



SEQUENCES

Self and external Evaluation of Quality in Europe to Nourish Childhood Education Services

SEQUENCES TOOLKIT

Toolkit for the Self and External Evaluation
of Early Childhood Education and Care provision

Version 1



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The production of this document has been possible thanks to the **support of the ERASMUS+ project:**

SEQUENCES - Self and external Evaluation of QQuality in Europe to Nourish Childhood Education Services

(2016-1-IT02-KA201-024628).

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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LIST OF COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

4C's	Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity
CCC	City/County Childcare Committee
CCS	Community Childcare Subvention Programme (funded by the Irish Government)
CETS	Childcare Education and Training Programme (funded by the Irish Government)
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CREA	Centre of Research on Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ISSA	International Step by Step Association
NASI	National Aistear Síolta Initiative
PA	Public Authority
PDCA Quality Cycle	Plan, Do, Check, Act
PICL	Parents Involved in Children's Learning
PTA/PTO	Parent Teacher Association/ Parent Teacher Organisation
QA	Quality Assessment
SEA	Successful Educational Action
SEP	Successful Education Plan
SEQUENCES	Self and External Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care provision
SMART goals	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (related objectives)
SMARTER	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Evaluate, Re-evaluate
SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
TQM	Total Quality Management
VCO	Voluntary Childcare Organisation
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

In addition:

Aistear – Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Síolta – Irish National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

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INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

This Toolkit represents one of the three main outputs of the SEQUENCES project, and specifically the one to be used as foundation for the others. It has been originally envisioned as a **support document for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) staff to improve self and external evaluation practices**. It has been **developed through a bottom-up approach** thanks to the cooperation of different stakeholders and the integration of their specific approaches and understandings of quality in early years education and care. It has considered the key features of local/regional and national systems in the partner's countries – Italy, Malta, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Ireland and Serbia (as part of the European Parents Association and actively involved in piloting the Toolkit) – and is expected to be **transnationally valid in Europe**.

The Toolkit is built upon the needs of partners to reach a common understanding and share good practices at provider level, that are linked to the quality areas expressed in the European Quality Framework¹, and thus become a practical inspiration for other ECEC providers who aim to improve the quality of their early childhood setting.



KEY PRINCIPLES

The SEQUENCES project and the process that led to this document, is underpinned by a number of key principles and values relating to early childhood.

In early childhood settings², **education and care are viewed as interdependent and inseparable**. The focus is on a nurturing pedagogy, where children's learning is embedded in respectful, responsive relationships with others. It is therefore vital that early childhood settings work in partnership with parents, engage them in their children's learning, and are understood as having the potential to act as support hubs for children, parents, families, and communities. Families are warmly welcomed and recognised as adding to the rich fabric of a thriving early years' setting. These settings nourish the child through relationships, learning experiences and by providing environments that are enabling and inclusive. They nurture the **holistic development of each individual child in a way that meets their individual needs, abilities and interests**.

Early childhood is viewed as a critical stage within the life-course, **the role of the educator is to support the child in the present, as opposed to focusing on future development and complementary to family education**. Children are seen as contributing, active citizens, in the moment, rather than potential citizens of the future. In addition to this, quality early years' practice

¹ *Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*, Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission, October 2014.

² For early childhood settings see **KEY DEFINITIONS**.

is always underpinned by a rights-based approach, where the child has agency and independence and where decision making is encouraged and supported. Early childhood settings play a key role in giving voice and visibility to our youngest citizens.

The view of the **child as a capable and competent learner** is critical in early childhood education and care. In keeping with this view, the child, educator and parents are invited to think about the child's strengths and positive dispositions and to think about other areas of interest that can be followed and supported.

Play is recognised as the key methodology for children's learning. Children are supported to make-meaning and co-construct experiences actively through play. In keeping with this active approach to learning, the **curriculum is emergent, inquiry led and based on the interests of the child.** This constitutes a shift away from a didactic approach to learning where children are seen as recipients of knowledge, to one where **children are creators of knowledge**, bringing with them experience and knowledge, which forms the basis of their learning. Creativity is also highly valued and supported within the early years' setting and children have opportunities to explore and engage with the arts.

Reflective practice is a key feature of a responsive, high quality early years' settings that adapts to the changing needs and requirements of children and families. This is characterised by Early Years Education Professionals who engage in ongoing review and discussion of practice, with a view to establishing what is working well and highlighting areas which can be improved upon in collaboration with children, parents and families. Again, this practice is embedded in supportive and respectful relationships which supports professional development and allows Early Years Education Professionals to openly share their practice, with a view to improvement.

