



HOME VISITING: EDUCATING FAMILIES, EDUCATING OURSELVES.



Foreword

Home Visiting: Educating Families, Educating Ourselves

ELI & Athena Swan Report 2026

Professor Gina Quin

The National College of Ireland (NCI) has a clear mission of “changing lives through education” through widening Higher Education participation and supporting learners from diverse and often underrepresented backgrounds. The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) was established by NCI in 2006, specifically to address educational disadvantage in early childhood through family learning and community-based programmes. Commencing its work in the North Inner City of Dublin, ELI now works across many areas of disadvantage nationally and throughout all of Dublin’s Inner City. ELI works directly with children, parents, and communities who experience poverty, educational deprivation and social exclusion, and the flagship Home Visiting programme is at the centre of these educational interventions.

This research explores the impact of the Home Visiting programme not on the children, families and community it serves, but on the Home Visitors and their immediate families who work for NCI and deliver this programme. Home Visitors, many of whom are from the communities within which they serve, bring lived experience, commitment, and a community connection to their roles. The research employed a Community Action Research approach, with the Home Visitors at the centre of the process, ensuring that the findings were grounded in their experience.

The evidence presented highlights both the persistence of structural barriers to education and the capacity for change when appropriate supports are in place. The educational journeys of Home Visitors, many of whom experienced early school leaving and/or limited access to opportunity, demonstrate resilience, determination, and most importantly, the impact of lifelong learning through their role with NCI.

Further, this research highlighted the wider familial and intergenerational impact of education. As Home Visitors developed their own skills, confidence, and qualifications, they simultaneously influenced the aspirations and outcomes for their children and families, contributing to a cycle of positive educational attainment.

The findings and recommendations outlined provide evidence for future policy and practice. They emphasise the need for continued investment in professional development, recognition of diverse educational pathways, and the strengthening of supports that enable participation in lifelong learning. Furthermore, they align

closely with national priorities around early intervention, skills development, and social inclusion.

It is hoped that its insights will inform ongoing dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, and educators, and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of inclusive educational systems.

I would like to thank all of those who contributed to the research, including all the Home Visitors who participated, and the research team of Maria Cannon, Melanie Cassidy, Lisa Farrelly, Deirdre McCarthy, Lisa Miao, Pranjali Mishra, Michelle Moore, Anca Oltean and Dana (Qi) Wang. The insights of these research findings are a tribute to their commitment and will make an important contribution to policy and practice in educational interventions.



The research team

Maria Cannon
Melanie Cassidy
Lisa Farrelly
Deirdre McCarthy
Lisa Miao
Pranjali Mishra
Michelle Moore
Anca Oltean
Dana (Qi) Wang

Contents

Foreword	1
Abbreviations	4
Executive Summary	5
Literature Review and Policy Context.....	6
Recommendations	9
Recommendations to Strengthen the Home Visiting Workforce.....	9
Policy Aligned Recommendations.....	9
Background	10
Research Methodology	11
Literature Review and Policy Context.....	18
Survey Results.....	24
Background Questions	24
Home Visiting Experience	28
Educational Experience	32
Family Educational Experience	46
Final Comments	60
Conclusions	62
Recommendations	65
Recommendations to Strengthen the Home Visiting Workforce.....	65
Policy Aligned Recommendations.....	67
References	68
Appendix One: Letter to Home Visitors.....	72
Appendix Two: Debrief Letter	74

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AON	Assessment of Need
AONTAS	The National Adult Learning Organisation
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CAO	Central Applications Office
CAR	Community Action Research
CDNT	Children's Disability Network Teams
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCDE	Department of Children, Disability and Equality
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth
DECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Service
NCI	National College of Ireland
ODD	Opposite Defiant Disorder
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PPFS	Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
SOLAS	Further Education and Skills Service
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Maths

Executive Summary

The National College of Ireland (NCI) aims to “change lives through education,” with a strong emphasis on supporting disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. Its Early Learning Initiative (ELI) extends this mission by delivering early childhood, family learning, and community-based programmes that address educational inequality. Through services like home visiting, literacy support, and parental engagement, ELI helps create educational pathways for families facing poverty and social exclusion, while also informing NCI’s teaching, research, and policy.

A key component of ELI is its Home Visiting programmes, where trained staff, who are often from the same communities they serve, provide early years education and support directly in families’ homes. These Home Visitors, currently all women, often have lived experience of educational disadvantage and act as role models and education ambassadors. They also have access to ongoing professional development through NCI, which may influence both their own educational journeys and those of their children.

This study uses Community Action Research (CAR), a participatory approach where community members actively contribute to research. Home Visitors were trained in research methods and conducted peer interviews to explore how their roles impact their own education and their families’ educational outcomes. CAR supports ELI’s continuous improvement model through cycles of reflection and action.

The research is part of NCI’s Athena Swan Ireland commitments, reflecting its focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Aim: To examine whether the Home Visiting programme influences the educational achievements and aspirations of Home Visitors and their families, and to identify the factors shaping these outcomes.

Methodology

The study used a participatory, mixed-methods approach, involving Home Visitors as active researchers in all stages of the project. A small team of experienced Home Visitors was recruited and trained in social research methods, including ethics, survey design, and interviewing. The research process included establishing a Research Oversight Group, obtaining ethical approval, co-designing a survey, and conducting face-to-face interviews with 29 Home Visitors using both qualitative and quantitative questions. Participation was voluntary, supported by data protection procedures.

Home Visitors carried out peer interviews, supported by training, pilot sessions, and ongoing guidance. Data was securely recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes.

The process emphasised learning and development, with participants gaining research, technical, and communication skills, while reflecting on their own experiences. Overall, the methodology combined rigorous ethical research practices with a collaborative, community-based approach that empowered participants and ensured the findings were grounded in lived experience.

Literature Review and Policy Context

The Athena Swan Research Project examines how the Early Learning Initiative's Home Visiting programme influences the education and aspirations of Home Visitors and their families in disadvantaged Dublin communities. These areas continue to face challenges such as poverty, early school leaving, and limited access to higher education.

Home visiting in Ireland has expanded as part of early intervention policy, supporting parents and children through community-based programmes like ParentChild+. These programmes build trust by employing local people and aim to improve early learning and family engagement.

Research shows that educational disadvantage is strongly linked to socio-economic background and often persists across generations. However, adult learning and continuous professional development can increase confidence, wellbeing, and engagement in children's education.

Home Visitors often become motivated to pursue further education, acting as role models for their children and positively influencing their educational attitudes and outcomes. Despite barriers to education, ELI provides accessible learning pathways that support staff development.

Using a Participatory Action Research approach, the study involves Home Visitors as co-researchers, ensuring their lived experiences shape the findings. Overall, the project highlights how community-based programmes and lifelong learning can drive intergenerational educational change and help break cycles of disadvantage.

Survey results

The background findings describe the demographic profile, experience, and motivations of ELI Home Visitors.

Most participants were women aged 35–54, living mainly in Dublin, with all having children and the majority having caring responsibilities. A small proportion identified as having a disability or mental health difficulty, and most were not from minority ethnic backgrounds. Nearly half had worked as Home Visitors for over three years, with some exceeding ten years of service.

Home Visitors joined the programme for a mix of personal, professional, and practical reasons. Key motivations included positive personal experiences with ELI services, a desire to give back to their communities, a love of working with children and families, and recognition of the importance of early intervention. Others were attracted by opportunities for professional development and the flexible, family-friendly nature of the role. Recruitment often occurred through word of mouth and trusted community networks.

Notably, many respondents (45%) had previously experienced ELI home visiting services as parents or through their families, which strongly influenced their decision to join.

Overall, the findings show that Home Visitors are deeply rooted in their communities, with motivations shaped by lived experience, personal values, and the desire to support children and families, alongside opportunities for growth and flexible employment.

The report explores the educational experiences of Home Visitors, highlighting significant early educational disadvantage alongside later re-engagement with learning.

Early education and leaving school

A substantial proportion (41%) left school early, often due to economic necessity, cultural norms, or family responsibilities. Many entered work or caregiving roles in their mid-teens, with leaving school early often seen as normal within their communities. Some also experienced lack of support or low expectations within the education system, while others had interrupted aspirations due to caregiving duties, financial barriers, or academic challenges. Migrant respondents also described leaving education to pursue work or improve opportunities abroad.

Access to and aspirations for higher education

Over half had little or no aspiration for third-level education, largely due to financial constraints, cultural expectations, or structural inequality. Barriers included cost, limited family history of higher education, and perceived exclusion or discouragement from schools. However, some did have support and encouragement to pursue higher education, particularly from family or school systems.

Return to education

A striking finding is that 97% later returned to education. The main driver was career progression, particularly the need for formal qualifications in childcare and early years work. However, motivations were broader and included personal fulfilment, confidence building, life transitions (such as migration or caregiving responsibilities), and a desire to support children and communities. Many described education as a tool for personal growth, self-worth, and improved life chances, not just employment.

Enablers and influences

Returning to education was strongly influenced by workplace support, especially through employers and programmes like ELI, as well as external factors such as regulatory changes and COVID-19, enabling online learning. Family—especially children—was a major motivator, with education seen as a way to improve family life and model learning for the next generation.

Survey conclusion

Educational pathways were shaped by structural inequality, cultural expectations, and financial constraints in early life, but later re-engagement with education was widespread. Adult learning was driven by a combination of employment requirements, personal ambition, family responsibility, and opportunity, reflecting resilience and the importance of lifelong learning.

The findings show that most respondents returned to education primarily to gain qualifications in early years and childcare, often as a requirement for employment or career progression (69%). Education was also used for lifelong learning, personal development, and career change, with many engaging in a wide range of courses

from basic qualifications to postgraduate study. Some began with foundational learning such as language classes or basic certificates before progressing further.

Most respondents (93%) felt equipped for the education system after returning, although confidence varied. Key challenges included digital skills, anxiety, and balancing study with family responsibilities. Support from tutors, institutions, and employers was crucial in enabling success, alongside increased confidence and personal growth over time.

Family background played a major role in shaping educational experience. Over half reported that their families of origin were not well equipped to support them in education, often due to limited schooling or lack of system knowledge. Many had to independently learn how to navigate systems like the CAO, while others developed stronger educational awareness for their own children, helping to build a more supportive learning culture in their families.

Over half of respondents had children with additional educational needs, including neurodiversity, speech and language delays, and other conditions. While some families had formal diagnoses and supports, others were still seeking assessments. Around 55% felt able to support their children's education, often through both personal experience and professional learning, though systemic barriers such as long waiting lists were common.

Nearly all respondents actively support their children's education, combining emotional, practical, and academic assistance. Many aim for their children to attend higher education, but there is also strong emphasis on happiness, autonomy, and alternative career pathways such as trades or creative work. Confidence in engaging with schools is generally high, and most respondents have some knowledge of systems like the CAO, often gained through personal or work experience.

Key influencing factors on education include family background, participation in ELI/NCI programmes, personal ambition, and children's interests. Respondents also highlighted the importance of breaking cycles of educational disadvantage, improving opportunities for their children, and adapting to changing labour markets. Overall, education is viewed as a lifelong, multi-generational process shaped by both structural barriers and personal resilience.

Conclusion

This study examined whether the Home Visiting programme influenced the educational aspirations and achievements of Home Visitors and their families, and the factors shaping these outcomes.

Findings suggest that working as a Home Visitor had a significant positive impact on participants' education, confidence, and family attitudes towards learning. Most Home Visitors had left school early due to economic pressures, caring responsibilities, migration, or limited educational support, and many initially saw higher education as out of reach. However, almost all later returned to education, driven by job requirements, personal growth, and a desire to support their children.

Over 75% of respondents reported that the Home Visiting role positively affected their own and their families' education. Many described the role as meaningful, flexible, and closely aligned with their values, while also enabling them to act as role models for their children.

A key outcome was intergenerational change: Home Visitors gained qualifications and confidence, which contributed to higher educational aspirations and attainment among their children, with many progressing to or expecting to progress to third-level education.

Overall, the study highlights how community-based employment combined with continuous education can help break cycles of educational disadvantage and strengthen family educational outcomes across generations.

Recommendations

Recommendations to Strengthen the Home Visiting Workforce

1. Recognising the study as a foundational evidence-based
2. Invest in further national research on home visiting
3. Strengthen investment and pay structures for Home Visitors
4. Provide dedicated time and capacity for CPD and upskilling
5. Develop accessible and flexible education pathways
6. Establish clear policy pathways for CPD and workforce development
7. Provide structured learning supports for Home Visitor
8. Introduce pre-learning and bridging supports
9. Assess readiness and “fitness to study”
10. Recognise diverse skills and multiple pathways to professionalism
11. Improve research practice and participant experience
12. Advocate for broader structural supports

Policy Aligned Recommendations

1. Align workforce investment with First 5
2. Support lifelong learning through the National Skills Strategy 2025
3. Strengthen community-based education via ETBs and SOLAS
4. Embed workforce development in Tulsa Prevention strategies
5. Advanced workforce professionalisation in line with the DCEDY, DFHERIS and HSE priorities
6. Address structural barriers through a whole-of-government approach
7. Build the evidence to inform policy and investment

Background

The National College of Ireland (NCI) is a higher education institution committed to its mission of “changing lives through education,” with a strong focus on widening participation and supporting learners from diverse and often underrepresented backgrounds. Within this context, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) operates as a department of the College, focused on addressing educational disadvantage through early childhood, family learning, and community-based programmes. ELI extends NCI’s impact beyond traditional higher education by working directly with children, parents, and communities, particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Through initiatives such as home visiting, literacy support, and parental engagement programmes, ELI creates pathways into education for families who may otherwise be excluded, while also informing teaching, research, and policy within NCI. This relationship is mutually reinforcing: ELI brings real-world insight, evidence, and community engagement into the College, while NCI provides the academic foundation, infrastructure, and strategic direction that enables ELI to scale its impact nationally.

The Early Learning Initiative has a team of Home Visitors who, for 18 years, have provided early years education in the homes of families, many of whom are vulnerable for a variety of socio-economic reasons. ELI employs Home Visitors who are themselves part of the communities they serve. Many of the team come from families who were visited by Home Visitors and/or were early school leavers themselves. These Home Visitors have become education ambassadors, playing a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape around them. All the current NCI Home Visitors are women.

Home Visitors have the opportunity to engage in continuous professional development and educational opportunities in NCI. Anecdotally, they have commented on the impact of their work as Home Visitors on their own education and the education of their children. This action research aims to explore the impact and the educational trajectories of NCI’s home visiting staff and their families.

Community Action Research (CAR) is a research method that gathers data from members of the community. CAR is particularly significant because this method gathers crucial information from real people who are being impacted by the issues being studied, so the results of CAR can be used to find solutions to issues that people are facing in the local communities. Research is a principal component of ELI and is essential to developing our understanding of the needs and circumstances of the community. CAR, specifically, is the primary methodology in the development of ELI. The action-reflection cycle of observe, reflect, act, evaluate and modify informs the development of ELI’s programmes and ensures that plans are implemented. The continuous aim is to create a structure that allows continuous evaluations and improvements to take place across all ELI programmes, ensuring that individual programmes evolve and change according to the educational needs of all the participants and the community.

ELI sees all staff as researchers in their own right. This is particularly true for the Home Visitors, who are the first point of data collection when it comes to families and the community surrounding NCI. For this reason, the research methodology employed in this study was participatory, identifying and supporting the Home Visitors as active participants, co-creating the research.

Home Visitors were trained in social research skills, and then they carried out the fieldwork, interviewing their peers to explore the impact of their work as Home Visitors on their own education and the education of their children

No previous study has been completed on the ELI Home Visitors' continuous professional development and how it has impacted on themselves and their children.

This research was an action within the [NCI Athena Swan Gender Equality Action Plan](#). NCI is a proud Athena Swan Bronze Award Holder, an award which we renewed in 2024. This award demonstrates NCI's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The [Athena Swan](#) charter launched in the Republic of Ireland in early 2015. Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality. All of Ireland's universities and institutes of technology, and several colleges, participate in Athena Swan Ireland. The Athena Swan Ireland charter underwent a redevelopment in 2021. In committing to the principles of the Athena Swan Ireland charter, NCI recognise that we join a global community with a shared goal of addressing systemic inequalities and embedding inclusive cultures in higher education.

Research aim

Identify if the Home Visiting programme has had an impact on the educational achievements and aspirations of Home Visitors and their families, to develop an understanding of the influential factors.

Research Methodology

The research model was participatory, ensuring that those who were the subjects of study were core to gathering the data and were involved in the dissemination of the results.

