Claire Butterly, LINC Programme

Linda Madden, LINC Programme

Margaret Joyce, LINC Programme

Prof Emer Ring, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Dr Lisha O'Sullivan, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.



Organisation: Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme

The Leadership for INClusion in the Early Years programme, LINC, is a Level 6 Special Purpose Award (Higher Education) that is designed to support the inclusion of children with additional needs in the early years. Once qualified, graduates will perform the role of Inclusion Coordinator within their early years setting.

The judging panel for this award consists of two members of the LINC steering group, who were instrumental in the design and development of the programme, and three of the tutors that help deliver the course to early years teachers across Ireland.

Further information, including biographies of the judging panel members, is available at www.lincprogramme.ie.





Name: Marlene McCormack

Organisation: DCU, Institute of Education

I have been involved in early childhood education and care for the past 30 years, in practice, policy, training and currently teaching undergraduate and masters' students. I feel privileged to have developed personally and professionally through my involvement in IPPA and subsequently ECI over many years.

Currently, I am the Chair of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education programme in DCU, I have been the coordinator for Professional Practice (Placement) and I teach in the broad areas of practice and play. I believe passionately in the rights of children to early education and the rights of those who work with them to professional pay, conditions and progression paths. Some of my current research interests are in the areas of; pedagogical documentation and ways in which we see and capture children's learning; play as a powerful learning experience and professional practice as the basis for our work.



Name: Mary Daly

Organisation: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

Mary Daly lives in Tipperary and has worked in the area of early childhood care and education in Ireland in a number of different capacities over the past 19 years. Mary has a BA in Early Childhood Studies from University College Cork and in 2002 she completed a Ph. D. which focused on the emotional, social, moral and spiritual development of the young child. In 2004 she published a book based on her Ph. D. She has presented and published nationally and internationally. For more than a decade Mary has worked with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and she was involved in the development of Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework, the Aistear Toolkit, the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, and the Mo Scéal Reporting templates which support children's transition from preschool to primary school. She has been a member of ECI's Scientific Committee for the past number of years.



Name: Mary Skillington

Organisation: Galway Mayo Institute of Technology

Mary Skillington is a lecturer on the BA in Early Childhood Education and Care in GMIT, Mayo campus. Her specialist field is child development and learning with a particular interest in play and neuroscience. She has more than 20 years of experience in the field of early childhood education and care. Mary has completed an MA in "Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care". As an Early Years Specialist, she mentored educators in early years services in the west of Ireland. She is passionate about early childhood and has delivered numerous workshops to parents and educators on the development of children between birth and six.



Name: Michelle Hart

Organisation: National Childhood Network

Michelle Hart is the Siolta/Aistear Manager with the National Childhood Network NCN (formerly the BCCN). She was employed in a variety of settings in the statutory and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, before coming to work at the National Childhood Network eighteen years ago. Michelle has a BA (hons) in Early Years and an MSc in Inclusion and the Early Years.

Core work involves overseeing the implementation of Siolta/Aistear within NCN; supporting other Siolta/Aistear mentors within the organization and nationally. Michelle spends time advising on a range of early year's policy and practice at local, regional and national level and working on a number of cross border programmes, including Sharing From The Start and Rural Respecting Difference Programme.. Michelle has developed the nurturing emotional well-being element for the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme. The programme is available nationwide, and is now extended for the under 3's. Other areas of interest includes developing curriculum practice, and listening to the voice of the child. When not working she likes to walk, read, and swim and is an avid Harry Potter fan.



Name: Sinéad Matson

Organisation: The Progressive College of Education (part of City Colleges Group)

Sinéad Matson has worked in Early Childhood Education and Care for over twenty years in many varying positions. Trained in Montessori teaching, Sinéad has worked as a Montessori assistant, Montessori educator, manager of a full day care setting, manager of a sessional setting, principal of a Montessori primary school, and as a tutor and lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Care. More recently, Sinéad holds the roles of Academic Consultant and Project Manager of the recently validated BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care Degree for the College of Progressive Education and External Examiner for the BA in Early Childhood Education and Care in Carlow I.T., Wexford Campus.

In 2008, Sinéad founded Ireland's online community of professional practice, Montessori and Early Childhood Professionals Ireland (MECPI) with over seven and a half thousand current members. She has recently stepped away from actively administrating the community of practice but remains as part of the research and dissemination team.

After completing a Master in Education Degree in 2013, Sinéad decided to pursue a PhD in Education examining how to ethically research with children and early childhood education and care settings in the Majority world. It is hoped she will graduate this October!