When practice in early childhood settings is informed by these principles and values it provides a strong foundation for quality. It is clear that a shared vision and mission are required in order to explore these principles and consider if and how they are embedded in practice. The SEQUENCES Toolkit provides concrete examples and opportunities for Early Years Education Professionals and other stakeholders to reflect on and explore these principles in action.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A child's learning environment extends far beyond the immediate setting of the home/family or early childhood setting outside the home. The conceptual framework of the child in the context of family and community is based on **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**³, which provides a lens with which to view the child and the various elements that impact on the child. Bronfenbrenner developed this theoretical framework, not only to explain how everything in the child's social environment impacts on their growth and development, but also how a child impacts the world around her/him.

The environments that effect a child's development and on which the child impacts, range from the micro -system to the macro- system. The micro- system refers to the relationship between the child and the immediate environment such as parents, siblings, home and family. As the child gets older, the system widens, involving more people, such as the early years settings. The macro-system is the wider set of social structures, which are far from the child physically, but which still have great influence over the child. The macro- system includes the wider contexts of institutional

³ The Ecological systems theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

forms of culture such as government policy, economy, the media, social strata and state of potential conflicts in society.

The challenge is to develop a framework, not only for monitoring and evaluation, but also for impacting and concretely put into action quality tools. In this way, it would allow practitioners to plan programmes and approaches which would consider all the factors that impact on young children. We believe that children are active agents in their own learning and development and that looking through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory the practitioners can identify the many factors which impact on the child, both directly and indirectly. We also want the framework to be clear and easy to use and be transferable across countries and cultures.

The SEQUENCES project has adopted a quality management approach to hold together the theoretical principles with the practical issues, therefore providing a **framework for practitioners to consider when monitoring and evaluating the quality of their work with children, based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the child rights perspective and the different best practices in Europe.**



The diagram in **Figure 1** represents the child at the centre of society and some of the important layers that impact upon and surround the child at any given time.

Child - The child is at the centre of our framework and our thinking and actions must take account of the various environments that have an impact, both on the child and each other. We must also consider how the child impacts these various environments, bearing in mind possible changes required to the physical and emotional environment and the settings procedures to adapt to the needs of the individual child.

Family – Parents/Carers are the primary educators of their child and their influence is of crucial importance for the child's development. Many stressful and difficult situations can put considerable strain and stress on families and affect their ability to care effectively for their children. The trauma felt by families can be picked up by children and internalised. Whether a child is enrolled into any early years setting or not is based on the parents'/ family choice. Early childhood settings play an important role in supporting families to make informed decisions about their child's learning and development.

Early Years Setting – “Early childhood is a critical stage of development that forms the foundations for children’s well-being and learning”⁴ The early years setting has the potential, through responsive, reciprocal, caring, respectful relationships, with both the child and their family, to impact positively on the child’s well-being and learning. Policies and practices that support parents and families, as well as programmes based on child centred pedagogy, which help children learn to know, to do, to be and to live together and which respond to both the child’s and family’s interests and needs particularly support children’s well-being and learning.

Wider Community – The wider community are also shaping and influencing the child’s learning and development. This can include the positive impact of an inclusive, respectful community, where extra resources are available to support each child to reach their full potential. Conversely, a community based on various types of divisions (social, political, economic, ethnic, religious etc.) can adversely impact on the children. At the same time, ECEC is largely influenced in many countries by the decentralised policies (in relation to governance structures, funding systems, policies for inclusion, priorities in enabling access to the children from marginalised groups etc.).

Culture, Economics, Governance, Research, Media – This is the largest and most remote set of people. However, they still have a great influence over the child. This includes things such as the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values, the economy, the impact of the media and evidence-based programmes. These influences can affect a child either positively or negatively.

We believe that the above framework will be a useful reminder for ECEC staff when monitoring and evaluating their policies and practice in relation to access of children to early years’ settings, performance and skills of work force, effectiveness of the curricula, as well as governance and funding in their settings. When monitoring and evaluating the quality of their policies and practice against this framework, **ECEC providers can ensure they are thinking about all the layers that impact on the child.**



BASICS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT FOR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

In educational settings, quality differs from other sectors, because in education the service is provided in a very specific way, with players and beneficiaries having different roles simultaneously and because the concept of quality, both perceived and expected is contextual depending on the Quality Management System adopted, it always requires the commitment and effort of the variety of actors involved and this can lead to pressure and affect the internal and external perception of quality.

The **difference between quality assurance and quality management** is that quality assurance measures the quality while quality management aims to create good quality through management actions. Quality management uses strategies and tools with a constant reflection of their influences to enhance the quality of education.

⁴ UNICEF (2001) *State of the Worlds’ Children*, UNICEF. New York, 2001. Early childhood regards children from birth to 8 years of age.