The research engaged mixed research methods including;

1. Identification of participant research team
2. Establishment of a Research Oversight Group
3. Gaining ethical approval
4. Training with participant researchers
5. Survey design in consultation with participant researchers
6. Face-to-face interviews, using a bespoke questionnaire, with both qualitative and quantitative research questions.
7. Post fieldwork evaluation with the participant researchers.
8. Ongoing support as required from research leads.

1. Identification of participant research team

All ELI Home Visiting staff (including coordinators) received an email informing them about the research and inviting those who could, cognisant of their current workload, to take part as researchers, making up the research team. The aim was to have those who have significant experience as Home Visitors, but no one was excluded.

The research team was identified by the Home Visitors themselves in consultation with the coordinators, to ensure minimal disruption to the families who are served by the programme. The project leads were Deirdre McCarthy, the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Training Manager in NCI, and Michelle Moore, the ELI National Home Visiting Manager. Five Home Visitors self-identified to be involved in the research, all with significant experience. A total of five Home Visitors and one coordinator agreed to participate in the training and interview fellow Home Visitors and coordinators.

These were;

- Maria Cannon
- Melanie Cassidy
- Lisa Farrelly
- Lisa Miao
- Anca Gabriela Oltean
- Qi Wang

No Home Visitor was asked to work additional time (there was no additional funding for the research); therefore, the training and research were completed within their working hours.

2. Establishment of a Research Oversight Group

The Research Oversight Group for the project was established to provide strategic guidance, ethical assurance and methodology support to the study. At the beginning of the study, an email went out to all NCI staff inviting them to be part of the Oversight Group. Seven staff members, Nikki Ryan, Marie Boyne, Michelle Kelly, Meera Oke, Barry Coughlan, Yvonne Emmett and Deirdre Tinnelly, came forward from different research backgrounds throughout NCI to participate in the group. They met four times within the project's timeframe.

3. Gaining ethical approval

Ethical approval for the project was formally sought and obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at NCI. A comprehensive Ethical Review Application was submitted outlining the study's participatory action research design, the involvement of the employees in a subordinate position, data collection methods and details of procedures for consent, data protection and ensuring voluntary participation. Following review, full ethical approval for the project was granted on 1st April 2025. Reference number: 01042504.

4. Training with participant researchers

The six Home Visitors undertook research training, with four face-to-face sessions held between November 2024 and January 2025. The training took place in Spencer Dock for approximately 2.5 hours per session. Training was provided by Deirdre McCarthy.

The training covered the following topics.

1. Introduction to social science and research types
2. Basic methods and approaches
3. Ethical research practice
4. Creating a survey
5. Conducting interviews
6. Data gathering

It is a testament to the commitment of the team that no one missed any of the training sessions.

Refresher training

While waiting on ethics approval, an additional one-on-one refresher session was provided to the Home Visitors, as several weeks had passed since the original sessions and the first interview, as the research waited on approval from NCI's Ethics Committee. There was a particular emphasis on using the recording app, with a hard copy step-by-step guide developed and provided to the team. Training was also provided on GDPR protocols as well as procedures for room bookings. It was identified in this session that some Home Visitors were not confident with some of the technology and would require extra support as they went through the process.

This support was arranged by Lisa Farrelly, who provided it as required. Interview pilots were then organised, with the team interviewing each other, and the learning was recorded.

5. Survey design

As part of the training process, a survey was drafted and co-created with the participants. This survey was re-drafted based on consultation with the team and piloting within the group. A final survey was developed as a result of this process.

6. Face-to-face Interviews

When the training and survey design were completed, all Home Visitors in ELI were contacted and asked to be involved as interviewees in the research.

A detailed written explanation was provided, and the Home Visitor's team meetings were addressed with additional information provided. It was stressed, at all times, that participation was voluntary, and anyone who wanted to participate in the research would be paid for their time, which was not going to exceed one hour. It was also noted that the Home Visitor could change their interviewer, and/or withdraw from the process at any time. The letter is provided in Appendix One. As the researchers were both respondents and researchers in the process, they provided further information to their peers by virtue of that relationship.

The benefits and risks of being involved were also highlighted. Participants were told that they would be asked about their own experiences and their children's educational attainment and aspirations. It was noted that some of these experiences might be negative or upsetting. It was stated that they would be contributing to the understanding of continuous professional development and the impact it can have on future educational and career aspirations, which potentially can lead to positive outcomes for the direct person and their children.

Details were also provided on how the data would be handled and used, and the potential for publication. All Home Visitors who chose to take part signed a consent form. Six of the Home Visiting Team opted out of the research. The total number of Home Visitors who took part was 29.

Those who decided to participate as interviewees were contacted by email to arrange an interview time. Interviews took circa 45 mins. All interviews took place on staff time (i.e. they were not expected to use personal/additional time). The team were prepared in the unlikely event that any participant became distressed with a debriefing sheet (Appendix Two) that held a list of support services if required. They were also made aware (if not already) of the support they have in NCI through the EAP Employee Assistance Programme.

Data management

The participants were informed on the information sheet of plans to disseminate the research. The Home Visitors were core to the dissemination of the material and ensured that the final draft was reflective of their responses. They were also given a draft before dissemination for clarification purposes.

Depending on the research recommendations (i.e. the need for more research), the data will be retained for secondary analytical purposes. This has been noted on the consent form. The participants were informed that interviews were recorded, how recordings were to be stored and for how long. They were also informed that direct quotes may be used from their recording, but that these will contain no identifying information. The voice recordings were deleted at source and not held beyond inputting into forms.

Conducting the interviews

Lisa Farrelly carried out extensive research into the best mechanism to record the interviews. Initially, the plan was to use OTTER, a transcription App, to record the interviews and store the data collected. Lisa created a step-by-step document to support the use of the OTTER App. Unfortunately, it was discovered that Otter was not suitable as it would only transcribe up to 30 minutes of recording before the interview would need to be paused and the recording restarted. There were concerns about the loss of data during the paused time period.

Lisa researched other Apps and found TurboScribe, which offered unlimited recording time with up to three free transcriptions per day. Another step-by-step document was created to support the installation and use of the App. TurboScribe was more user-friendly and downloaded onto a Word document easily and precisely.

Once the interviews were transcribed and edited by the interviewer to remove pauses and non-words, answers to each question were copied and pasted into the survey. Once the survey was submitted, the Word document was uploaded to a secure file on SharePoint with limited access, and all other copies and recordings were deleted.

Communications

Communication throughout the research process was supported using a WhatsApp group and the NCI email system, which was used to manage the administration of the research process.

Name selection process

A random name generator was used to match the survey participant with an interviewer. The interviewer and the research participants had the option to choose to be interviewed by someone else and to interview a different participant if they chose to do so.

Staff notifications

Lisa emailed all ELI Coordinators with information and a consent form. Staff conducting the interviews received a list of participants who agreed to be interviewed, chosen at random. Emails were sent to all staff participating in the survey, saying that they would be contacted by the Home Visitor directly to arrange suitable days and times to conduct the survey.

Making appointments

The interviewer contacted the Home Visitors directly to arrange days and times for interviews. The interviewer supplied the information sheet and consent form for the Home Visitors to read and sign before proceeding with the interview. A paper survey was filled in during the interview to ensure accuracy in answers.

7. Feedback from conducting interviews

Feedback from the Home Visitors who carried out the interview was positive. Turboscribe was user-friendly and proved to be very efficient overall, but there were concerns that some of the conversation was not recorded during the interviews. This may have been because the phone was not close enough. There were also issues distinguishing between the interviewer and the participants.

As the process continued, the Home Visitors became more confident in completing the steps. One Home Visitor conducted an interview over Microsoft Teams, but the phone failed to pick up the recording. This interview had to be repeated. Two interviews using Microsoft Teams did not pick up all the language correctly. These interviews also used the paper survey, which enabled accuracy throughout the interview process. The Home Visitors' feedback overall was that they really

enjoyed the experience. They found the step-by-step manual very useful. They found the WhatsApp group great for communicating on a regular basis.

Learning outcomes for interviewees

The training introduced social science and research methodologies, including methods and approaches. There was also an extensive discussion on ethical research practice, power dynamics in research and the voice/view of participants in the research process. The sessions were participative and reflective, with extensive discussion and learning from the facilitator, Deirdre McCarthy and each other.

The Home Visitors who conducted the interviews gained skills in conducting, recording, and documenting interviews. They learned new technical skills, such as editing and uploading files securely, which can be transferred into their continuous professional/personal development.

They were able to use communication skills they had developed over the years of Home Visiting and apply these to a peer-to-peer interaction during the interviews. The Home Visitors demonstrated professionalism throughout the interview process using skills they developed during the training for this research project.

Working as part of a team, the Home Visitors acted as a support to each other face-to-face and through the WhatsApp group, which played a vital role in self-care. Some personal reflections from the research process are outlined below.

How did you feel when conducting the interviews?

The research team were nervous to start with, but skills and confidence grew with practice.

“I was nervous when interviews began, with navigating this new environment.”¹

“You learn a lot from every individual because you have to build trust and have respect for each individual.”

“It was very interesting and another kind of flavour of knowledge to have”

“I felt very honoured, it was a big opportunity, it was a very interesting exercise, and if I was asked to something else, I would not think twice about it.”

“I was really, really nervous; I worried about my pronouns that they would not understand me. I was worried about the app not working but the experience made me more confident.”

“At the beginning, it was really daunting putting myself forward for doing something like this, but I said to myself, it’s something new and you have to push yourself a little bit.”

“At first I was worried I was covering all the steps and getting the full recording, but I became more confident and was able to conduct relaxed interviews.”

¹ These are direct quotes from respondents, only identifying details have been removed.

What were your thoughts after conducting the interviews?

"As you started doing the interview, you did become more confident."

"Because we are not all the same, it was nice to learn about people's differences. I was happy I did it, it was a lovely experience."

"I gained better understanding of the CAO system from conducting the interviews, as both my daughters did PLCs [Post Leaving Cert Courses] so I never experienced the CAO [Central Applications Office] process."

"I learned I get stressed trying something new, and my voice shakes, but the more I get into it, the more I relax."

Thinking back, what did you learn about research?

"Having the training at the start helped, we knew why we were doing the interviews. Having the pilot interview helped prepare us."

"I was really happy that people were willing to share their honest experiences with me."

"It's not just collecting research; it's also about understanding the meaning behind the people's responses and insurance that it is respected."

"Before we started, we got lots of knowledge about why we ask those questions. The training went really well and helped me a lot. I was surprised by how willing people were to participate. I felt supported by the people around me."

"What I learned about the research is, you never know what's behind people, Home Visitors or Coordinators, and people from different countries, you really don't know people's backgrounds."

"What I learned about research is how vital it is for mapping a collective group's journey and trajectory, which enables research to allow provisions to support future similar groups."

"Their kind of thoughts and feelings about education, and what their life was like growing up. And it really does lend itself into like when you look at Home Visitors, why we do and why we are drawn to being Home Visitors."

Thinking back, what did you learn about yourself?

"I got to know the difference from one person to another, and I learned a lot. I was really impressed about how diverse the education experience was for people and their working styles."

"What I learned about myself is that I can stay open-minded and objective even if one person's views differ from mine. I also feel brave you know? When I

applied to do this, I was thinking can I do this, I was really worried, but I said I can try, maybe I can do it. Thank you for the opportunity."

"The experience helped me to understand that people may have different opinions, or different happening that they are dealing with or may be facing."

"I learned I am compassionate, which allows others to tell their story willingly and without bias or judgment."

"After conducting the interviews, I was surprised by how many different backgrounds and life experiences each Home Visitor had, and yet we all had similar hopes and goals in terms of our own, and our children's academic achievements and aspirations."

GDPR

All respondents to the survey signed consent forms, which are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the ELI office, Spencer Dock Campus, NCI. Paper surveys were identifiable by participant number only. These were shredded once the Word document was put in the individual interviewer's folder on SharePoint. This SharePoint folder had restricted access. The voice recordings were deleted at source and not held beyond inputting into forms.

The results were analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. This process involved;

1. Developing familiarisation with the data
2. Generating initial codes for interesting features and topics
3. Grouping codes into potential themes to develop patterns of meaning
4. Reviewing the themes
5. Refining the specifics of each theme and defining them clearly
6. Producing the report by writing up the thematic including direct quotes from the data

Literature Review and Policy Context

Introduction

The Athena Swan Research Project was a participatory action research (PAR) project that aimed to identify if the Home Visiting programme has had an impact on the educational achievements and aspirations of Home Visitors and their families, to develop an understanding of influential factors. For 18 years, ELI has provided home visiting services to the local Dublin Docklands community (Dublin 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8) employing Home Visitors who are part of that community.

Several parts of the Docklands and the surrounding Northeast Inner City can be categorised as disadvantaged both historically and currently, despite the influx of more affluent communities as a result of gentrification of parts of inner-city Dublin (DECLG, 2012; Kelly, 2014). Intergenerational early school leaving and low progression rates to third level are prevalent (Hayes, 2022; INTO, 2015). The recent rise in migration, asylum seekers, and high numbers living in IPAS (International Protection Accommodation Service) and people experiencing homelessness have contributed to the complexity of educational challenges in these communities.

ELI's Home Visitors have become educational ambassadors, playing a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape around them. Many ELI Home Visitors talk about the fact that their role has motivated them to seek training, and/or further study and qualifications. In tandem with their own growing educational ambitions and achievements, their children are also experiencing educational transition, staying in school longer, and making positive choices about their own educational trajectories. There is minimal research that delves into these experiences in Ireland. This project aims to fill the knowledge gap that currently exists.

Landscape of home visiting in Ireland

The landscape of home visiting in Ireland has developed considerably over the past 20 years as part of a broader shift towards prevention and early intervention in child and family services. National policy frameworks, including the First Five Strategy 2019-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2019), Young Ireland 2023-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2023), and the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) (Tusla, 2018) programme, highlight the importance of supporting parents in the home environment throughout the child's early years. Home visiting programmes are designed to support parenting capacity, foster early learning, and connect families with their community and wider support.

In Ireland, a range of services operate within this space, including public health nurses (PHNs) who visit with newborns, targeted supports from Tusla, and community-based programmes often delivered by not-for-profit organisations. In recent years, collaboration across the sector has also been strengthened through initiatives such as the Home Visiting Alliance (2024), which was founded in 2020 by five evidence-based home visiting programmes in Ireland, bringing together organisations delivering home visiting programmes to share knowledge, promote best practice, and advocate for the development of a coordinated national home visiting system.

While some home visiting services concentrate on health and safeguarding, others focus on early childhood development, language, and parent-child interaction. Within this context, programmes such as ParentChild+, delivered through the ELI, represent a model that mixes educational support with community-based family engagement. These programmes typically employ and train people from the

community as Home Visitors, supporting services to develop trust with families who may be less likely to engage with formal education or support systems.

As the Government increasingly recognises home visiting as an important mechanism for supporting families experiencing disadvantage, the establishment of the Tusla National Home Visiting Programme (2024) marks a significant step in strengthening the sector. The Programme aims to coordinate services, provide strategic direction, and gather national data and evidence to inform the development of a sustainable home visiting system. As a result, the future of home visiting in Ireland appears promising, with growing potential for it to become a key mechanism through which families across the country can access meaningful parental support in the years ahead.

Disadvantage in education and school leaving in Ireland

In Ireland, educational disadvantage remains a significant issue despite it being on the policy agenda for decades. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme introduced in 2005 and extended in 2017, has been one of the primary national interventions. DEIS is an area-based and targeted initiative that aims to support schools whose students come from communities with significant socio-economic disadvantage with additional funding and staff, as well as literacy and numeracy programmes, and home-school-community liaison services (DES, 2017; McCoy et al., 2014). As much as DEIS has achieved some significant gains, school inequality has not been resolved. The Department of Education has reported that students in DEIS schools are still experiencing lower school engagement rates, lower than average literacy performance, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school earlier than their counterparts (DES, 2017).

Investigations by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) consistently reveal that socio-economic background has remained one of the significant predictors of educational progression in Ireland (McCoy and Byrne, 2024). It affects the transition to senior cycle, engagement in further education, and higher education (McCoy et al., 2014; Smyth and McCoy, 2011). The results of the Growing Up in Ireland Study (2026) also highlight the impact of the role of parental education and family background. Children born in families with lower educational levels and increased financial deprivation are more prone to poorer academic performance (Nixon, 2012; Williams et al., 2009). This demonstrates that not only school factors influence educational outcomes, but that family and socio-economic conditions also play a role.

