

Director Early Learning Initiative

National College of Ireland



National College of Ireland is seeking an exceptional leader to serve as Director of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI). This is a senior strategic role responsible for the leadership, governance, financial sustainability and national development of ELI's early intervention, family engagement and community learning programmes.

About National College of Ireland (NCI)

NCI is a third-level education, teaching and research institution, operating as a not-for-profit entity with charitable status. The college's mission is to "Change Lives Through Education". NCI aims to widen participation in higher education by reducing barriers, strengthening community partnerships and enabling every learner to reach their full potential. In 2026 NCI is celebrating 75 years in higher education and 20 years providing services through its Early Learning Initiative.

About the Early Learning Initiative (ELI)

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) is a community-based educational initiative within NCI that provides world-class educational, early intervention and family engagement programmes. ELI works with children, families, schools, early years settings, community organisations and national partners to ensure every child—particularly those living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage—has the skills, confidence and support to thrive.

ELI's work spans:

- Dublin's Inner City (including the NEIC/Area Based Childhood Programme)
- The National Centre for Parent Child Home Visiting and Family Engagement
- National and EU research, development and learning networks

ELI collaborates closely with Tusla, HSE, NEIC Initiative, CYPSC, Better Start, YPAR, primary and early years settings, community organisations, philanthropic partners and government departments. Please see the [ELI annual report](#) for current information.

Strategic Context

ELI's mission is fully embedded in NCI's mission 'to change lives through education' and aligns with the Government's *First 5 – A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028, Young Ireland*, the DEIS Framework, Tusla Family Support, Sláintecare and national priorities around early intervention, prevention, parental engagement and community-based learning.

ELI is entering a significant phase of strategic development, with priorities including:

- Strengthening its high-impact model in Dublin's Inner City
- Scaling and supporting home visiting and parent engagement programmes nationally
- Enhancing governance, compliance and research systems
- Ensuring long-term financial sustainability
- Maintaining ELI's national profile in the early learning and community sector



The Role: Director of the Early Learning Initiative

The Director is responsible for the strategic, operational, governance and financial and fundraising leadership of ELI. This is a high-impact senior role requiring deep sector knowledge, strong community relationships, governance excellence and a track record of delivering high-quality outcomes in early intervention and community settings.

The Director is a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the National College of Ireland and reports directly to the President.

The role contributes to NCI's institutional strategy, widening participation agenda, educational mission and research priorities, and works collaboratively with academic schools, professional services and research leadership across the College.

The Director has strategic and operational oversight of a diverse team including, but not limited to, Parent Child Home Visitors, Early Years Practitioners, Doodle Den Facilitators, Programme Coordinators, Researchers, and Administrative and Support Staff.

The role is supported by the National Home Visiting Manager and three Assistant Directors, ensuring strong leadership capacity across all programme strands and geographic areas within the Initiative at National College of Ireland.

The Director works closely with the ELI Advisory Committee, supporting its role in providing strategic advice, effective fund raising for ELI services, and ensuring effective communication between the Committee, the President and NCI governance structures.

Purpose of the Role

To lead ELI in realising its mission to improve educational, wellbeing and life outcomes for children and families, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, through evidence-informed, community-led early learning supports.

Key Areas of Responsibility

1. Strategic Leadership

- Provide vision, direction and organisation-wide leadership.
- Develop and implement ELI's strategy in line with NCI's institutional goals.
- As a member of NCI's Senior Leadership Team, contribute to cross-college strategic planning, policy development and organisational decision-making.
- Drive quality, innovation, research and evidence-informed practice.
- Lead national expansion of home visiting and parent engagement models.
- Anticipate and respond to emerging developments in higher education, early learning, research and public policy, ensuring ELI and NCI are well-positioned to meet future opportunities and challenges.

2. Governance, Compliance & Risk

- Lead the continued development of governance and compliance arrangements to ensure the highest standards of accountability, transparency and regulatory compliance.
- Ensure compliance with NCI policies, regulatory frameworks and charity governance standards.
- Lead out and manage ELI's government and other contracts.
- Manage risk registers, policy updates, data protection, research ethics and audit requirements.
- Prepare reports and papers for the NCI Governing Body, President, External Funders and ELI Advisory Committees.

3. Child Safeguarding and Vulnerable Adults

- Serve as Deputy Liaison Office for NCI with particular responsibility for Child Safeguarding for ELI.
- Ensure full compliance with Children First and Tusla requirements.
- Oversee safer recruitment, staff training and reporting procedures.

4. Operational Management

- Oversee programme delivery across ELI's two departments:
 - Dublin's Inner City (including ABC Programmes)
 - National Centre for Home Visiting and Family Engagement
- Manage HR processes, staff supervision and workforce development.
- Lead planning, performance management and organisational systems.
- Work collaboratively with academic and administrative teams across NCI to support integration with teaching, research, access and community engagement initiatives.