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a **management approach to long-term success through customer satisfaction, based on the participation of all members of an organization in improving processes, products, services, and the culture they work in** (Karen Bemowski, *Quality Progress* – 1992).

It is a step away and forward from quality assurance, an approach of measuring quality against standards externally set and doing so after the service has been established and delivered. The TQM approach is a community-based approach where the standards we measure, but also design our service against, come from the customers in general, in the case of ECEC services, the most important stakeholders, children and their parents.

The TQM approach aims at improving quality and increasing customer satisfaction by renewing the organisational culture, restructuring, and it often leads to the optimisation of resource efficiency and effectiveness. The focus must be on long-term success, and when starting to apply the approach it is often difficult to focus on this, rather than changes for short-term success. It is also an important, but a rather difficult to apply element, in terms of the fact that all staff (including non-educational staff), as well as all parents/families/carers and children need to be involved for the desired long-term success. **TQM enhances slow, incremental change that involves continuous quality improvement, and change is based on careful planning rather than seat-of-the-pants instinct by the manager. It requires a continuous and systematic approach to gathering, evaluating, and acting on data about what is occurring in an organisation.**

TQM management principles⁵, applied to ECEC, include the following:

1. The primary objective of the institution is to meet the needs of its internal and external “customers” by providing quality services, and to continually improve them. In the ECEC context, **external customers** include not only the children, but also the parents, the decision makers (board, municipality, etc.), other professionals intervening in children’s personal development (i.e., paediatricians, social services operators, etc.), even the media and the general public. **Internal customers** include all the staff members working in the ECEC key processes, who are part of the organisation key processes and must perform in the best way they can in order to assure quality at its’ best towards the external costumers.
2. It instils in all staff members an *esprit de corps* that assures them that having quality as the number one goal is an important tenet. Staff members are responsible for quality, even if it is related to an issue beyond the scope of his or her job. Do not be afraid of evaluating, it’s a strategic competence. Eliminating the “it’s not my job” mentality becomes an achievable organisational objective. Also, it requires the acquisition/reinforcement of a *Culture of evaluation* (both qualitative and quantitative), which in turn drives more effective, efficient and flexible ways of working.
3. It continuously searches for ways to improve every activity, program, and process. It does so by constantly seeking feedback from customers, data monitoring and evidence collection, and promoting suggestions from all sources, both externally and internally (i.e., through self-reflection and self-assessment practices), on how to improve. In doing so, it preliminarily sets qualitative and quantitative performance indicators.
4. It rewards quality, not only internally, but from its suppliers. It recognises that poor quality from its collaborators, be they suppliers or other partners, affects the institution’s quality.
5. It recognises that staff must receive continuous training to improve their work performance.

⁵ Applied for ECEC from Gary Grobman’s TQM principles for social NGOs.



6. It encourages staff and other stakeholders of the institution, especially parents, to work as a team to solve problems and meet customer needs rather than competing against each other.
7. It empowers workers at every level, and permits them to be actively engaged in decisions that affect the organisation, and to constantly look for ways to improve it.
8. It provides staff with the opportunity to have pride in what they do in their job and to see the fruits of their labour measured in the quality of the service they provide rather than just financial rewards of a salary.
9. It promotes a planning process that is geared toward continuously improving quality in everything the institution does.

Quality planning⁶ consists of:

- identifying the customers (both internal and external)
- determining his or her needs
- developing services and features of services the customers need
- designing and building the process that produces those services in a way that meets quality goals and does so at a minimum combined cost.