Long-term effects of leaving school early are also visible. According to Irish studies, early school leaving has been linked with weakened job opportunities, lower rates of well-being, and a lower likelihood of pursuing education at an older age (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Smyth and McCoy, 2011). In ELI, Home Visitors often report early school leaving rates as being normalised in their communities, due to economic pressures, family care loads, discouragement or lack of support within the education system or at home (ELI internal project documentation, 2025). These experiences correlate with the trends found in national studies.

These results are consistent with international evidence, which indicates that educational disadvantage will be replicated in the following generations without early intervention (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Heckman, 2011). Therefore, early, prolonged, and community-based educational support, such as that offered by ELI, is required to break the cycle of disadvantage and encourage intergenerational educational transformation.

Educational disparities amongst the disadvantaged Irish communities

Irish studies highlight that adults living in disadvantaged communities are exposed to numerous obstacles whenever attempting to resume their education. The Adult Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy (SOLAS, 2021) established that adult learners delay or avoid returning to learning due to childcare, cost, lack of confidence, and negative experiences in school.

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) programme promoted by Tusla also emphasises that families living with the consequences of socio-economic stress usually underestimate educational priorities when urgent needs such as housing, income, and caring concerns take priority (Tusla, 2018). For many adults, especially women, community-based supports are important in the process of accessing education. The Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY, 2020) identify trusted relationships and local provision as one of the factors that allow the adult to engage, which directly reflects ELI in its decision to hire Home Visitors in the community.

ELI internal project documentation; Home Visiting, CPD and Educational Trajectories indicate that many Home Visitors had relatively low levels of formal education before their employment and viewed participation in the programme as an opportunity to return to learning, build self-esteem, and achieve greater job security (ELI, 2025).

Lifelong learning, continuous professional development (CPD), and adult confidence

There is both Irish and international evidence that adult learning can lead to significant improvements in personal well-being, confidence, and employment opportunities (AONTAS, 2018; Field, 2005). In the Irish context, the National Further Education and Training Strategy identifies lifelong learning as a key driver of community development and economic participation, particularly for adults re-entering the workforce, including women returning after periods of caregiving (DES, 2015). Adults who resume learning in Ireland frequently report:

- Increased confidence
- Enhanced communication skills
- Greater engagement in their children's education, and
- More positive attitudes towards schooling (DES, 2015).

Similar outcomes have been reported internationally, where adult education has been shown to improve self-efficacy, family well-being, and parental engagement in children's learning (Feinstein et al., 2003; Field, 2005; Schuller & Watson, 2009). Comparable patterns are also evident within ELI. Home Visitors consistently report that engaging in CPD and formal training through NCI helped them to recognise their own strengths, build confidence, and take a more active role in supporting their children's education (ELI internal project documentation, 2025). This is consistent with a broad body of international research showing that adult learning has positive ripple effects within the family, improving household wellbeing, parents' confidence, and children's educational engagement (Feinstein et al., 2003; Field, 2005; Schuller & Watson, 2009).

Role modelling and intergenerational influence on the part of the parent

Irish policy and research consistently highlight the influence of parents on children's educational expectations and achievements. The value of parental engagement in early learning is strongly emphasised in recent national policy, including the Parenting Support Policy Statement (DCEDIY, 2022), the First Five Strategy 2019–2028 (Government of Ireland, 2019), its Implementation Plan 2023–2025 and Young

Ireland 2023-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2023). Updated Irish evidence from the ESRI also shows that parental involvement has a direct and measurable impact on children's learning outcomes and long-term educational pathways (McCoy, Smyth & Banks, 2021).

Children tend to imitate what they observe in the house:

- Parents who get involved in education or training help children to have better educational ambitions (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).
- Even one consistently supportive adult can help buffer the negative effects of poverty, stress, or early adversity and promote resilience in children. This has been demonstrated in classic resilience research (Werner, 1995) and reinforced by more recent evidence showing that stable, caring adult relationships are among the strongest predictors of positive developmental outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage (Masten, 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012).
- Learning behaviour among children is directly related to parents' confidence in supporting learning at home, such as reading, playing, talking, and helping with early educational activities (DCEDIY, 2020; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Home Visitors often reported that when their children observed them studying, completing courses, or gaining new qualifications, their children's own motivation toward school increased. This reflects international evidence which shows that parents' visible engagement with education sends strong messages to children about the value of learning and positively shapes their attitudes, aspirations, and motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; OECD, 2019; Sammons et al., 2015).

The Athena Swan project places particular emphasis on this form of intergenerational change, where parents' own educational journeys become a powerful source of inspiration and encouragement for their children. Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland study further highlights the importance of parental expectations. Data from the age 25 cohort shows that almost 70% of individuals whose parents expected them to obtain a degree had achieved a degree by age 25, compared with 37% of those whose parents did not have this expectation (CSO, 2024). Overall, these findings emphasise that parents play a vital role in shaping their children's educational aspirations and attainment.

Access to education for Home Visitors

Access to education and CPD opportunities is a key consideration in supporting the capacity and sustainability of home visiting. Some programmes like ParentChild+ and Community Families intentionally recruit Home Visitors from their target communities, recognising the value of lived experience and cultural understanding, which helps build trusting relationships with families (National Home Visiting Resource Centre, 2024; HomVee, 2023). However, this can mean that some staff enter the workforce with limited formal qualifications, making access to further and higher education acutely important for career and professional development and for programme quality. Within the ELI, Home Visitors, who are NCI staff, benefit from direct access to higher education pathways, including accredited courses and CPD opportunities. This includes two dedicated online micro-credential courses in home visiting developed by NCI, "Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice for Early Childhood Home Visiting" and "Certificate in Leadership, Governance and Change Management in Early Childhood Home Visiting", which aim to strengthen practitioners' understanding of relationship-based practice, early childhood development, family engagement and the leadership skills needed to lead professional practice.

However, Home Visitors working in other ParentChild+ sites across Ireland do not always have the same level of institutional support to access higher education. As a result, programme centres encourage Home Visiting organisations to pursue training through their local Education and Training Boards Ireland centres (ETBI), where further education courses are available at relatively reasonable cost. While these pathways provide significant opportunities, they can still present barriers for practitioners balancing work and family commitments. These challenges have been further complicated by structural changes to the Professional Practice Placement module of 150 hours, which sees students only allowed to complete the work experience in Tusla-registered settings (Department of Social Protection, 2025), and doesn't take into account home visiting, making it near impossible to work in home visiting, complete the placement and keep a work-life balance. This is particularly challenging given that home visiting roles already require practitioners to be highly flexible, adaptable and responsive to the complex needs of families in community settings (Early Learning Initiative, 2025). These changes highlight the ongoing need for accessible and flexible educational pathways that recognise the professionalisation of the home visiting workforce and support Home Visitors to progress academically while remaining embedded in their communities (Peacock et al., 2013; Moloney, 2014).

ParentChild+ and international home visiting evidence

Evidence from both international research and ELI's own practice suggests that the impact of home visiting extends beyond the child and into the personal and educational development of Home Visitors themselves. Studies of paraprofessional home visiting programmes show that Home Visitors often develop stronger communication skills, increased confidence, and a greater interest in further education or professional qualifications because of their role (Finello et al., 2016; Roggman et al., 2013). Similarly, ELI internal project documentation, Home Visiting, CPD, and Educational Trajectories, as well as staff reflections, indicate that many Home Visitors have reported gaining confidence, developing a stronger understanding of early childhood development, and feeling encouraged to return to education or pursue additional qualifications. Home Visitors have also described how their involvement in the programme has influenced their view of learning within their own families, often motivating them to take their children's education more seriously and to act as positive educational role models (ELI, 2025).

Although the main goals of ParentChild+ are to support parents in their role as their child's first and best educators and to improve outcomes for the programme child, the programme model also appears to generate wider benefits for the Home Visitor, the family network, and the community. The Athena Swan project sought to explore and formally document this broader impact, particularly in relation to how the Home Visitor role influences women's educational confidence, aspirations, and the educational trajectories of the next generation within their families.

Participatory and community-based approaches in the Irish context

The Athena Swan research used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR is a participatory research approach where the research subjects are actively included in the process of research development as opposed to the research subjects being subjects of study only (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). It treats lived experience as an expertise and suggests reflection, empowerment, and positive change and production of knowledge. Home Visitors in this project played a role in setting research questions, collecting data, interpreting the findings, and making sure that their voices and experiences were at the centre of the research. This method resonates with the community education ideologies in Ireland, as described by AONTAS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), and is a

representation of an interest in collective education, engagement, and community leadership.

Participatory Action Research can be used effectively in situations where complex social issues are best understood through lived experience and where participants are actively involved in generating and interpreting knowledge (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). ELI is supporting the principles of community-led education that Tusla, Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) and the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) promote by drawing on community knowledge and inviting Home Visitors to participate as co-researchers.

Conclusion

The Irish evidence is in line with the international evidence: educational disadvantage has profound and long-lasting impacts on both children and adults, often across generations. Socioeconomic background, parental education, and leaving school early remain clear indicators of subsequent educational and employment outcomes. However, the literature clearly states that significant interventions, particularly based on community relationships, can produce a shift in perspectives and transform them permanently. When adults are supported to engage with learning and personal development, the benefits increase beyond individual achievement to improvements in confidence, well-being, family engagement, and children's educational aspirations.

Within this context, the ELI Home Visiting model represents more than an early childhood intervention; it's a community-anchored pathway for educational transformation. By employing Home Visitors from the Docklands community, ELI has created opportunities for professional growth, lifelong learning, and renewed educational ambition among the staff who have experienced disadvantage themselves. The evidence suggests that when Home Visitors pursue further education and CPD, they not only strengthen their professional selves but also influence their children's outlook towards their education, which contributes to positive intergenerational change.

The Athena Swan Research Project provides a well-timed and necessary opportunity to formally document and analyse these ripple effects. Through a PAR approach, Home Visitors are positioned not only as early years practitioners but as co-researchers whose lived experience is key to the overall research findings. This consolidates both the credibility and the ethical bases of the project. By examining how adult and educational progression with a community-based home visiting programme influences family aspirations and educational trajectories, the research project contributes to an under-researched area in Ireland. Ultimately, this project has the capacity to show how investing in lifelong learning within disadvantaged communities can serve as a catalyst for sustained, intergenerational educational transformation.

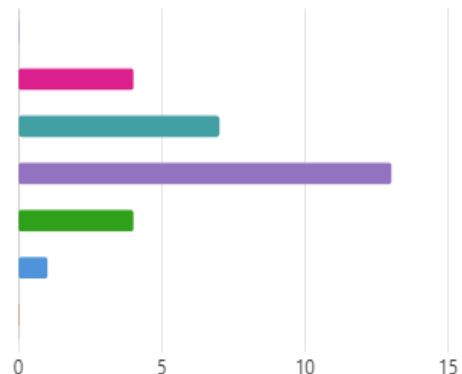
Survey Results

Background Questions

Some demographic questions were asked to understand the socio-demographic background of the participants in the research.

What age are you?

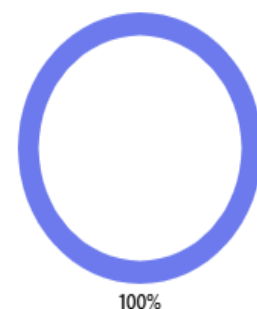
Under 25	0
25-34	4
35-44	7
45-54	13
55-64	4
65+	1
Prefer not to say	0



The majority of participants were under 54, with 45%² aged between 45 and 54, 69% between 35 and 54.

How would you describe your gender?

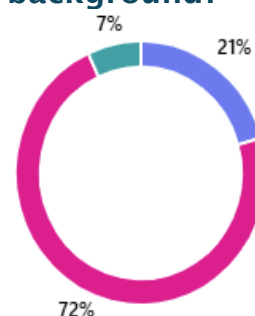
Woman	29
Man	0
Non-binary	0
In another way (specify, if you wish)	0
Prefer not to say	0



All the respondents were women; there are currently no men working as Home Visitors within ELI.

Do you consider yourself to be from a minority ethnic background?

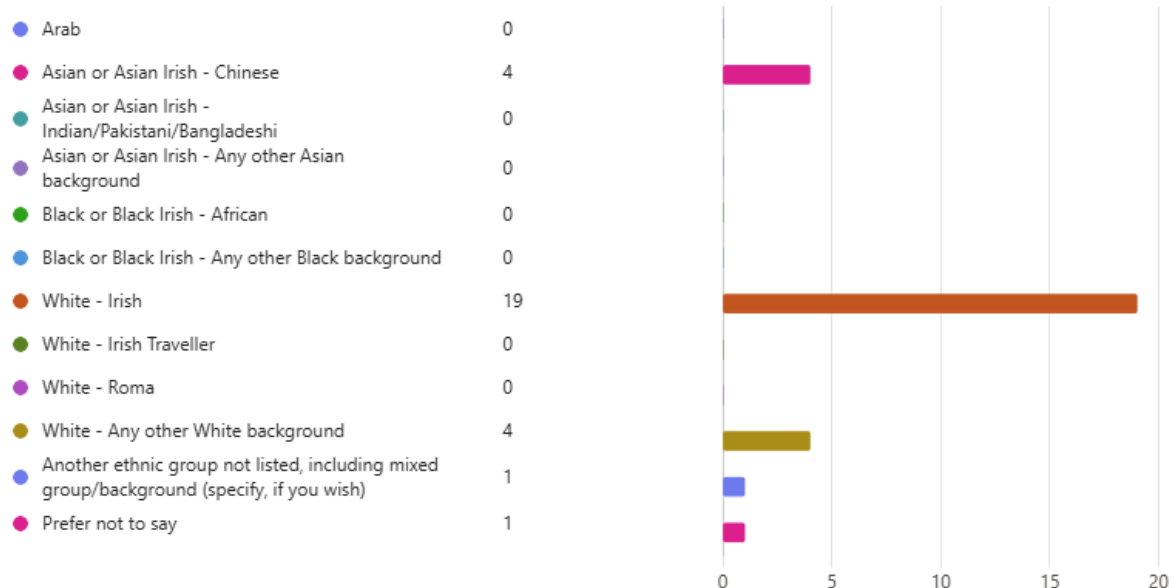
Yes	6
No	21
Unsure	2
Prefer not to say	0



² All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

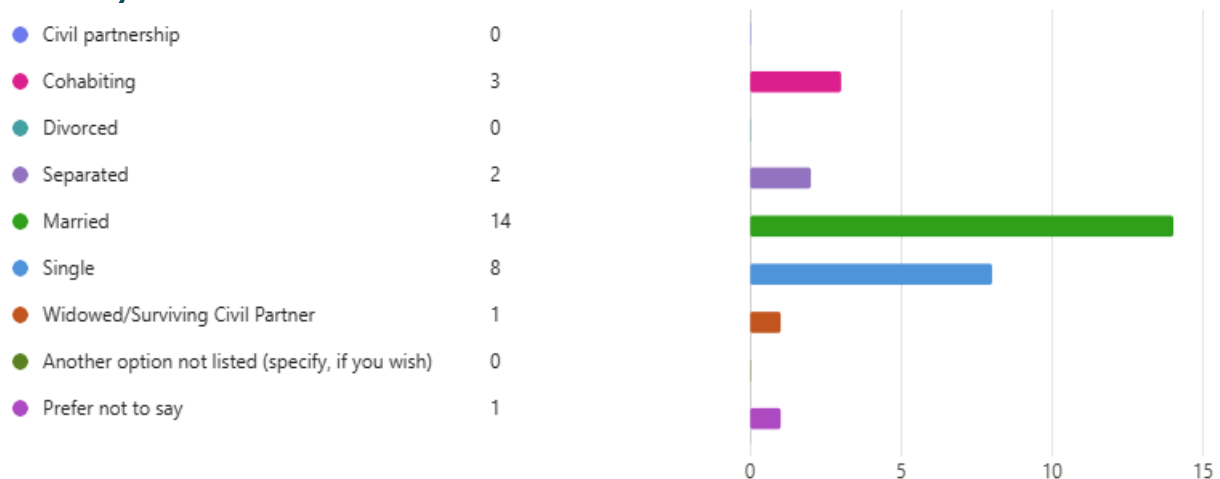
72% said they were not from a minority ethnic background, while 21% said that they were, 7% were unsure. People can be unsure as they may not have considered or understood how ethnic categories are defined.

Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?³



The two largest minority ethnic backgrounds were Asian or Asian Irish/Chinese and Any Other White Background, both at 14%. One person identified as another ethnic group⁴.

What is your current marital status?