5. Financial Leadership & Sustainability

- Prepare and manage budgets, forecasts and financial oversight.
- Lead fundraising, donor relations, philanthropy and grant writing.
- Maintain ELI's 6-month reserve fund and financial sustainability plan.

6. Partnerships, Networks & Government Engagement

- Build strong relationships with:
 - Tusla, HSE, NEIC, CYPSC, YPAR
 - Early years and education providers
 - Government departments, agencies and policymakers
 - Corporate and philanthropic partners
- Represent NCI and ELI externally at local, national and international levels, promoting the College's mission and ELI's evidence-informed model of practice.

7. Research, Evaluation & Impact

- Oversee data systems, research, monitoring and evaluation.
- Support the ongoing development and enhancement of ELI's Research performance and systems
- Ensure evidence of impact informs practice and policy.
- Support publication and dissemination of research findings.
- Work in close collaboration with NCI research leadership to ensure alignment with the College's Research Strategy and research governance frameworks.

8. Communications & Sector Profile

- Act as spokesperson for ELI.
- Maintain ELI's strong public, sectoral and advocacy presence.
- Ensure consistent, high-quality communication and messaging.

Person Specification

Qualifications

- Master's degree in early childhood education, Education, Social Policy, Public Administration, Community Development, or similar.

Experience

- At least 5 years' senior leadership experience in early years, education, community or family support settings.
- Demonstrated experience with:
 - Community networks (including NEIC, Tusla, HSE, CYPSC, ABC)
 - Government strategy and policy
 - Governance, compliance and risk management
 - Child safeguarding and welfare oversight
 - Research, evaluation and impact processes
 - Fundraising, donor management and grant writing
 - Managing complex teams and multi-site programmes
 - Working with children and families experiencing disadvantage



Skills & Competencies

- Strategic vision and organisational leadership
- Strong negotiator and relationship-builder
- Excellent communication, presentation and advocacy skills
- Ability to manage complexity and competing priorities
- Emotional intelligence, integrity and resilience
- Commitment to equality, community empowerment and best practice in early intervention

Conditions of Service

Tenure: Permanent contract of employment.

Salary: Executive salary band €95,000 - €124, 863.

Pension: Defined Contribution Pension Scheme.

Probation: Subject to a six-month probationary period.

Location: Based at NCI, Mayor Street and Spencer Dock campus, International Financial Services Centre, Dublin 1.

Working Hours: Minimum of 35 hours per week (five-day week), with potential evening and weekend work as required.

Annual Leave: The annual leave allowance is 27 days.

National College of Ireland's mission is to change lives through education. Its vision is to provide an inspiring educational experience that is innovative, responsive and enterprise focused.

Note: The functions and responsibilities assigned to the Director, Early Learning Initiative are based on the current stated role and strategy of the college. These functions, tasks and responsibilities may alter or be added to in line with any change in the role and strategic objectives of the ELI and NCI or that may otherwise be necessary or directed by the college from time to time.

National College of Ireland is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace where all individuals are valued and respected. We encourage applications from candidates of all backgrounds and provide equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, or any other protected grounds.

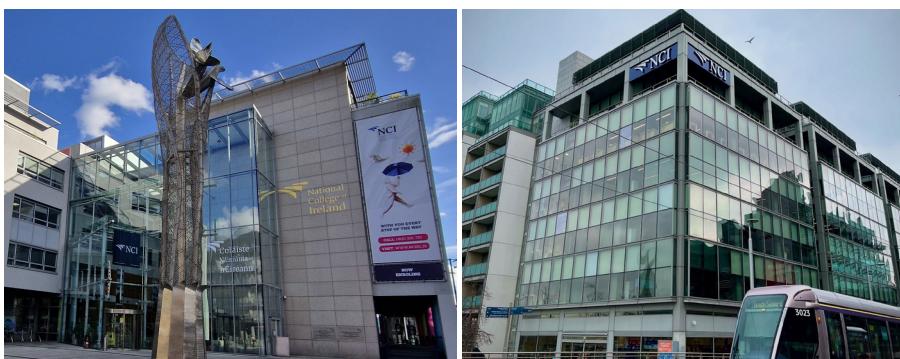
Additional Important Information

- The successful applicant will be subject to Garda vetting and must not have any convictions under the Sex Offenders Act 2001.
- The functions and responsibilities assigned to the Director of The Early Learning Initiative are based on the current stated role and objectives of the college. These functions and responsibilities may alter in line with operational and strategic plans, and priorities of NCI.

Application Process:

To apply, please e-mail your cover letter and CV both in PDF format ONLY, quoting reference number: NCI 26003 to: **recruitment@ncirl.ie** by **5:00 pm, 30th January 2026**.

Shortlisted candidates should be available for first-round interviews approximately between **2nd and 13th March**. Confirmation of the exact schedule will be provided closer to the time. This will be a two stage process of interviews.



For more information on the work of the ELI,
please visit: www.ncirl.ie/ELI

Address: Mayor St, IFSC, Dublin 1, D01 K6W2

Reception: (01) 4498500