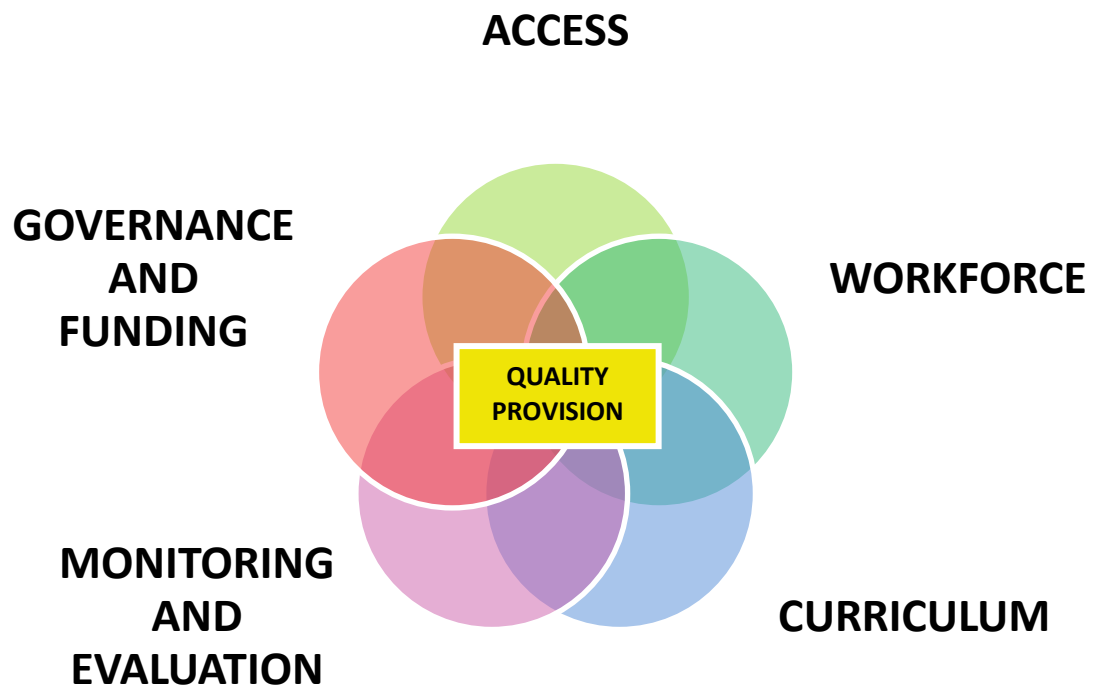
WHAT IS THE SEQUENCES TOOLKIT?

The SEQUENCES Toolkit is currently composed of **33 tools**, each designed **for inspiring quality practices** in ECEC settings applying the *continuous improvement* approach. The tools have been developed jointly by the project partners through the exchange of good practices and working groups with a Study Visit in Ireland, and based on the observations carried out during the visits to ECEC settings in Italy, Lithuania and Ireland. The diversity of the partnership **reflects the perspectives and backgrounds of a variety of relevant stakeholders**, such as public and private ECEC providers, trade unions from the educational sector, parents association representing in a wider sense home/families' interests. It is expected to also influence the practice **at local level by providing a model for multi-stakeholder's cooperation to providers themselves**.

The Toolkit is divided in 6 sections, corresponding to 6 Quality areas: **Access; Curriculum; Workforce; Monitoring & Evaluation; Governance and Funding; and Common Area**. Each of the tools is part of one of these areas, following on the classification provided by the framework and statements in the *Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. The partners have also added a Common Area which includes (quality) management tools adapted to early years settings corresponding to each of the five areas identified in the *Proposal*. The contents of the Toolkit provide the opportunity to actively develop a quality culture within the institution, and indeed the benefit of the tools is that they can be used directly and integrated into daily practical work. The adoption and use of the Toolkit by ECEC staff, stimulating further reflection on internal practice and quality concepts, has the potential to lead to the conception and development of additional tools to be integrated in the document.

⁶ Deming: *On Some Statistical Aids Toward Economic Production*, 1975.

THE ELEMENTS OF QUALITY EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE PROVISION



The tools in **COMMON AREAS** will assist in reviewing all of the areas above

HOW TO WORK WITH THE TOOLKIT

You can use the toolkit as a source of information on various areas of practice for different situations. You can combine tools, use them all together or choose to use single tools. Each tool is designed as a practical and flexible instrument, which can be adapted to different situations. It is recommended that they are implemented together with setting staff and, in cooperation with external stakeholders. You can use the instruments informally for development purposes and the tools can also be used as a formal tool in the quality assurance of your institution.

You are encouraged to edit each of the tools to meet your specific and changing circumstances. To support this, each document is available in Word format. You only need to retain the project and funding logos in your personalised versions. You can also use the Toolkit in its published format, in accordance with the Creative Commons regulation.

Each of the tools has a number and a title. You will also find information on their **objectives**, the **time** that you will need for their use, the **references** and links with other tools. In many of the tools you will find some **examples of actual practices** or **projects** from which they were inspired. The central aspect of each instrument is the “**How?**” section, in which the steps for adopting a given tool are described.

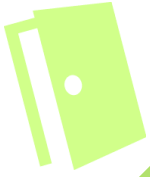
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS/ACTION RESEARCH WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Some of the tools in this Toolkit may involve consultation with children, parent and families and staff. Working in this way honours the rights of the child to have a voice in matters which concern him/her, engages parents and empowers staff. Improving quality includes identifying current practices to inform changes or improvements to the environment, activities and experiences offered to children or reviewing daily practices or procedures. Using the *PDCA Cycle* (see Tool 30) may involve gathering data by taking photographs or short videos of children and staff as they go

about the daily routine, using samples of children's work or taping or documenting conversations with children, parents or staff. Usually this data is used solely by the early years setting or in the event of piloting the Toolkit shared among the SEQUENCES Partners, included in the Toolkit and some data may be used to populate the SEQUENCES website or Facebook page. The following permissions may be required:

- Parental permission to:
 - document observations of their child in the setting
 - include their child in photographs,
 - include their child in video clips,
 - consult with their child,
 - use samples of their child's work,
 - to share the above with the SEQUENCES Mentor and European Partners,
 - use examples of the above for the Sequences website or Facebook page,
 - share results from parents' surveys/consultations with the SEQUENCES Mentor and European Partners.
- Children's permission to:
 - observe them in the setting,
 - include them in photographs,
 - include them in video clips,
 - consult with them,
 - use samples of their work,
 - share examples of the above with the SEQUENCES Mentor and European Partners,
 - include these examples in the Toolkit,
 - post them on the SEQUENCES website or Facebook page.
- Staff permission to:
 - observe them in their work,
 - include them in photographs,
 - include them in video clips,
 - consult with them,
 - use examples of their work,
 - share examples of the above with the SEQUENCES Mentor and European Partners,
 - include these examples in the Toolkit,
 - post them on the SEQUENCES website or Facebook page.

It is important that parents, children and staff are clear about what data will be used, how it will be used and where it will be used to ensure informed consent.



ACCESS

This part of the Toolkit aims to achieve universal and equitable access to early childhood education and care provision. The first important goal is to offer provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children. The important target group is children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups for whom the benefits of participating in ECEC are shown to be even more significant. While policy is working on ECEC provision to be made available from birth to the age at which children start compulsory primary school, ECEC settings need to respond to parental circumstances and encourage all families to use ECEC settings. Provision also needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the programme. This is one of the main goals in the Access quality area.

The other goal is to offer provisions that encourage participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity. It offers a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of ECEC which involves local organisations and community groups; approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents; an assurance that all children and families are welcome in an ECEC setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use ECEC settings; a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value ECEC settings and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected, while parenting programmes/support are also offered to support early childhood education at home.

These tools are intended to assist ECEC settings and staff to develop transparent strategies that helps to achieve these goals. It is also intended to assist the planning of a more inclusive ECEC Setting, and overcome challenges related to physical access. As parents' involvement as educators is crucial to healthy, and effective ECEC, the focus of Tools 1, 2 and 5 is on communication with parents as well as other stakeholders. Tool 6 addresses the participation of children, so that decision making involves the active participation of children, parents and professionals. In order to achieve sustainable and visible development in this area, a deep analysis of the current situation and real needs is necessary, followed by careful planning, Tool 4 guides ECEC staff in conducting the necessary research before taking action while Tool 3 deals with crucial question of diversity.

TOOL 1: STRATEGY FOR MAKING ACCESS PROCESS VISIBLE

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 1 – Provision that is available and affordable to all families and children

Statement 2 – Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

WHAT

A consistent strategy, comprising different communication channels and methods, to facilitate the access to the available ECEC settings, by direct ECEC settings' beneficiaries (families, parents, carers, children) and the whole community. Since early years' settings have a responsibility to assist parents in the education and care of their children, they should plan and implement an adequate strategy to assist parents in this decision, detailing information about the setting, using a variety of media. Parents want to make informed decisions about which ECEC settings might best meet their expectations and best suit their child. This can include setting up a website, a Facebook page, a Services Charter (see Tool 2) and hosting an open day/information evening.

OBJECTIVES

- To inform parents, carers and families about the steps and procedures to access the ECEC setting
- To provide clear and concise information about the ECEC setting
- To encourage the participation of parents in the ECEC setting
- To promote communication among ECEC settings and parents, carers and families based on transparency and participation
- To make the setting more and more responsive to the needs of children

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: citizens, parents, families, ECEC staff

Indirect: children

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Planning and update before the beginning of the enrollment period, implementation throughout the year.

HOW

The provision of ECEC services should be made available for the period from the child's birth to the beginning of compulsory schooling. A family has "access" to childhood education and care when a place is provided for their child in a high quality service, where neither distance nor cost constitute a barrier to attendance. For this reason it is preferable that the offer is well known and has a good visibility among citizens and potential beneficiaries through a set of tools and channels described below.

1. WEBSITE: It is an online communication tool that must provide parents, carers and families with all of the relevant details about the setting (history, projects, activities, contacts, location etc.) in a clear and immediate way. It is increasingly important to use the opportunities offered by the web to raise awareness and promote the activities of the setting because it reaches thousands of potential families. The website ensures maximum interaction with its beneficiaries and

stakeholders, and can also be a great way to build a brand that identifies the settings and determines how the structure “looks” in the eyes of users. Online open source web creation and graphic softwares could be used to create the ECEC settings own website. Moreover, it is also a highly visible tool to establish collaboration and partnerships especially at local, regional and national level. In the references section more detail about how to create an effective website are provided.