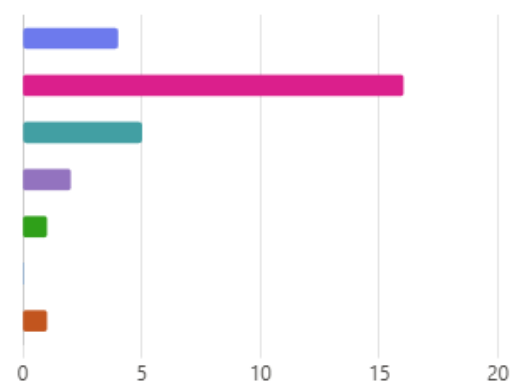
57% were in a relationship, either married or cohabiting, while 31% were single and/or widowed.

³ The ethnic categories are those used by the Central Statistics Office in the census.

⁴ This has been anonymised as there was only one respondent in this category and it would be identifiable.

How many children do you have?

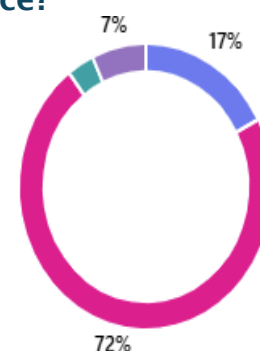
One	4
Two	16
Three	5
Four	2
Five	1
Six or more	0
Prefer not to say	1



All the respondents, who provided details, had children, with the majority having two children (55%). Among the 28 who provided details, there were 64 children.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment, chronic health condition (including mental health) or learning difference?

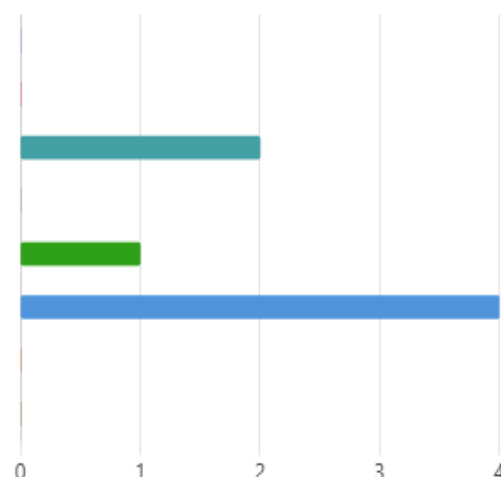
Yes	5
No	21
Unsure	1
Prefer not to say	2



17% identified as having a disability, impairment, chronic health condition (including mental health) or learning difference, with a further 3% unsure.

If yes, please select all that apply:

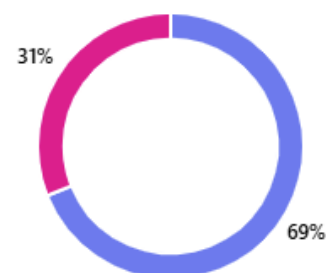
Deaf or hearing impairment	0
Blind or visual impairment not corrected by glasses	0
Specific learning difficulty (for example dyslexia)	2
Developmental condition or social/communication difficulty (for example, speech or language...)	0
Physical impairment or mobility difficulty (for example, difficulty using your arms, use of a...)	1
Mental health difficulty (for example, depression, an anxiety disorder or bipolar disorder)	4
Another option not listed (specify, if you wish)	0
Prefer not to say	0



The majority of those who provided information indicated that they have a disability, impairment, chronic health condition (including mental health) or learning difference as a mental health difficulty, at 57% of those who identified as having a disability.

Do you have caring responsibilities?

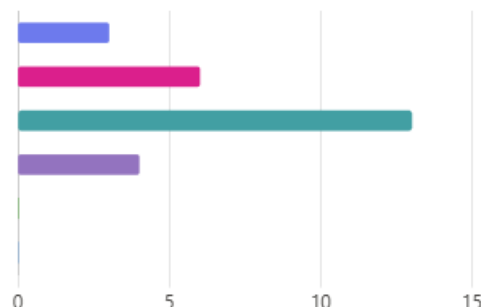
Yes	20
No	9
Prefer not to say	0



The majority, at 69%, have caring responsibilities.

If yes, please select what caring responsibilities:

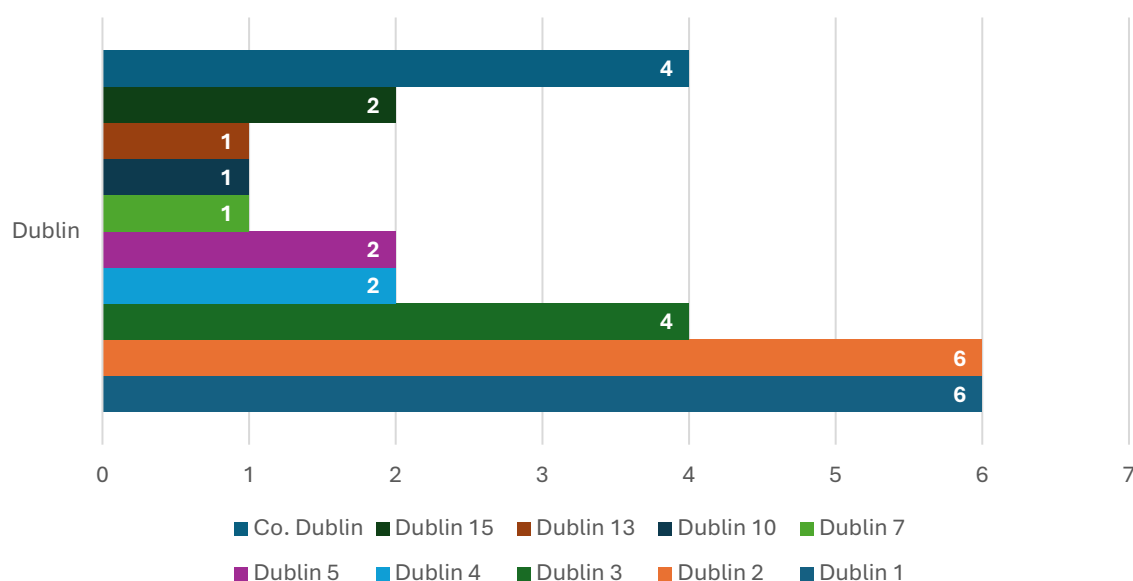
Caring for a child with a disability or long-term illness	3
Caring for an adult with a disability or long-term illness	6
Childcare	13
Eldercare	4
Another option not listed (specify, if you wish)	0
Prefer not to say	0



The majority noted that their caring responsibilities centred around children, at 45%. 10% are also caring for a child with a disability or long-term illness. 21% are caring for an adult with a disability or long-term illness. While 14% have eldercare responsibilities. Please note that some may have more than one caring responsibility.

“Yeah, I'm the only child. My parents are getting old. I wish to look after them when they're getting older. Because they live far, so that's another worry or issue now. We don't know how to deal with that.”

What area of the city are you living in?



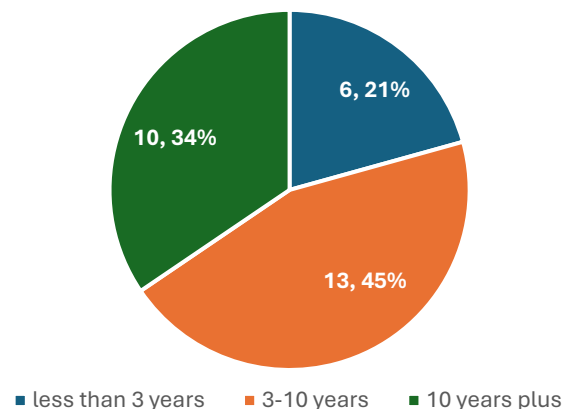
All the respondents who answered come from Dublin, with 62% living in Dublin 1, 2, or 3.

Home Visiting Experience

How long have you been an ELI Home Visitor?

- Six have been Home Visitors for less than 3 years
- Thirteen have been Home Visitors for between 3-10 years
- Ten have been Home Visitors for more than 10 years (including three who are 18 years +).

How long have you been an ELI Home Visitor



Why did you join the home visiting team?

The motivations for becoming a Home Visitor ranged from the personal to the professional, with alignment to personal values and practical needs.

Motivations included the desire for personal change, to make an impact in their community, and/or looking for more flexible employment. Most had multiple motivations, even if the initial motivator was practical.

Many discovered a passion for early childhood education through their own experiences as parents and/or recipients of the programme, and a desire to share those benefits with others. They also described joining the Home Visiting programme as a personally meaningful and professionally empowering experience.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Transformative personal experience
2. Desire to give back/support the community and/or families
3. Love of working with children and families
4. Recognition of the importance of early intervention
5. Professional development/change
6. Flexible work arrangements

Transformative personal experience

31%, or almost a third, of respondents talked about their own personal experience with ELI as service users (e.g. home visits for their own child(ren)) and the influence it had on them. They referred to the experience as transformative, identifying benefits for their children, families and themselves.

This meant they had knowledge of the programme and a desire to be part of the programme professionally.

“Because my son, he was one of the participants. And from there, I really, really fell in love with the work.”

“Because my little girl was on the home visiting programme. Oh, it was amazing, yeah.”

“I took part with my son, and I had a Home Visitor come to my house, and I absolutely loved it.”

“That time I just have my child... I really need help and ELI Home Visitor give me lots [of] help.”

“Being involved [in home visiting] as a parent first showed me the impact it has. When the opportunity came up to work in ELI, I really wanted to be part of it.”

These reflections highlight how experiencing the benefits firsthand inspired respondents to become Home Visitors themselves.

Desire to give back to the community and/or families

34%, or just over a third of respondents, talked about the desire to contribute positively to their own local communities; often in a way they themselves had once benefitted from, including the desire to support other families, particularly in local or similar communities.

“I’m originally from the local community... it was something that I was passionate about.”

“Why not be helping other families that are in more or less the same situation I was?”

“To work within the communities and to improve outcomes for children in communities.”

“I feel this work has suited me the best. I enjoy working with families, support the communities.”

This indicated a strong community ethos.

Love of working with children and families

41%, talked about their love of working with children and/or families and that this was a motivating factor for wanting to do this work. Some had worked in childcare or early years education in another role.

“I love working with children and I like being out and about.”

“I like working with children, and also, I have the sensibility to look after child and the family.”

“It's my professional area, and also I love children.”

“Because it’s a job I really like doing.”

“First, because I like the job and I like to work with children.”

Therefore, this role was often seen not just as a job, but as a vocation that is aligned with personal values.

Recognition of early intervention and educational impact

21% talked about the power of early intervention and the importance of programmes that work with children from a very young age, and wanting to be a part of that.

“I felt it could really make a difference with like working with children right from the beginning of being a baby.”

“To improve outcomes for children in communities.”

“It was the first I’d ever heard of home visiting... and I was hooked from day one.”

“I realised how important it is to get in before they start school.”

“Working with children right from the beginning of being a baby.”

This indicates a belief in the transformative power of early intervention

Professional development/change

17% talked about the opportunities and professional development that the programme offered them. Some of these described the training that they received to become a Home Visitor as life-changing, particularly those with limited formal education or those seeking a career change, often following prior roles in childcare, social care, or non-care sectors.

“I joined because I love my education, I didn’t have a good education.”

“I was a hairdresser... I went to college and trained for childcare.”

“My background is social care... I wanted a change.”

“I was working in a crèche as a chef... did a level six in additional needs.”

These responses highlight how the programme served as a gateway to personal and professional development, particularly for those looking to move out of less fulfilling or less flexible roles.

Flexible work arrangements

21% valued the flexibility of the role, particularly as mothers, where it took account of the caring and domestic roles that they had and was an important aspect of why the job fit well into their lives.

“It was very flexible when my children were very small.”

“I had three young children... Home Visitor job just suited me at that time.”

“Perfect as [it was] only taking afternoon staff.”

This highlights ELI’s family-friendly policies where the almost exclusively women on staff can have a work-life balance, making it accessible to caregivers.

Recruitment through word of mouth and community networks

Informal networks played a significant role in recruitment into the role of Home Visitors in ELI. 28% heard about the work/role through friends, health professionals, or other community members, as well as being from families who themselves benefited from the programme.

“The PHN started me by telling me about the programme.”

“I heard about the programme from a friend who was a Home Visitor.”

“My boss at the time in the crèche said to me, why don’t you go over and have a look at it?”

“My friend had recommended it to me, and she had worked there.”

This highlights the importance of trusted relationships and peer recommendation in spreading awareness.

Several respondents reflected on their initial uncertainty or limited understanding of the role, followed by deep engagement.

“At the beginning, I didn’t know what was really behind... I just felt very curious to start with, and then I fell in love with the programme.”

“At first, I wasn’t sure what the role involved.”

“Once I started, I realised how important the work actually was.”

This suggests that exploratory engagement, like training sessions or introductory meetings, might be a useful recruitment tool.

Therefore, there was a mix of personal, professional, and community-driven motivations for becoming a Home Visitor, alongside reflections on the transformative impact it has had on both themselves, their own family, and the families they work with. A love for working with children and supporting families was also a dominant motivating factor.

Were you or your family visited by a Home Visitor on any of the ELI programmes or home visiting programmes outside of ELI?

Thirteen (45%) of those involved had family visited by an ELI programme.

“We were a family that was visited by a Home Visitor.”

“Yeah, my baby, my daughter was on the zero to two programme when she was born for the first year, for one year. I went back to work.”

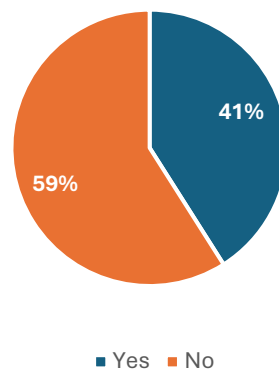
“Oh, yes. My family was visited by a Home Visitor. My family was in PC Plus programme and STEM programmes. And we also joined the Zoom Ahead Book club. Yeah. So, three programmes.”

“My grandchild was in the programme.”

Educational Experience

The Home Visitors in the research had a mixed educational experience, but educational disadvantage was a dominant feature.

Number of respondents who had left school early.



12 or 41% left school early, two left school by the age of 12 and therefore had not done any post primary level education.

“12 and a half, I did not see secondary school.”

“I left at junior cert, just after junior cert, I must have been maybe fifteen.”

Why did you leave school?

Those respondents who left school early identified a range of reasons why they left formal education, including socio-economic pressures, family responsibilities, and cultural expectations and norms. The responses highlight how social, cultural, and economic factors shaped their educational journeys. Many encountered structural inequalities, gendered expectations, or economic exclusion, prompting them to leave school early and enter into work and/or caregiving roles.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Economic necessity and early work
2. Cultural and family norms
3. Interrupted or unfulfilled aspirations

Economic necessity and early work

24% of the respondents left education to get a job and earn money.

“Had to work. Well, that's the way it was. Them days...”

“Because I got a job. I was allowed to leave school.”

Cultural and family norms

28% talked about how leaving school early, often when compulsory education was completed, was normalised in some families or communities. Generational patterns and family expectations to leave school early were common.

“That’s kind of the way me and my mum wanted me to... we all kind of left at that age.”

“It was 1985 and everybody was leaving school at 15 after Inter⁵ cert.”

“Generationally, when we were growing up, either you got to a certain level in education and then you got a job, education wasn’t important.”

A few respondents suggested that they did not feel supported, included or motivated by the education system.

“I didn’t have any faith... I suppose a lack of encouragement and confidence.”

“In secondary school....and the careers teacher pulled out certain people out of the class to talk to them about the CAO system...And the ones that were from the flats complexes were told that we didn’t need to go to the talk because it wasn’t for us.”

Interrupted or unfulfilled aspirations

21% of respondents noted that their educational aspirations were interrupted by life circumstances, including gendered caregiving responsibilities or not achieving the academic requirements required at that first stage.

“I didn’t get the chance, didn’t get enough points.”

“My mum took sick, so I had to drop out and look after her.”

“I was the babysitter. Left school to care of siblings.”

“I always wanted to be a teacher...I didn’t get enough support for Irish, so I couldn’t apply to St. Pat’s.”

Some respondents grew up elsewhere and became migrants who had come to Ireland, from both Europe and beyond, to pursue employment and opportunities.

“I come to Ireland to learn English.”

“Life was hard in ***** ... I wanted to come and work and make money.”

⁵ The state exam taken in third year, which then became the Junior Certificate.

“My brother came to Ireland before me, and he got a job and I wanted the same. I wanted to come and work and make money because life was hard in **.”**

Importantly, most re-engaged with education, as we can see below, which helped empower them and change or enhance employment opportunities. This demonstrated resilience and a desire for lifelong learning despite some negative experiences many had during their childhood education.

Completed primary and post-primary education

15 or 52%, just over half, completed the post-primary education, hence finished school, and 5 (17%) talked about then going into further education, although one had to leave further education to provide family care.

A small proportion of the respondents talked about the specifics of the migrant experience, coming to Ireland, often with a post-primary level education and seeking ways to gain better employment, often through improving their language skills.

Thinking back, did you/your family aspire to higher education at that time?

55% of the respondents (more than half) said there was no or very little aspiration for a third-level education for them at home, in school or in their communities. Interesting 26% just said there was no aspiration for third level in their families of origin, but did not expand on why they thought that was the case. This may be a difficult area to understand and analyse, in terms of recognising what were the decisive factors of the time, particularly when it was often seen as the ‘norm.’

While for some there was an aspiration for higher and further education, it was often constrained by socio-economic factors. Respondents talked about exclusion based on class, culture, finances, and educational structures.

Overall, socio-economic factors, cultural capital, social position, institutional bias, and family culture influenced access to higher education.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Socioeconomic and financial barriers
2. Cultural and familial expectations
3. Structural discrimination and poor educational supports
4. Support for third-level education

“We couldn’t afford it”

“It wasn’t for us”

“Discrimination by teachers”

“Low expectations from schools”

Socioeconomic and financial barriers

21% referenced socioeconomic and financial barriers, including the cost of education. Respondents lacked access to free education, particularly those from migrant backgrounds or from larger families. Therefore, in some instances aspirations existed but were stifled by financial constraints and lack of access.

“Not really because in my country, you pay for education... it was very hard to do university and work.”

“Families, if they had more than one child, couldn’t really afford to do that.”

“There would have been very limited money in my household.”

“It wasn’t really a possibility because it’s quite expensive.”

Cultural and familial expectations

14% noted that it just wasn’t the cultural or familial expectations to go to third level, leaving education and early work were normalised. In some communities, going to college just wasn’t expected; it wasn’t seen as a likely or viable path in certain households or peer groups.

“It wasn’t something that was spoke about.”

“You were allowed to leave school if you got a job.”

“Not a lot of our family went to college at that time.”

“We all kind of left at that age and got a job.”

Structural discrimination and poor support in school

14% argued that they were actively discouraged by school or society from continuing in education. They described being actively discouraged from pursuing higher education due to their class background. Education systems reproduce social inequality by gatekeeping higher education access.

“It was pure discrimination based on your accent.”

“Imagine your teacher telling you, you wouldn’t aspire to anything.”

Several respondents had complex responses, wanting to go, but not seeing it as feasible or not being fully encouraged. Aspirations existed in tension with context, ability, and perceived belonging. Overall, there were mixed or ambivalent aspirations; dreams of education existed, but at times they were fragile or conditional.

“I suppose... yeah and no.”

“They always wished but not wished that much.”

Support for third-level education

17% talked about the support that they received from their families to pursue higher education.

“Strong parental support”

“Yeah, I did. I did because, like the school I went to, you know, they really promote, like everything was all about getting your Leaving Cert done and then after Leaving Cert was going on, go to college, go to university.”

Personal drive and alternative educational routes

Despite barriers, most pursued education later in life or via non-traditional routes, often with the support of ELI. Where support had been missing early in their lives, individual resilience and determination found other ways.

“I went to a night school to do a childcare course.”

“I went and done childcare education and done a level five and level six with additional needs.”

“I was 40 when I went back to college, but it was me, to better my education.”

“Because I come to Ireland to learn English...to continue my education.”

Personal drive and alternative educational routes meant that many found ways to access education later or differently.

Did you return to education, including further education?

● Yes 28
● No 1



97%, or almost all of the respondents, returned to education.

Why did you return to education?

The main reasons outlined for returning to education were, in the first instance, education for career advancement or to meet job requirements. Respondents referred to the requirements to have specific qualifications for the areas they wanted to work in, particularly within the childcare, early years and education sectors. Some also noted that returning to education was essential for a career change and/or move to different/ better employment opportunities.

Therefore, education was often identified as a practical necessity for career progression, rather than solely a personal or academic endeavour.

That being said, the motivations for returning to education were complex and multifaceted, and included intersecting personal, professional, and social factors. So, while professional advancement was often the driver, respondents also expressed personal aspirations, familial commitments, and a desire to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Career development and practical needs
 2. Personal fulfilment and growth
 3. Life circumstances and turning points
 4. Community impact and contribution
-

Career development and practical needs

83% of respondents cited returning to education was because of career progression and responding to practical requirements. Education to access or improve employment is often linked to specific jobs in childcare, early years or education. Respondents spoke of required qualifications (e.g., Level 5/6), improving employability, or changing careers entirely. This is the most explicit reason people returned to education.

“Because I needed it for the career I wanted... I always knew I'd want to work with kids.”

“I wanted to get higher education for a better career.”

“I was working for 10 years in offices, and I knew that's not what I wanted...”

“Because I wanted to change another career. And start a new beginning.”

“Just to learn more. Like I wanted a career for myself. So yeah, I wanted to study.”

Personal fulfilment and growth

48% of the respondents talked about returning to education for their own personal fulfilment, including to improve confidence, self-worth, or achieve missed goals. In one case, it was to gain basic educational skills.

Respondents spoke about the fact that they had missed opportunities, particularly educational opportunities when they were young, and were now setting out to build confidence or achieve personal goals. They were motivated by more than employment; they wanted to achieve some personal ambitions. Education was seen as a means of self-improvement and personal development.

“I always felt it was something I missed out on and wanted to do.”

“To achieve more for myself and build confidence.”

“To better myself.”

“To learn to read and get a better job.”

“I wanted to get higher education for a better job...It was a better salary with higher education.”

For these respondents, returning to education was not only about career outcomes but also about developing agency, self-worth, and confidence.

7% explicated linked their return to education to support their children or, to act as a role model for them.

“To show my own children that without an education you can't get very far.”

7% explicated linked their return to education, wanting to make a meaningful impact in their own communities. A desire to use their education to help others, particularly children and families in their communities. This altruistic motivation coexisted with personal goals, highlighting a sense of community engagement.

“To support the community... make myself feel more useful, meaningful.”

17% talked about an explicit desire to learn, to continue learning. Education was described as a source of enjoyment, curiosity, and personal enrichment. This emphasised a lifelong love of learning, independent of job requirements or expectations.

“I love learning and I'm very curious. I'm a nosy person... so it's a natural fit.”

“The more you're learning, you feel you needed more to learn, so you just keep going.”

“I think I just wanted to do more and learn more.”

Therefore, returning to education was not just for individual achievement but also something that could be a shared benefit within the family and community. It was identified as not only a tool for personal and professional growth, but also as a means to support others.

Life circumstances and turning points

For 57%, returning to education was part of a turning point in their lives. A career change, migration, looking for better employment opportunities, or for employment that they could manage with their complex lives as carers.

Changes in life circumstances acted as a catalyst for action. These turning points created motivations and sometimes external pressures to re-engage with formal learning.

“After I came to Ireland...”

“When I started the job, they were asking people who work with children...”

“Looking after my mother... wanted to have something to work part-time.”

This reflects how circumstances influence educational trajectories, often making education feel both necessary and newly accessible. These findings reinforce the view of adult learners as complex individuals whose return to education reflects both internal ambitions and external realities.

What factors played a role in your return to education?

In order to explore the factors that supported the 97% returning to education, respondents were asked to reflect further on the factors that influenced their decision to re-engage in lifelong learning.

38% specifically talked about their return to education to support/improve the lives of their own children/family. It was influenced by family factors, particularly the desire to improve life for their children and themselves, influenced by personal experiences often from their own childhood, like watching parents struggle financially. Therefore, education was identified as an opportunity to improve the support they could provide to their families and communities.

“Seeing what early year education can do for families.”

“Mainly because of my family environment. Because my child needed me to learn a lot of things.”

“Seeing my daughter on the programme and the benefits and what benefited me and the community going forward.”

62% identified working in early years education as the main influence in returning to education, but with differing emphasis. Career considerations played the primary role, with many noting the need for formal qualifications to secure or advance in jobs, particularly in childcare and early years-related professions. Respondents were supported by employers, including ELI, to support their access to education, making education more accessible.

Support networks and context, such as encouraging managers, Home Visitor programmes, and the unique conditions created by COVID-19 lockdowns, also facilitated respondents’ ability to pursue education. The financial support and education programme as part of employment were key enabling factors.

Finally, respondents held varied perceptions of education, balancing the value of academic credentials with practical, everyday knowledge. For many, education was not only about certificates but also about gaining useful skills to enhance their personal and professional lives.

Key themes include

1. Education as a pathway to better employment and stability
2. Family as a catalyst for returning to education
3. Personal growth, confidence, and personal development
4. External supports and enabling factors

Education as a pathway to better employment and stability

62% of respondents framed education as a means to achieve a better future, financially, professionally, and socially. Motivations were tied to employability requirements and changing careers.

“I just wanted to try to have an easier life.”

“It was a better salary with a higher education... more options for promotion.”

“I wouldn't get a job unless I got qualifications.”

Respondents described changes in the childcare/early years sector, shifting from a space where experience was enough to requiring formal qualifications. This shift was experienced as both pressure and opportunity

"Regulations came in... and from there I aspired to get my degree."

Family as a catalyst for returning to education

38% talked about their family, in particular, children playing a key role in decisions to return to education. Learning is understood as having a generational impact, where they learn skills to support their children and model positive behaviour. Education becomes familial, about the family and not just the individual, to support their own children academically and to break the cycle, where it needs breaking, and to improve family life.

"Seeing my daughter... we were all supporting each other in our educational role."

"My son is my main reason."

"I needed knowledge to help my own children."

"I think it's a question, what's making you? I think for me and my family, we all want higher education for my life as well. That's why I think I have to go back to education."

"Then my own children, I needed to learn more to help them or to support them to go to school or go to college."

Personal growth, confidence, and personal development

For 35%, returning to education was because of growing self-belief, helping them reconnect with what they wanted for themselves. Being in education also further increased their confidence.

"I think I probably felt a bit more confident in my abilities."

"I think it was always I knew what I wanted to do."

Some respondents questioned the dominance of formal education, asserting value in experiential or "common-sense" knowledge. This reflects tension between institutional expectations and cultural/local knowledge.

"There's two types of education... book education and everyday life knowledge."

"I'm not a paper person."

10% noted that having supportive workplaces, which provided funding, time to engage in education and encouragement from others, enabled participation. Without these supports, education felt inaccessible.

"Just having people there that believed in me."

"My job... would pay for you to do stuff because it's thousands."

"COVID-19... online learning helped."

Overall, the data reflect a complex interaction of personal aspiration, family responsibility, workplace requirements, and opportunity.

Returning to education is not a single-motivated decision but a complex mix of personal development, capability building, and social mobility. Respondents' responses revealed emotional, practical, and familial influences, framed against broader employment and regulatory shifts towards increased professionalisation in the early childhood sector.

What did you do when you returned to education?

Due to the sample involved in the research, it is not surprising that those returning to education were mainly focused on qualifications in early years education. Many engaged in education as a springboard for career growth, personal development, and professional validation. Themes of continuous learning, flexibility, and adaptability were highlighted.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Childcare and early years education as a pathway
2. Lifelong learning
3. Career change

Some specifics included

- 69% engaged in early related to childhood education and care, and similar, such as Special Needs Assistance (SNA)
- 24% referred to education but didn't specify what/what level.
- Specific education courses that were engaged in included level 5 to master's degrees in early childhood education.
- Other areas included
 - Micro credentials
 - The Junior Certificate
 - Play therapies
 - Infant massage instructor
 - Healthcare Assistant Level 5

Childcare and early years education as a key pathway

69% of respondents pursued qualifications in childcare and early childhood education, often citing levels 5 and 6, with some progressing to degree and postgraduate levels.

"I did level five in early childhood education and care, I did, and the micro credential's level six."

"I'm currently doing my early years honours degree."

"I did childcare. I've done loads of different courses... QQI level 5."

"The big degree course – the honours degree in early childhood education and care."

This reflects a structured, qualification-focused return to education that is directly tied to employment in early years settings. Education was often paired with on-the-job learning, practical skills development, or compliance with regulations (e.g., needing a certain level to continue in the role).

“Started learning childcare with Home Visitor work.”

“I was working and studying at the same time.”

“Some new regulations came in, and I started doing level six in childcare.”

This theme underscores the integration of formal education with professional practice and regulatory requirements.

Lifelong learning

34% of respondents described continuous learning and upskilling through a range of courses and programmes from micro-credentials, short courses, and formal education from foundational levels through to master’s degrees.

“I’ve done level nines on leadership, community organisations... and the master’s in business administration.”

“Nail Technician... cheffing... trainer the trainer... data analytics now.”

“I did Healthy Eating, GDPR training, First Aid, and home research training.”

“Then I finished my level 5, and my level 6.”

This demonstrates a strong commitment to lifelong learning, often self-directed, building a range of skills, both academic and vocational.

Career change

Respondents mentioned using education to change careers or diversify their skills, including transitioning from previous fields such as beauty therapy, tourism, or administration into new professions.

“I did catering. I did beauty therapy, medical aesthetics... and then childcare and education.”

“I done travel and tourism in college.”

“So the first time would have been beauty training... then I start childcare.”

“I worked as an administrative assistant.”

This theme highlights how education served as a tool to change professional careers.

For some respondents, including some of those from migrant backgrounds or those with interrupted schooling, returning to education started with basic or foundational courses, including language acquisition.

“I just go to the language school... English is the first point to learn.”

“I took the Junior Cert... It was a long process.”

This reflects the barriers and progression paths faced by learners starting with lower qualifications or re-entering from outside the system.

Since returning to education, are you equipped for the education system?

The analysis revealed that 93% of the respondents felt equipped for the education system, but this readiness was not uniform. Some faced challenges around technology, balancing life and caring responsibilities, and learning difficulties.

Support systems, such as tutors, support from within the educational institutions, and peer encouragement, were critical in helping respondents adapt and cope.

However, the data also shows the results were more nuanced: feeling “equipped” is contextual, dependent on the presence of support, access to training, and life circumstances.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Mixed readiness and ongoing barriers, including digital and technical challenges
2. Support systems and learning environment
3. Personal growth and confidence
4. Balancing education with life pressures

Mixed readiness and ongoing barriers, including digital and technological challenges

31% of respondents expressed mixed readiness; there was a wide range of responses, with some feeling only partial readiness due to anxiety, learning difficulties, or being out of education for a long time.

“Yes and no... I can support my son, but this new AI I am not equipped for.”

“I still struggle because of my learning difficulties and anxiety.”

15% of respondents expressed difficulty with digital and/or technical aspects such as digital tools, online systems, and modern technology (e.g., AI, CAO, IT systems). While some are improving, it remains a common struggle.

“I'm not very techie... I have improved, but it's just not natural to me.”

“This new AI I am not equipped for.”

Support systems and learning environment

21% noted that they got support from institutions (e.g., NCI, the Larkin Centre), tutors, and workplace mentors, which significantly supported them to succeed.

“With the backup of the supports I have within the role... there's a lot of positive support.”

“I had a lot of support with the Larkin Centre and a great tutor.”

Personal growth and confidence

Having returned to education, 21% of respondents noted that they experienced personal growth, gaining confidence and using their learning to empower others, particularly their own children or family.

“As time goes by, you learn a bit every time.”

“I wasn’t always like that... It’s learned over time.”

“It’s a little bit technical for me, but I’m getting there.”

Some now feel equipped to guide their own children or help others navigate the education system, highlighting the ripple effect of empowerment.

“I was educating [my friend] to make sure that her kid knows.”

“I changed because I wanted more for them [my children].”

“Through the years of being a Home Visitor and learning from other Home Visitors and senior staff, I even got more confident in speaking to teachers in the schools regarding my own children's educational outcomes, and I suppose I changed because I wanted more for them to break the generation of what I didn't have. I wanted more for my own children's education.”

Balancing education with life pressures

7% referred to the additional pressure of learners with family responsibilities and the challenges that that poses, particularly for mature students, but again, respondents wanted to do it for their children and families.

“The time is not enough to study.”

“Trying to balance everything... can be a bit of a struggle.”

Were you or your family (of origin) equipped for the education system?

(For example, taking an interest in schoolwork, talking about subjects, what they like, discussions about secondary school and subjects for Junior or Leaving Cert or understanding the CAO system.)

55% of the respondents felt that their families of origin were not fully equipped to support them in the education system. A range of issues were highlighted. Those who were not originally from Ireland faced additional barriers but often bridged the gap by working closely with their own children.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Generational barriers and educational gaps
2. Self-taught how to navigate the education system
3. Growing educational culture within families

Generational barriers and educational gaps

55% identified generational barriers and educational gaps, with limited parental education, learning difficulties such as dyslexia, or non-engagement with schoolwork.