2. FACEBOOK PAGE: The Facebook page is the tool made available by Facebook to advertise the ECEC setting on the platform. It is free of charge and can be customised by administrators depending on the type of setting to be promoted.

First of all, the ECEC setting must create a Facebook account that acts as a page administrator, enter information such as logo, photo, cover, description, and website address, and eventually promote it to gain further visibility. In the references section more details about how to create an effective website are provided.

It allows ECEC settings to:

- listen to users and respond to their requests, when possible according to the type of request
- interact directly, helps to make connections with parents and families and builds positive relationships by involving followers and respond to users’ comments
- maintains the relationships with the already existing or former users, reminding them that the ECEC setting is present, offering information about current events(former users – parents & children - can serve as multipliers to spread the word of mouth about the facility but also give feedback, taking into account the future development of children who have gone on to primary school
- get in touch with thousands of potential new users through advertising and word-of-mouth.

3. WELCOME EVENT: It is an event organised to give families the opportunity to access and visit the ECEC setting in the area where they live and to meet the educators. The initiative aims to be a welcome time to allow parents to have a conscious choice according to their and the child’s needs. This could be in the form of an information evening in the setting for parents and families; an open day where all prospective parents can come with their children and spend time together in the setting and appointments for an individual parent and child to spend time in the setting. The planning and organisation of the event will include:

- announcement of the event and communication campaign, widely spread in the local area (including agencies/professionals that come in contact with children and families i.e., libraries, health centres etc.) and also through leaflet/posters advertising the setting, containing images to reach those who might not speak the majority language
- preparation of the necessary documentation to distribute to the participants
- welcoming parents, children, families and other citizens
- ECEC staff presentation of the management and characteristics of each single setting.

The open day may begin with an introduction by the manager of the ECEC setting that presents it, it’s staff and an overview of the pedagogical approach. ECEC staff will have to give further information about programmes and projects. This should be an opportunity for potential beneficiaries to visit and learn more about the ECEC setting.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 2 – Early Years Settings Charter

TOOL 2: EARLY YEARS' SETTINGS CHARTER

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 1 – Provision that is available and affordable to all families and children

Statement 2 – Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

WHAT

The Early Years' Settings Charter is a written document stating the settings provision and describing how the ECEC setting concretely implements its Quality Policy, and outlining the methods of collaboration between the setting and parents. It outlines the principles of educational and pedagogical activity, values, organisation of services, spaces, activities and ways to involve parents and families.

OBJECTIVES

- To inform and communicate with parents, families and citizens in a transparent way, stating from the beginning the rights and duties of all the stakeholders involved
- To communicate the defined goals, the quality levels to be guaranteed, measurement criteria, and the ECEC staff and parents' rights and duties, also highlighting the importance of listening to families/carers/parents and children's needs
- To increase the participation of parents and families in the ECEC setting
- To highlight the learning and developmental benefits

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: citizens, parents, families, ECEC staff, policy makers

Indirect: children

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

During planning and to be updated before the beginning of the enrollment period and implementation throughout the year.

HOW

The Early Years' Settings Charter is a document which informs and guides parents, families and citizens in general about the ECEC settings in the area. It is a fundamental communication tool that outlines the principle of transparency and can be a highly stimulating tool for the ECEC providers to make them reflect on what is working well in the setting, bearing in mind the primary goal of constantly improving the quality of setting. The Early Years' Settings Charter provides an overview of the pedagogical principles, values and approaches and indicates the specific responsibilities for each area of action.

Specifically, the Early Years' Settings Charter includes the following information:

- target
- mission (it expresses the primary goal and the characteristics that distinguishes it from all the others).
- characteristics of the structure
- human resources employed
- fees and special conditions
- how the setting functions
- conditions to facilitate user evaluation
- possibility for families to activate proposals for change

The contents of the Early Years Settings Charter should be written in simple, concrete and understandable language for “non-contracted” recipients and present clear contents. It should also be used as a quality assessment indicator. It should be updated whenever changes happen in the setting which influence the quality of the offer (at least every 3 years). Information should be provided in a range of languages present among the community in order to break down language barriers and those related to bureaucratic procedures for completion of enrollment.

The Early Years' Settings Charter shall be made available to citizens within ECEC settings or relevant offices. It should be visible and distributed to the families/parents/carers during enrollment in the setting or in special initiatives for the promotion of the child well-being.