Respondents described a lack of educational support from their family of origin, often due to low levels of parental education, dyslexia, or limited awareness of educational pathways.

“My mom left school when she was 12... she left school not being able to read... she didn’t know much about worldly subjects.”

“My mum had severe dyslexia... she didn’t pick up on my struggles.”

“There was never really any other interaction, I don’t think, just ‘how was your day?’”

“As a child. No, no, no. You just, you went to school. I do my junior cert. I didn’t do my leaving cert. And I wouldn’t have known about CAO or anything.”

There was mixed family engagement, where there was some support from family, without full knowledge or involvement.

Respondents described some support within the home, for example, some had siblings or parents who encouraged schoolwork, but with limited depth or structure.

“My dad was like, whatever you want to do.”

“But wouldn’t know how to support more, or have that deeper conversation of like colleges and what options. And it was more like, you’re in school, you’re getting there, you’re doing well, you’re doing the greatest. And she didn’t pick up obviously that the skills weren’t picking up.”

“There were always books at home... but I didn’t know about the pathways until I worked at NCI.”

In many instances, support was more moral than practical, and in many cases, limited by parents’ own educational limitations.

This highlights how intergenerational educational disadvantage affected engagement and understanding of the formal education system.

Self-taught how to navigate the education system

21% described independently learning how to navigate the education system, often later in life. Despite early disadvantages, respondents showed resilience and self-motivation, learning about educational systems like the CAO or supporting their children by actively seeking information.

“I filled out my CAO myself... there wasn’t much support.”

“I learned of the CAO system when my daughters got to that stage... it was new for me.”

“I had to relearn it... my daughter showed me how to use the system.”

“I’m from a family where we wouldn’t have had opportunities to stay in school or to go on to college.”

This theme reflects knowledge being built later in life or through necessity.

This was also an issue where respondents from other countries had to learn the Irish education system from scratch. They highlighted the challenge of adjusting to a completely different education system, especially without prior familiarity.

“In my country there is no CAO system... I had to learn from my daughter.”

“Coming from **, the system was new to me.”**

Growing educational culture within families

41% noted that there was a more developed/developing understanding of education in their own families rather than their families of origin. Respondents were creating a stronger learning culture for their own children

Several responses show how respondents created a more supportive educational culture for their own children, contrasting with their own experience.

“We did have the conversations with the schools and input from both children.”

“From the beginning, I really wanted my children to do well in school.”

“I walked her through Trinity, and even say, you know, you could come here one day if you want.”

“She knows she has options...We will be able to support her whatever she chooses.”

This suggests an intentional effort to break the cycle, increasing engagement and information-sharing in their own homes.

Family Educational Experience

Do any of your children have any additional educational/learner needs? (Please elaborate)



Just over half, 52%, of the respondents had children with additional educational/learning needs.

If any of your children have any additional educational/learner needs? (Please elaborate)

35% stated that one or more of their children was neurodiverse such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ADHD

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Other additional needs identified were

- Cerebral Palsy
- Speak and language issues

“My son was diagnosed with autism in 2018 when he was four.”

“He has cerebral palsy, he's a quadriplegic.”

“My eldest was diagnosed with autism and ADHD at about eight.”

“ADHD, dyslexia, ODD.”

“Dyspraxia, he's allowed to use an iPad at school for his work.”

These cases typically involved access to formal supports, such as assistive technology, special needs assistants (SNA), or specialist programmes like Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT).

Undiagnosed needs

Several respondents expressed concern or suspicion about their child having an additional learning need, without currently having a formal diagnosis.

“I think he might be dyslexic... my younger one might have something too, but I don't want to label her.”

“They've learned to deal with it, they're very well educated... but yeah, there's dyslexia in the family.”

“My son would really struggle with reading and writing... he's a little bit better at Irish than English.”

This points to parental insight and intergenerational awareness, with a desire for clarity but hesitation around labelling too early.

Speech and language delay

10% noted that one or more of their children had speech and language delay.

“My youngest daughter just has speech and language delay.”

“Yeah, just speech and language.”

This may not always be classified as a special educational need long-term, but it clearly impacts early learning and communication.

Behavioural or emotional support needs

Some children are receiving support in relation to behavioural issues/needs, either through schools or services like children's disability network teams, which may be part of a broader diagnosis process.

“Attends the CDNT in Summerhill for behaviour but may be part of diagnosis.”

This indicates that behaviour or emotional regulation is being addressed within or alongside educational planning.

One respondent shared a powerful narrative of leaving work to fully engage in their child's learning needs, acquiring skills in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), occupational therapy (OT), and visual communication.

“I quit my job... to learn about special needs assistance, VB Map [verbal Behaviour Milestone Assessment], OT [Occupational Therapy], ABA [Applied Behaviour Analysis], and visual support.”

This highlights the significant emotional and practical labour some parents undertake to support their child's development, often becoming experts themselves.

There was recognition of neurodiversity as a lens through which some families understood their children's differences, indicating a move beyond deficit-based labels.

“Neurodiversity. Autism spectrum and potential ADHD.”

This reflects a more inclusive framing of learner variation, aligned with an inclusive understanding of educational needs.

Can you support your children (with additional educational needs) with their educational journey?

(For example, do you understand the pathways available for your children with additional/learner needs. Have you availed of them?)

Of those who provided an answer to this specific question, 55% said that they could support their children's education, although the depth and type of support they could offer varied.

Some parents were actively navigating systems like the CAO and post-leaving certificate colleges, while others felt confident providing more general or wider emotional and practical support.

A recurring theme was the desire to ensure their children could access better opportunities than they did; some were learning about systems alongside their children, or as the stage arrived where specific educational supports were required. Some expressed concern over their own academic weaknesses and sought ways to compensate for them

Ultimately, the responses highlight both the dedication and the diversity of strategies used by parents in supporting education.

Key themes respondents referred to include: (those are from the 55% who had children with additional needs)

1. Growing understanding through experience and their own roles as Home Visitors
 2. Knowledge of pathways without full access yet
 3. Independent learning and advocacy
 4. Structural barriers and delays
-

Growing understanding through experience and work

43% referred to knowledge that they have gained through the work and/roles as a Home Visitor, which has assisted them in accessing support. Parents with professional/ community roles often have a clearer understanding of supports.

These parents felt more confident navigating supports, largely due to personal experience or professional roles in education or care.

"I knew the pathways because I would have sought out how to go there... I needed to understand it for my kids."

"Thanks to work and training from work, I do very good with support and all of that."

Some explicitly tied their understanding to their jobs in community or educational work, showing how insider knowledge improves access.

24% talked about how the stage their child had reached affected awareness, where parents' confidence depended on the child's age/stage, with some feeling less certain approaching adolescence.

"She's only in fourth year, I think it'll get harder as we go."

"His age is for the next stage—teenagers—so I need more knowledge now."

This suggests the need for ongoing, age-specific guidance, not just early intervention.

"I support them 100%... All the way."

"We're being sent for an assessment of need (AON.) He's getting some support while we wait."

"You have to find out everything yourself and fight for it."

"Now I know, but it was a long learning journey."

Knowledge of pathways without full access yet

24% referred to knowledge without yet accessing the service/support. These parents know where to go but have not yet accessed supports, often due to timing, waitlists, or uncertainty about diagnoses.

"I haven't availed them yet, but I know someone... I know which way to go."

"We're still in the process... hoping to get more knowledge around training for dyslexia."

These cases reflect latent awareness but barriers to activation or implementation of supports.

Independent learning and advocacy

16% referred to the learning and advocacy they have engaged in themselves. Parents educating themselves and learning how to understand the systems.

"I had to learn the system... now I know where to go for extra help."

"Sometimes I'm not confident... I need more knowledge for the next stage."

This highlights both parental commitment and a gap in formal system guidance, especially as children age.

Structural barriers and delays

25% made referred to systemic barriers, including delays, waiting lists, or lack of available support, which undermined even informed parents. In these instances, even when respondents understood the system, there were barriers such as long waiting lists, bureaucratic obstacles, and a lack of follow-through, especially in recent years.

"Even when you know where to go, there's a closed door. Two or three years, four years waitlists."

"Support isn't there like it used to be."

This points to systemic limitations, especially for newly identified or borderline cases.

Are any of your children early school leavers?

● Yes 1
● No 28



Only one respondent had a child who left school early; that child did not want to avail of support:

"He didn't want them, he started work."

Can you support your child(ren) with their education? (All children)

Respondents report varied experiences in supporting their children's education. Many have been actively involved in educational decisions, learning about systems like the CAO and supporting their children in making choices.

Emotional encouragement and motivation also form a key support that they offered, with respondents emphasising happiness and confidence as crucial.

Practical support was also recognised as important, with financial assistance and the provision of resources.

However, some respondents noted that they face barriers, particularly with academic subjects they find challenging or due to language barriers. They recognise the importance of accessing external support and have been proactive in seeking help from schools or tutors.

Preparing children for educational transitions was also a recurring topic.

This highlights the multi-dimensional nature of parental support and the importance of addressing both practical and emotional needs to enhance children's educational outcomes.

Key themes respondents referred to include

1. Active and informed educational support
2. Confidence gaps and subject-specific limitations
3. Emotional, logistical, and resource support
4. Respondents influenced by personal history

"I had to continuously learn and find out information."

"I understand them, I just, I don't need them yet, hopefully."

Active and strategic educational involvement

93% of the respondents stated that they support their children's education, some were not specific with the details of the support that they provide, but others talked about feeling able to support their children, and taking the initiative to understand education pathways, and taking a proactive role in helping their children navigate key decisions like subject choices, college admissions, or apprenticeships. This included researching, attending information sessions, and engaging in ongoing conversations with their children.

"I encouraged my kids to make sure that they knew how to navigate that CAO system."

"We would have conversations around education and stuff..."

7% of respondents were influenced by personal history, where support was driven by a desire to offer more than they had themselves. They drew contrasts between their own limited education and their aspirations for their children. This led to strong motivation to help them succeed.

"When I was younger, I never got the opportunity to go to college..."

"It was a given from day one. They were going to college."

Confidence gaps and subject-specific limitations

17% did refer to some gaps in their capacity to support their children. Some respondents mentioned specific subjects where they lacked the knowledge to help, showing an awareness of their limitations and, in some cases, a desire for additional support.

Some respondents rely on external factors, teachers, principals, tutoring, or school programmes to support their children when direct help isn't possible.

"Yes and no, I am bad at maths and Irish..."

Many respondents affirmed their support abilities, but several admitted limited knowledge about specific routes like early school leaver programmes or the CAO system. Some learned out of necessity rather than prior familiarity.

Emotional, logistical, and resource support

14% referred to the emotional, logistical, and resource support that they offer their children in education. Noting that support is not always academic, it includes emotional, logistical, and home-based support, which play a vital role.

Beyond academics, respondents emphasised the importance of emotional well-being, happiness, and motivation, seeing these as foundational for educational success. Therefore, some parents offered less academic support but ensured their children's basic needs were met, including providing emotional reassurance, meals, and speaking to schools on their behalf.

Support included providing physical resources such as books and financial aid, ensuring children have what they need to study effectively.

"I make sure they have a happy time in school... enough food... talk to somebody like a teacher or principal."

"We did support them. Financially, yeah. Mentally as well, we did."

With your children, do you have any educational/work-related aspirations?

Respondents expressed a diverse and nuanced range of aspirations for their children's educational and employment opportunities. Many prioritised their children's happiness as well as supporting their own autonomy, to follow their own passions rather than imposing career or educational choices.

While a significant number aspired for their children to complete higher education and enter specific careers, there was broad acceptance of other pathways such as trades, creative industries, and social careers.

Parental aspirations and support included practical help and encouragement, with attention to mental health and social well-being considered essential. Respondents in general didn't specify aspirations, i.e. that course or this job, highlighting respect for their child's interests and autonomy.

The thematic analysis of parental aspirations highlighted the importance of flexibility, emotional support, and respect for the individual pathways children take in their education and careers.

Key themes include

1. Prioritising the child's happiness and autonomy, promoting wellbeing.
2. Educational achievement and career success aspirations.
3. Acceptance of diverse career paths and flexibility.
4. Support and preparation for the future.

Prioritising the child's happiness and autonomy, promoting well-being

52% talked about wanting their children to be happy, supporting their unique interests, and not imposing rigid expectations. Respondents encouraged their children to pursue their passions, resisting pressure to conform to traditional educational or career paths.

"I think my hopes and dreams would be for them just to like school and do what they want to do, do you know what I mean? Like it's, I wouldn't put any of my dreams on them, it's their own dreams."

"The only aspirations I have is that they're going to do something that they're happy with. I don't like forcing them into something that they don't want to do."

Some did express concerns about mental health and special educational needs, which may influence educational choices and aspirations.

"Because if he gets a diagnosis, there's a chance they can ask us to remove him from the * school And I don't want to do that I know it might have an effect on the English, but mental health-wise and social-wise, he's really, really happy there."**

"Where a child's comfortable yeah, that's very important."

Some respondents were unsure or were waiting for their children to decide their own paths, preferring to let children choose freely as they mature, as part of promoting and protecting their own autonomy.

"I feel the children have their own thinking and ideas. So, what I'm supporting them is to do whatever they like, and I support them to do the right thing."

"Just for them to be fully happy with where they go in life."

Educational achievement and career success aspirations

45% specifically referred to aspiring to higher education, degrees, secure good jobs, and having fulfilling careers.

"And I think with the three of them seeing me graduating and coming through to college, and watching me study at nighttime and get certificates, they think it's the normal now, and they're looking forward to going to college."

"I'd like them to complete a third level education and for that to lead to a job."

Acceptance of diverse career paths and flexibility

14% noted that success isn't limited to third level; trades, creative fields, and alternative routes were identified as valid. There was a recognition that successful futures may include vocational training, apprenticeships, creative or social careers, reflecting a broad view of "success."

"It's just, like, my hope for * is that she'll go out into the world and she'll find something that she's really passionate about and that she'll study and she'll be the best she can be at whatever that is that's going to make her happy. And, like, that might not be, she might not fit into this, you know, CAO system, going to university. I can already see she's very, she's very highly creative."**

Support and preparation for the future

17% talked about ensuring that they provide financial, emotional, and practical support to help their children prepare for independence and work.

"To guide him on the right path while letting him choose his aspirations."

Are any of your children in higher education or aspiring to higher education?

As the respondents were a variety of ages, so are their children; therefore, there were at a variety of educational stages: from those still in school, including primary school, those aspiring to higher education, those currently in higher education, to those who have completed it and moved on to work.

Respondents articulated pride in their children's achievements or optimism for future academic success. Some noted the influence of their own educational journeys as a motivator for their children.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of support and encouragement to help children reach or aspire to higher education.

Younger children are often seen as still too young to have firm plans but are expected to pursue further education.

41% have children who are currently in (or have completed) higher education.

"My daughter is completing her degree"

"My son is in college now, third year."

Some of that 41% have children who have finished their education and are now working or pursuing careers.

"They have finished their education"

"My son started work after graduating."

52% have children who are currently too young, but 53% of those have noted that they are aspiring to higher education. Respondents expressed hopes or expectations that their children will attend higher education, often citing age or readiness.

"Not at the moment, but they are aspiring"

"Hopefully they will,"

"Definitely they will."

24% referenced parental support and role modelling, parents encouraging or influencing children through their own education or support. Respondents identify their own education or career paths as influential on their children's aspirations and support them accordingly.

"Yeah, they're going and I would say, the reason why they're going as well, and are willing to go through it, is because they've seen me go through it as well. So they've seen me, like, as I said, I left, I never went to college, straight out of school, but when I got into work, any of my jobs, I always went back to college, even before NCI"

"They'd be very aware of it (education) from coming in on visits and seeing what I do."

Have you any knowledge of CAO or career guidance?

Respondents have a range of expertise in relation to the CAO and/or career guidance. Some felt confident and understood the systems, often because of their involvement in early learning and education. Others acknowledged government support and school communication as helpful resources. While some have limited knowledge.

1. Knowledge of CAO and/or career guidance
2. Experience through personal or children's experience
3. Basic or limited knowledge/ Need for more information
4. No knowledge in this area

Knowledge of CAO and/or Career Guidance

55% of respondents have knowledge of the CAO and/or career guidance.

"I have, yes. That was through the job and through us and senior staff, their opinions and management. When you are unsure at the start and it was the information and the advice given through the early learning initiative that made us actually understand that and look for more information."

Experience through personal or children's experience

This knowledge was often gained through personal experience or supporting their children. 57% of those have direct experience because their children have gone through CAO or career guidance recently (e.g., filling out applications, attending info sessions). A few noted that their children's schools provided career guidance. Some respondents have knowledge from their roles.

"Now I know, after applying for the first one, so I am more prepared now for the second one."

"Yeah. From filling it out with my daughter and going to information sessions, I would get a lot of knowledge."

Basic or limited knowledge/ Need for more information

31% stated that they needed more information in this area, with half of these saying they had no knowledge of the systems. Some rely heavily on their children or schools for information, indicating a gap in their own detailed knowledge. Some want to become more involved or informed as their children approach critical stages.

“I know most of them, but I think my son knows everything. He got all the information from school and teachers. But sometimes he will tell me about information, but I still need to get more information about the CAO.”

No knowledge in this area

Several mentioned having only a little knowledge or needing to learn more when the time comes.

“I would have a lack of I'm not good around the CAO piece It's not something I got a lot of in secondary school”

“Yes, I remember from when I was in school, I'd say it's all changed now, but I suppose when the time comes, and I have to help them look into it I will, but right now, not.”

One respondent shared personal negative experiences with career guidance in their own school days, impacting their current engagement and trust in the system, but there is recognition that the system and information have changed over time.

“Personally, I had the bad experience but that was many years ago, but it changes all the time. So you need to get new information.”

Are you confident engaging with schools and teachers?

There was a range of responses in relation to confidence in dealing with schools and teachers, ranging from high to low confidence, and the importance of the relationship itself.

All of the respondents, apart from one, so 97%, felt confident or very confident engaging with schools and teachers. They referred to good communication channels like school apps, emails, and parent meetings. 24% highlighted that their own long-term involvement, professional experience, or close relationships with teachers have benefited their capacity to engage with schools.

“Well, previously from when they were in school, I would have been confident. More so in later years because of my confidence growth, I have a lot of contact and involvement with the schools.”

“I'd be very confident. I work a lot with teachers, with parent associations. And I've been in meetings with them a lot. So I'm always engaging with them, yeah.”

“Yeah, absolutely, I would certainly see any, and I would encourage other parents to see that, that they are on a level, the same level with the teachers, and schools in general, and I think that if you go in with that confidence, that,

you know, you can, that you can sit down and have conversations with your children's teachers”

There was an emphasis on partnership and being seen as an important part of their child’s education.

“Yes, they need us on the same page, and we need them to support our children to be confident in life.”

Some noted differences between primary and secondary, where secondary schools were identified as the more difficult to engage with.

“If anything happens, if I want to talk to teachers, I would. I have some children in secondary school. I think the secondary school is a bit harder because we don't really see, I don't really go to the school a lot. I don't really see their teachers. The teenagers, they don't really talk to you with different little issues. It looks like they are happy in school, so not too bad.”

It was noted that confidence grows with experience and familiarity over time and that positive relationships and open communication are key to confidence.

One respondent expressed no confidence at all. There was no reference to intimidation or barrier

“Not at all”

Respondents placed a strong emphasis on open, honest, and family-oriented relationships with teachers, viewing teachers as partners and almost “second parents”.

Parents appreciated when schools saw the child holistically and supported social/emotional development, not just academics.

“An honest open relationship with them so I just find it helps better”

“We can communicate with the teachers. If we have any questions and need support, we know where to go.”

Are there any factors that you think have influenced yours or your children's education?

In summary, there is a range of factors that have influenced the respondents’ children’s education.

Key themes respondents referred to include;

1. Family, social and cultural factors
2. Current role in ELI
3. Personal growth
4. Children’s interests

Family, social and cultural factors

69% identified family background as an important factor; inclusive of parental education and culture, and generational patterns, which influenced educational aspirations and behaviours. These factors were influential in limiting their own

education, and then how they themselves have changed how they manage education with their own children and families. Breaking cycles of previous generations who may have left school early or viewed education as less important was highlighted.

Respondents referred to the impact of family attitudes and educational history on their own and their children's education, and their opportunity to engage in education because of their work as Home Visitors.

Role modelling by parents returning to education, as part of the employment, was emphasised as influential.

“There’s loads, like family, you know, family attitudes, family’s own education... that influenced my path to education, and that is influencing hers.”

“Generationally, when we were growing up it was either you got to a certain level in education and then if you got a job, education wasn’t as important... it’s trying to break a generational... cycle.”

“I’ve been a good role model to the children, so seeing me going back to education has helped them to see the value of it.”

Respondents referenced broader cultural influences shaping educational paths, such as the immigrant experience and the wider social environment.

Cultural expectations around completing education were highlighted, with some respondents noting specific family or cultural pressures. Immigrant experiences brought additional challenges and motivations to integrate and succeed through education.

“For our culture, at least the children need to finish their college.”

“Being immigrants, we had to look at pathways to integrate in society.”

“Working in NCI and the managers... the push towards lifelong learning... has rippled at home.”

“There is loads of support out there... once parents support them, it can lead to a great path.”

Current role in ELI

45% referenced the influence of working in ELI/NCI and/or the educational programmes, available resources, and specific initiatives, such as programmes like ParentChild+, as positively influencing both their own and their children's education.

The work environment and peer support within were noted as ELI/NCI, reinforcing lifelong learning.

Access to educational materials, as part of their roles as Home Visitors, motivated parents to support children's learning more than they themselves had experienced.

Support for children with learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, autism) was seen as valuable.

Engaging with children's schoolwork and maintaining involvement was stressed.

"I think the whole ELI and the NCI have influenced me and it is influencing them."

"The Parent Child Plus programme helped ** socially... the teachers noticed she had early learning."**

"There were so many books and educational toys... I was more conscious of having the availability of things for my children that maybe I didn't have."

Personal growth

10% referred to their own drive to improve life circumstances through education, including a belief in lifelong learning. They spoke about education as a way to better themselves or their children's futures.

Lifelong learning was recognised as essential, emphasising the need to continually update knowledge to keep up with a fast-changing world.

Respondents also highlighted self-motivation and encouragement.

"I remind them every day... Get your stuff done. Get your head down. Get an education. If you don't get an education, you won't go on to a better life."

"Life teaches you... the world is going very, very fast and very competitive... You need to grow. You need to know more things around you."

"Learning is not a one-time thing. It's a whole life thing... Learning may be fun, may be not fun, but not a bad thing."

"I wanted to better myself... I encouraged them to go further to better their education."

Children's interests and career focus

18% referred to being led by their hobbies and interests to help their children identify their passions and future career paths. Respondents emphasised allowing children to try various activities (arts, music, sports) to discover what they enjoy and might want to pursue professionally. Supporting children's aspirations and helping them find meaningful careers was a priority. Encouragement to attend college or university as a necessary step for better career opportunities was common.

"During school, they try all the hobbies... then after, they could make it professional."

"I just want the best for them... so it's part of growing up, skills... so hopefully enjoy it and make their careers out of it."

"I encouraged them to go to third-level education in order to become what they want."

"It's not my son's choice, it's my only choice... once they understand they need to go and will do well."

Final Comments

45% of the respondents added some final comments which referred to a range of issues, including;

- Changing educational pressure and parental expectations
- Impact of educational programmes and home visiting
- Navigating the education system as immigrant families
- Breaking cycles and changing perspectives on education
- Challenges of the current job market and emigration

Changing educational pressure and parental expectations

Respondents referred to engaging with children's learning through a range of activities, home visits, and supporting schoolwork.

Some noted the importance of stepping back and recognising the need for different learning paths for each child and ensuring that children develop the confidence to challenge and have their voice heard.

"It's that one size fits all, that is, where children to be seen and never heard and all, that's changed, where children have the confidence to challenge..."

"Don't always accept no, if something doesn't sit right. Value your voice."

Changing educational pressure and parental expectations

Respondents reflected on their own schooling as more pressured compared to their current attitudes.

There was a recognition of peer pressure and an emphasis on encouraging children to do their best, but without adding additional pressure. These respondents saw their roles as trying to alleviate pressure rather than add to it.

"I feel when I was younger, I think school was a bit more of a pressure, and right now it's like, do you know what? Just go and try your best..."

"I won't pressure them, and that's what I feel... They have enough peer pressure as it is..."

Impact of educational programmes and Home Visiting

Programmes like ELI and home visiting were identified as life-changing and learning opportunities for the whole family.

"I just think it's as a Home Visitor and a coordinator... I wanted to replicate that with my family when my children were younger."

Respondents learned about formal education through their own work experience as well as their own experience of education, and applied this knowledge to support their children, in some cases, learning from what didn't work in their own childhood.

Some noted that exposure to books and learning resources at home, some of which were there as a result of working as a Home Visitor, influenced children's outcomes.

“I was more conscious of having a selection of books readily available at the house... I think the influence that I have given on my children’s education has really impacted the outcomes.”

Navigating the education system as immigrant families

Respondents reflected on differences between education systems (e.g., their own country vs. Ireland). They learned about the Irish system, which reduced stress and helped them better support their children.

“After I become a Home Visitor, I learned a lot of school system in Ireland. Ireland and * are very different...”**

“In Ireland, I think learning is life. You’re learning whatever you feel you needed or you wanted. That’s a really good thing to know.”

“College is there and you have your choice. Go now or go later.”

Breaking cycles and changing perspectives on education

Education was identified as a means to overcome disadvantage and change family trajectories. There was pride in returning to education later in life and seeing others do the same. Respondents felt integrated and equal within society through education.

“I’m proud of myself. And even family in their sixties have gone on in education and my family are really, really doing well.”

“Being a Home Visitor and coming through the ranks in NCI has definitely changed my perspective on education...”

“That cycle of disadvantage, especially around education, is actually gone.”

Challenges of the current job market and emigration

There are concerns about education not aligning with job opportunities locally, and young adults emigrating to pursue careers matching their qualifications.

“The education system or the job system now in Ireland is not meeting the children...”

“My son has emigrated to ***... to get a job in what he got in his degree, which is animation.”**

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify if the Home Visiting programme has had an impact on the educational aspirations and achievements of Home Visitors and their families, and to develop an understanding of the influential factors.

Home Visitors in NCI have commented anecdotally on the impact of their work as Home Visitors on their own education and on their children's education. The research sought to explore and formally document this impact, particularly in relation to how the Home Visitor role influenced their educational confidence, aspirations, and the educational trajectories of the next generation within their families.

“I think that the whole programme has been life-changing. I think for us all as a whole family.”

This study should be positioned as an important initial exploratory piece of research. While the findings are compelling, particularly in relation to confidence, educational progression, and intergenerational change, they are based on a specific cohort within ELI. As such, the study provides a strong basis for further investigation rather than definitive conclusions. Acknowledging this strengthens the credibility of the research and highlights the need for continued evidence-building in this area.

As highlighted by the international evidence, educational disadvantage has a profound and long-lasting impact on both children and adults, often across generations. Socioeconomic background, parental education, and leaving school early remain clear indicators of subsequent educational and employment outcomes. However, the literature clearly states that significant interventions, particularly based on community relationships, can produce a shift in perspectives and transform them permanently. One of those significant interventions is a home visiting programme for participants, but as this research documents, so is working as a Home Visitor on a home visiting programme.

Home Visitors are supported to engage with learning and personal development. The evidence suggests that when Home Visitors pursue further education and CPD, they not only strengthen their professional selves but also influence their children's outlook towards their education, which contributes to positive intergenerational change.

Therefore, educate a Home Visitor and you educate a family and a community, as the benefits increase beyond the individual to improvements in family engagement and children's educational aspirations and achievements. This research provided a well-timed and necessary opportunity to formally document and analyse these ripple effects. As one respondent noted,

“Just to say that it was good to reflect back.”

Overall, 76% of the respondents, or over three-quarters, directly referred to the positive impact of working as a Home Visitor in ELI on their own and/or the family's education. Respondents repeatedly discussed the impact of being a Home Visitor on their own and their family's education, from when they joined to the impact of the specific work itself, to the learning opportunities the work offered them, which then impacted their family and children, specifically. Their new skills provided them with the explicit education needed to support their children and offered the opportunity

to share the implicit value of education within their families, both by indirect example and explicit improved knowledge.

Joining the home visiting team was driven by a mix of personal values, lived experience, professional background, and practical considerations, emphasising their own communities' influence, personal experience, and fit with family life. Many were motivated by recognising that supporting families from infancy can improve long-term outcomes for children.

Many of the respondents were from the communities they now serve, and they wanted to contribute positively, improve outcomes, and support families that were facing similar challenges to those they had experienced themselves. A significant number had children and/or family who had participated in ELI activities or the home visiting programmes themselves. Seeing the benefits for their own child inspired them to join the team and support other families. Those with direct experience often cited it as a key motivator for joining the team, having witnessed tangible benefits in children's confidence, developmental skills, and school readiness.

The flexibility of the roles was also a key factor, particularly for women with young children, who still have the majority of the responsibility for caring roles within families and society, allowing them to balance work and family responsibilities. Overall, respondents described the role as aligning closely with their values, skills, lived experience, and desire to support families holistically. It was widely seen as meaningful, flexible, community-centred, and critically, a role that allows women to support children and families at vital early stages, often reflecting their own journeys of education, parenting, and community engagement.

The findings show that the majority of the women left school early, due to a combination of economic necessity, i.e. needing to work to contribute financially to their own family, family responsibilities, including care for siblings, migration, and lack of formal educational support. Leaving school early was frequently normalised within families and communities, particularly where early entry into work was expected.

For many, leaving school early was not framed as a choice but as the "normal" or only option at the time. Some did aspire to higher education, often encouraged by school culture or personal ambition. Many did not, due to cost, lack of family experience of college, limited guidance, or the minimal further education expectations placed on them, particularly those from inner-city or working-class backgrounds. Several described systemic barriers and discrimination, including being discouraged by teachers from considering college. For migrants, paying for education in their home countries limited their aspirations. Overall, higher education was often seen as "not for people like us."

Therefore, many of the women had unfulfilled educational aspirations that were disrupted by caregiving roles, gendered expectations, or systemic discrimination within the education system.

Despite high rates of early school leaving, almost all the respondents (97%) later returned to education. Their return was primarily driven by the qualification requirements within ELI, but there was also a desire for personal fulfilment, confidence-building, love of learning, and the desire to support and role-model education for their own children. Education was viewed as both a practical necessity and a pathway to support and inspire their own children and families. Respondents re-entered education through both further and higher education pathways, particularly QQI Levels 5 and 6, progressing in some cases to degrees

and postgraduate qualifications. Many engaged in lifelong learning through micro-credentials, short courses, and workplace-based training. For migrant learners or those with interrupted schooling, foundational education and language learning were important entry points.

Returning to education was enabled by supports such as ELI as a flexible workplace, financial assistance, institutional encouragement, and online learning opportunities (notably during COVID-19). However, challenges persisted, including digital skills gaps, time pressures, caring responsibilities, learning difficulties, and anxiety. Feelings of being “equipped” for the education system varied and were often dependent on the availability of ongoing support.

Recently published research from the Growing up in Ireland (*CSO statistical release*, February 2026) study has highlighted that a parent’s expectation of their 9-year-old’s future educational attainment had an impact on their likelihood of having a degree. Almost 70% of those whose parents expected them to get a degree had done so by age 25. By comparison, 37% of respondents, whose parents did not have this expectation, had a degree-level qualification by age 25. In this research, 55% of the respondents (more than half) said there was no or very little aspiration for a third-level education for them at home, coming from families that were not equipped to navigate the education system, due to low parental education, generational disadvantage, or unfamiliarity with structures such as the CAO. Therefore, most did not go to the third level initially. In contrast, working as a Home Visitor improved their skills and expectations of themselves and their children.

Many respondents actively worked to create a stronger educational culture for their own children, learning to navigate the system themselves and using their education to empower both family members and their wider communities. The vast majority expected their children to go, and the majority of those children have gone/are going to third-level education. Ultimately, breaking a generational cycle of educational disadvantage.

“I think you've got everything. I think that's it. I just think, definitely, I would say that being a Home Visitor and coming through the ranks in NCI has definitely changed my perspective on education and changed my, like, from going from a person that was, that would have been.”

Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by the findings of this study. While the research highlights significant positive impacts, particularly in relation to personal development, progression into further education, and intergenerational influence, it also identifies several structural and systemic barriers that limit the full recognition of these outcomes.

As an initial study, these findings provide a valuable foundation for understanding the wider role of home visiting programmes, not only in supporting children and families, but also in contributing to workforce development and community capacity-building. The recommendations, therefore, aim to strengthen both practice and policy, with a particular focus on workforce investment, access to education, and the development of sustainable, inclusive pathways for Home Visitors.