THE PROCESS OF DRAWING UP AN EARLY YEARS' SETTINGS CHARTER: The working methodologies depend on the motivations for developing an Early Years' Settings Charter and the main purpose it is intended to serve. In order to facilitate the process of creating and elaborating such a document, some of the following questions can be taken into consideration:

- What prompts us to design / rethink the Charter?
- Do we want to prioritise certain groups?
- What can we learn from the best experiences achieved?
- Who will be involved (and how) in designing them? (beneficiaries, staff, ...)
- How do we imagine using the Charter? As a self-assessment model? Do we intend to distribute it to everyone or make it available only to beneficiaries?
- What critical factors influence the quality of our service? What constraints and opportunities should be taken into consideration?
- How are we going to ensure constant improvements?

It would be advisable to have a clear list of the stakeholders involved and to map it, involving a group of representatives of the ECEC setting of the different levels and functions, and finally to decide when to involve them (at the beginning or at the end of the process or periodically for confirmation and updating the indicators etc.).

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 1 – *Strategy for Making Access Process Visible*

Tool 4 – *Needs Analysis and Planning*

Tool 13 – *ECEC Setting Mission Statement*

Tool 23 – *Parents' External Evaluation*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

Information for parents – a registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the setting is provided with the following information:

- (a) the name, position, qualification and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor
- (b) details of the class of setting and the age profile of the children for which the setting is registered to provide services
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the setting
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the setting
- (e) the facilities available
- (f) the opening hours and fees
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the setting is required to maintain

TOOL 3: PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE ECEC SERVICE

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 2 – Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

WHAT

A written plan to devise policies and procedures on inclusion. A document clearly stating that the ECEC setting is an inclusive setting which welcomes all children and families and actively challenges discrimination.

OBJECTIVES

- To recognise and respect diversity
- To recognise the added value of different activities of individualisation and tailored services
- To build inclusive cultures and measures within the ECEC settings
- To create a culture of inclusiveness beyond the ECEC settings

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: ECEC staff, network of ECEC settings

Indirect: children, parents, families

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Throughout the year.

HOW

The measures that regulate access to ECEC settings should be carefully planned. The physical environment indoor and outdoor, the programme of activities, experiences and materials should be reviewed to ensure they are accessible and available to all children. This should remove barriers that prevent access to ECEC settings on behalf of children and families with fewer opportunities and promote a more proactive attitude in involving these families, paying particular attention to the ones less visible within the communities.

Within the ECEC setting, in drawing up a *Plan for an Inclusive ECEC Setting*, the staff should be able to consider key actions aimed at strengthening and concretely implementing social inclusion. To ensure greater effectiveness of the document, it is advisable to structure it together with key stakeholders such as parents/families, social and health-care services, cultural mediators (if possible), local authorities, etc..

Within the table below, a series of actions relevant to all children considering the aim that the ECEC settings have to nurture all children’s well-being, sense of identity and sense of belonging. The suggestions are in general based on considering all children as individuals (having different personalities, experiences, interests and needs).

SUGGESTIONS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

Provide individualised pathways. If relevant, co-participate in the drafting of individual pathways with social and health-care services (compilation of cards and dossiers)

Collect as much information as possible about each child's identity, his/her needs and interests

(compilation of each child's personal file). If relevant, collect and analyse specific documentation (health and social conditions, etc.)
Organisation of initial interviews with families to gather as much information as possible about the identity of each child and his/her needs and interests
Collect any documentation from previous experiences in ECEC settings
If relevant, promote constant and systemic meetings with social and health-care services (participation in meetings with experts)
If relevant, share clinical and functional diagnosis with social and health-care services
Think of the environment according to the specific needs and abilities of the child
If relevant, provide the possibility of a support figure for the child and/ or for the team
Encourage sharing and mutual support
Encourage children to participate in activities that encourage them to recognise diversity as a value
Provide accessible forms of language and content documentation to all families
Respect each child's culture (menu diversification, sharing traditional foods during festivals, creating games, popular musical objects or instruments during workshops)
Ensure that information for parents is provided in different languages - Early Years Education Professionals need to be sure that every child understands, a translation should be provided or prepared in writing in advance.
Promote occasions for social inclusion
Allowing every child and every family to feel part of the setting
Removing obstacles to the social participation of children and families

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 4 – Needs Analysis and Planning

Tool 7 – Reflecting Professional Development

Tool 9 – Nurturing Learning Environments

Tool 12 – 4 Pillars Curriculum

TOOL 4: NEEDS ANALYSIS AND PLANNING

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 1 – Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

WHAT

Model for conducting an analysis to understand and meet families/parents/carers expectations about the ECEC setting

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the needs and expectations of external stakeholders with regard to the provision of the ECEC setting
- To offer an accessible and affordable service, meeting families/parents/carers' provision needs
- To widen the access to the ECEC settings

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: ECEC management; ECEC staff (both private and public)

Indirect: Parents/families/carers; public authorities

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Before the enrollment period and periodically to revise the ECEC setting provision, according to further needs developments. In order to adapt the provision of the setting on a regular basis, it is important to question children, parents, carers and families at the beginning of every school year/new group.