Collectively, these recommendations are intended to inform future programme development, guide strategic investment, and contribute to the growing evidence base for home visiting in Ireland.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Home Visiting Workforce

1. Recognising the study as a foundational evidence-based

As noted, this study should be positioned as an important initial exploratory piece of research that begins to record the wider impact of home visiting on Home Visitors and their families. While the findings are compelling, particularly in relation to confidence, educational progression, and intergenerational change, they are based on a specific cohort within ELI. As such, the study provides a strong basis for further investigation rather than definitive conclusions. Acknowledging this strengthens the credibility of the research and highlights the need for continued evidence-building in this area.

2. Invest in further national research on home visiting

There is a clear need for expanded research across ParentChild+ nationally, and potentially across other home visiting models in Ireland. This study highlights significant outcomes, including increased educational aspiration, confidence, and intergenerational impact, but there remains a lack of Irish-based evidence in this area. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes, compare models, and examine workforce development in more depth. Building this evidence base will be critical in informing national policy, funding decisions, and the development of a coordinated home visiting system.

3. Strengthen investment and pay structures for Home Visitors

Sustainable delivery of high-quality home visiting requires appropriate funding and recognition of the Home Visitor role. This includes pay that reflects the complexity of the work, particularly where Home Visitors are contributing to research, training, and programme development. The findings show that Home Visitors play a critical role not only in child outcomes but also in community transformation and educational change. Investing in pay and conditions will support recruitment, retention, and the professionalisation of the workforce.

4. Provide dedicated time and capacity for CPD and upskilling

Home Visitors require protected time and structured opportunities to engage in CPD. While many participants demonstrated strong motivation to pursue further education, this was often constrained by competing demands such as workload, caring responsibilities, and time pressures. Embedding CPD within working hours and workforce planning will ensure that upskilling is achievable, equitable, and aligned with programme quality standards.

5. Develop accessible and flexible education pathways

There is a need to create flexible, accessible education pathways that reflect the realities of Home Visitors' lives. While opportunities exist through higher education and ETBs, barriers such as narrowly focused placement requirements, digital skills gaps, and work-life balance challenges limit participation. Education pathways should include blended learning, recognition of prior experience, and progression routes that allow Home Visitors to remain in employment while studying.

6. Establish clear policy pathways for CPD and workforce development

To support long-term impact, CPD and education pathways must be embedded at policy level within the home visiting and early years workforce. If the goal is to break cycles of intergenerational disadvantage, investment in the workforce delivering that change is essential. This includes recognising home visiting as a professional pathway, aligning with national strategies on lifelong learning, and ensuring that community-based practitioners have equitable access to education and progression opportunities.

7. Provide structured learning supports for Home Visitors

Home Visitors need practical, wraparound supports to successfully engage in education. This includes study skills, digital literacy, academic mentoring, and emotional support. The findings highlight that confidence, anxiety, and feeling "equipped" for education are key factors influencing participation and success. Providing structured supports will reduce barriers, improve retention, and ensure positive learning experiences.

8. Introduce pre-learning and bridging supports

To avoid setting participants up to struggle, programmes should include pre-learning or foundation supports that prepare Home Visitors for further study. This could include short introductory modules, confidence-building courses, or orientation to academic learning. Such supports would complement existing training (e.g. NCI provision) and create a more inclusive and supportive learning journey.

9. Assess readiness and "fitness to study"

It is important to ensure that Home Visitors are supported to enter education at the right level and time. This includes assessing readiness, identifying support needs, and aligning learning pathways with individual capacity. Without this, there is a risk of overburdening staff or creating negative educational experiences. A strengths-based, person-centred approach will help ensure that participation leads to success.

10. Recognise diverse skills and multiple pathways to professionalism

The research highlights the importance of valuing both lived experience and formal education. Home Visitors bring critical relational, cultural, and community knowledge that cannot be replaced by academic qualifications alone. Workforce development should therefore include multiple pathways, including accredited training, experiential learning, and practice-based CPD. Not all roles require the same academic trajectory, and diversity in skills should be recognised as a strength.

11. Improve research practice and participant experience

Future research should adopt enhanced participatory and ethical practices, including sharing interview questions in advance and incorporating more holistic questioning approaches. Given the participatory nature of this study, where Home Visitors acted as co-researchers, continued refinement of research processes will support more inclusive, reflective, and high-quality data collection.

12. Advocate for broader structural supports

The findings point to the need for wider structural investment, including access to early years education places, after-school placements and supports for families. Visitors operate within complex socio-economic contexts where barriers such as childcare, cost, and family responsibilities impact both families and the workforce. Addressing these systemic issues will strengthen both programme delivery and outcomes.

Policy Aligned Recommendations

13. Align workforce investment with First 5

Investment in Home Visitors directly supports the ambitions of First 5, particularly in strengthening early intervention and improving outcomes for children and families. Funding should prioritise workforce development, fair pay, and access to education pathways, recognising Home Visitors as key agents in delivering prevention and early support.

14. Support lifelong learning through the National Skills Strategy 2025

The progression of Home Visitors into further and higher education aligns strongly with Ireland's commitment to lifelong learning. Flexible, work-based education pathways, recognition of prior learning, and targeted supports (e.g. digital skills, study skills) are essential to ensuring equitable access to education for community-based practitioners.

15. Strengthen community-based education via ETBs and SOLAS

Partnerships with SOLAS and ETBs can support the development of accessible, locally delivered education pathways for Home Visitors. This includes bridging programmes, accredited training, and progression routes that reflect the needs of adult learners balancing work and family commitments.

16. Embed workforce development in Tusla Prevention strategies

Home visiting programmes contribute directly to Tusla's prevention and early intervention agenda. Workforce development should therefore be embedded within Tusla-funded initiatives, including the National Home Visiting Programme, ensuring that Home Visitors are supported through CPD, supervision, and progression pathways as part of a sustainable service model.

17. Advanced workforce professionalisation in line with the DCEDY, DFHERIS and HSE priorities

The professionalisation of the early years and family support workforce is a key national priority. Recognising home visiting as a distinct and valuable professional pathway will support quality assurance, consistency, and long-term impact across services.

18. Address structural barriers through a whole-of-government approach

Barriers identified in the research, including childcare access, financial constraints, and time poverty, require cross-departmental responses, especially where funding for these essential services is concerned. Investment in early years provision, family supports, including supports for children with additional needs, and flexible education options will enable both families and Home Visitors to fully engage in programmes and progression opportunities.

19. Build the evidence to inform policy and investment

There is a need for continued national research and evaluation to inform policy and funding decisions. Developing robust Irish evidence base on home visiting will support alignment with national strategies and strengthen the case for sustained investment.

References

- Administration for Children and Families (2023) ParentChild+ Family Home Visiting Model. Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE). Available at: <https://homvee.acf.gov/models/parentchildr-family-home-visiting-model>
- AONTAS (2018) Community Education: Ireland's Lifelong Learning Engine. Dublin: AONTAS. Available at: <https://www.aontas.com/knowledge/publications/community-education-irelands-lifelong-learning-engine>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Byrne, D. and Smyth, E. (2010) No Way Back? The Dynamics of Early School Leaving. Dublin: ESRI. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/no-way-back-the-dynamics-of-early-school-leaving>
- Central Statistics Office (2026) Growing Up in Ireland Cohort '98 at Age 25: Childhood Influences on Education and Finances. Cork: CSO. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/fp-guic98cief/growingupinirelandcohort98atage25childhoodinfluencesoneducationandfinances/>
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2014) Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/77586-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/>
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2018) First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/first-5-a-whole-of-government-strategy-for-babies-young-children-and-their-families-20.pdf>
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2020) Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Workforce Plan 2021–2028. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/97056-early-learning-and-care-and-school-age-childcare-workforce-plan-2021-2028/>
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2022) Parenting Support Policy Statement. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a70d3-parenting-support-policy-statement/>
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2023) Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/young-ireland-6782f479-d5da-4f33-85a1-b49e39490912.pdf>
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2015) Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/915d5-further-education-and-training-strategy-2014-2019/>
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017) DEIS Plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/42668-deis-plan-2017/>
- Department of Social Protection (2025) Community Employment Early Learning and Care Programme. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/community-employment-early-learning-and-care-programme/>
- Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) Minister Hogan Announces Designation of Dublin Docklands Areas as a Strategic Development Zone. Available at:

Early Learning Initiative (2025a) Internal Project Documentation: Home Visiting, CPD and Educational Trajectories. Dublin: National College of Ireland (internal document).

Early Learning Initiative (2025b) State of the Moment Report 2025. Dublin: National College of Ireland.

Eccles, J.S. and Wigfield, A. (2002) 'Motivational beliefs, values and goals', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, pp. 109–132. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135153>

ESRI (McCoy, S. et al.) (2014) Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS. Dublin: ESRI. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/learning-from-the-evaluation-of-deis>

Feinstein, L., Duckworth, K. and Sabates, R. (2003) *The Wider Benefits of Adult Learning*. London: Institute of Education. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/17609/>

Finello, K.M., Terteryan, A. and Riewerts, R.J. (2016) 'Home visiting programs: What the primary care clinician should know', *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*, 46(4), pp. 101–125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2015.12.011>

Government of Ireland (2019) *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Government of Ireland (2023a) *First 5: Implementation Plan 2023–2025*. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/first5/>

Government of Ireland (2023b) *Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/campaigns/young-ireland/>

Hayes, E. (2022) 'Why post-Leaving Certificate students in Ireland from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to proceed to third-level education', Thesis. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.34719/WZZQ9259>

Henderson, A. and Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin, TX: SEDL. Available at: <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

Hickey, G., McGilloway, S., Leckey, Y., McCormack, P. and Forde, D. (2024) *UNITES Project: National Mapping and Review of Home Visiting Provision in Ireland*. Dublin: DCEDIY. Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/306589/c391d219-bd12-4c95-9e4d-9ef625a7348b.pdf>

Home Visiting Alliance (2024) *About the Home Visiting Alliance*. Available at: <https://hva.ie/about-hva/>

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (2015) *Review of DEIS: Poverty and Social Inclusion in Education*. Dublin: INTO. Available at: <https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/ReviewofDeis.pdf>

Kelly, S. (2014) 'Taking liberties: Gentrification as neoliberal urban policy in Dublin', in MacLaran, A. and Kelly, S. (eds.) *Neoliberal Urban Policy and the Transformation of the City*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137377050_11

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2005) 'Participatory action research', in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Masten, A.S. (2014) *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*. New York: Guilford Press.

McCoy, S. and Byrne, D. (2024) 'Shadow education uptake in Ireland: Inequalities and wellbeing in a high-stakes context', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 72(6), pp. 693–719. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2331476>

McCoy, S., Smyth, E. and Banks, J. (2021) *Parental Involvement in Children's Education*. Dublin: ESRI. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/parental-involvement-in-education>

Moloney, M. (2014) 'Breaching the divide between early childhood education and care and school education', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(2), pp. 242–256.

National Home Visiting Resource Center (2024) *ParentChild+ Model Profile*. Available at: https://nhvrc.org/model_profile/parentchild/

OECD (2018) *Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/education/equity-in-education-9789264073234-en.htm>

OECD (2019) *Helping Young Children Learn and Grow: Policies for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/education/helping-young-children-learn-and-grow-65289cff-en.htm>

ParentChild+ National Center (2019) *Program Overview and Evidence Base*. Available at: <https://parentchildplus.org/what-we-do/research-evaluation/>

Peacock, S., Konrad, S., Watson, E., Nickel, D. and Muhajarine, N. (2013) 'Effectiveness of home visiting programs on child outcomes: A systematic review', *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), p. 17.

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008) *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Roggman, L.A., Boyce, L.K. and Innocenti, M.S. (2013) *Home Visiting: Partnerships with Families*. Boston: Pearson.

Sammons, P., Toth, K., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj, I. and Taggart, B. (2015) 'The long-term role of the home learning environment in shaping students' academic attainment', *Journal of Children's Services*, 10(3), pp. 189–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-02-2015-0007>

Schuller, T. and Watson, D. (2009) *Learning Through Life*. Leicester: NIACE. Available at: https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/learning_through_life.pdf

Shonkoff, J.P., Garner, A.S., Siegel, B.S. et al. (2012) 'The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress', *Pediatrics*, 129(1), pp. e232–e246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>

SOLAS (2021) *Adult Literacy for Life Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/>

Smyth, E. and McCoy, S. (2011) *School Experiences and Inequality*. Dublin: ESRI. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/school-experiences-and-inequality>

Sweet, M.A. and Appelbaum, M.I. (2004) 'Is home visiting an effective strategy?', *Child Development*, 75(5), pp. 1435–1456. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2004.00750.x>

Tusla (2018) *Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme Commissioning Framework*. Dublin: Tusla. Available at: https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/PPFS_Commissioning_Framework.pdf

Tusla (2024) National Home Visiting Programme. Dublin: Tusla. Available at: <https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support/home-visiting/>

Werner, E. (1995) 'Resilience in development', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 4(3), pp. 81–85. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10772327>

Appendix One: Letter to Home Visitors

Dear Home Visitors,

This study aims to explore the impact of the Home Visitor role on their own education and that of their families through community-based action research. Home Visitors will be trained in social research skills, enabling them to investigate how their participation in the programme influences their educational development and their children's learning.

We would like you to take part in this research project. Before you decide, it is important that you first read this letter and decide if you want to take part or not. If you want to take part, we ask you to complete the attached consent form. If you do not want to complete it, that is not a problem. Just do not sign the form. Please note, even if you do decide to participate, you have the right to opt out at any stage of the study.

The results of the study may be used for formal publications and/or presented at conferences.

What will taking part involve?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be invited to attend an interview with a Researcher (Home Visitor). The interview will be recorded using an electronic recording device. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete.

Do you have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. Taking part is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part in the study but decide at any stage that you would prefer not to answer certain questions, you have the right to refuse to do so. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without any consequence whatsoever. You can withdraw from the study up until the point of data analysis.

What if you want to opt in for the study but want a different researcher (Home Visitor) to complete the interview than you got?

We expect that this will happen as some participants may feel more comfortable with certain researchers than with others. Please contact Michelle Moore at michelle.moore@ncirl.ie, who will assign a different researcher to you.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to talk about your personal experiences. Some of these experiences may be negative or upsetting. If this happens, you are welcome to withdraw from the study and the Researcher will provide you with information about some people you can talk to about how you are feeling.

The benefits of taking part in this study include providing an opportunity for parents to express their views and experiences of yours and your children's educational attainment and aspirations. Participants are contributing to the understanding of continuous professional development and the impact it can have on future educational and career aspirations which potentially can lead to positive outcomes for the direct person and their children.

Will taking part be confidential?

Yes, taking part is mainly confidential. The researcher and ELI team member who asked you to take part will know your identity. However, the researcher and ELI team member will not reveal your identity as a participant in the study except in instances where, during the interview, you disclose instances of your own behaviour which puts children at risk of harm – this information will have to be reported under NCI's Child Protection Guidelines. If you disclose information about the behaviour of a third party which puts children at risk of harm or neglect, this will also have to be reported to NCI's Designated Liaison Person, under NCI's Child Protection Guidelines.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

After the interview has been recorded, the researcher will transcribe the recording of the interview so a written copy of exactly what was said during the session is created. The recording of the interview will be stored securely, in a password protected file which only the research team will have access to. The transcript of the interview will be anonymised. This means that any information contained in the interview that could lead someone reading it to identify you (e.g. your name, the names of any families that you visit etc.) will be removed. This transcript will then be stored securely in an encrypted file which only the research team will have access to.

If you have any questions about this study or would like further information, please feel free to reach out to Michelle Moore (michelle.moore@ncirl.ie), or Deirdre McCarthy (deirdre.mccarthy@ncirl.ie).

Appendix Two: Debrief Letter

Thank you for your participation in this research study. We appreciate the time and effort you have given to the interview. We are also aware that speaking about your past educational experience may bring discomfort. If you wish to talk to someone, there is a list of support below, and the NCI EAP is always available.

Right to withdraw data

Please note, you may choose to withdraw the data you provided prior to debriefing and up to data analysis. Please contact the email address below to do so.

If you have questions

If you have any questions about this study or would like further information, please feel free to reach out to Michelle Moore (michelle.moore@ncirl.ie) or Deirdre McCarthy (deirdre.mccarthy@ncirl.ie).

List of Support Services

Name	Phone Number
Samaritans	116123
Women's Aid	1800341900
An Garda Siochana Helpline Historic Abuse	1800555222
Alone – support for older people	0818222024
Aware – support for mood related conditions	1800804848
Pieta House – prevention suicide	1800247247
Citizens Advice	0761074000
Rape Crisis Centre	1800778888
Mental Health Ireland	012841166
DLP (Josephine Bleach)	0868153600