HOW

The tool is meant to support ECEC staff and management in delivering a service in line with the actual and specific needs of all children and their parents, families and/or carers.

1. Needs Analysis: The collection of needs and expectations can be done in different ways, taking into account the context of the setting and its current customers. For example, it could be done by disseminating a questionnaire, through a conversation with each of the families/parents/carers, through dedicated meetings, etc. A question asking the ideal specific times parents/families/carers would like their child to attend the setting in order to meet their professional commitments or working hours, should be included. Also, in case of language barriers, supports should be provided to families/parents/carers in understanding the questions in order to highlight the specific needs. In case of children with special needs, be sure to dedicate additional time and attention to this phase of provision needs assessment.

The following aspects need to be investigated in this analysis:

- Family members occupation and, in case of jobs outside the house, average working hours considering the specificities of seasonal occupation/new jobs
- Level of flexibility in the professional and personal commitments in order to facilitate the arrival and departure of children as well as the participation in the settings educational programme
- Skills, talents, interests or aspects of parents/carers profession or culture they would like to share with the children in the setting (i.e., music, story-telling, cookery, etc.), also by

providing a list of some ideas as to how parents and families can participate in the educational programme, detailing dates/times when they could do this

- Cultural and religious practices of the family which are considered important for the personal development of the children and need to be taken into consideration within the educational and care activities
- Specific dietary habits of the family and/or of the children
- "Health specificities"/recommendations for educators

2. Planning in the ECEC setting: On the basis of the above analysis, the management of the setting reflects on the emergent needs and comes up with a proposal for the organisation of the ECEC provision which should be flexible to facilitate the emergent curriculum. At this stage of the analysis the ECEC setting management provides financial and administrative data to complete the planned feasibility and foresee eventual actions needed to match the requirements (i.e., specific investments in equipment, specific food provisions, etc.). In case of strongly differentiated families' needs, it is advisable to foresee flexible tailored services. Before presenting the planned services to parents and families, it is important to have shared the information among the staff team(s), collecting and considering opinions, availability and contributions of each of the colleagues/employees.

A report of the main findings can be produced and can also be shared, if needed, with other stakeholders (local policy-makers, paediatricians, psychologists, local, public health-care services, etc.).

The main features of the planned services, according to the principle of delivering an emergent curriculum (aimed at continuously adapting and changing education plans to facilitate all children's learning and development throughout the year) can be detailed in a written document as well as in the *Early Years' Setting Charter* (see Tool 2).

In case of integrated services or in presence of territorial coach (see Tool 24), it is recommended to carry out together the preliminary analysis. Being in a network, could also overcome the issues and difficulties of setting with limited (human) resources in delivering a need-responsive service by offering diversified opening hours, additional services, etc.

Sample questionnaire

ACCESS

1. Why did you choose to bring your children to this setting?

- a) It's the only one in the locality - the closest to home
- b) I opted for this setting based on prior information
- c) To the recommendations of friends - because my friends also have children at this setting

2. How did you learn about this kindergarten?

- a) From other people -, neighbours, relatives
- b) From newspapers
- c) From Radio or TV
- d) From the Internet

3. What is the level of safety for pupils / children within the school unit?

- a) Very high
- b) High
- c) Medium
- d) Low
- e) Very low

4. Are you part of the Parents' Committee of the Class?

- a) Yes b) No

5. If so, how often does the Parents' Committee of the Class meet?

- a) Monthly or more often
 b) Every 2-3 months
 c) Once or twice per term
 d) Whenever needed
 e) It does not meet
 f) I do not know

6. Is your feedback acted on when you find a negative aspect, which you communicate to the director or a Early Years Education Professionals?

- a) Almost always found an improvement or find a solution
 b) Usually we could see an improvement or find a solution
 c) Sometimes I have seen an improvement find a solution
 d) Very rarely or never could we see an improvement or find a solution

CURRICULUM**7. Did you make proposals to improve kindergarten activities in the last school year?**

- a) Yes b) No

8. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, what happened to the latest proposal made?

- a) It was taken over and applied directly
 b) We discussed the proposal with other people (teacher, director, other teachers, etc.) and then it was applied, totally or partially
 c) We discussed the proposal with other people, but the proposal was not applied
 d) Nothing happened

9. List at least 5 activities in the setting in the last three months (whether or not you have participated)

- 1.....
 2.....
 3.....
 4.....
 5.....

10. Are there projects developed in partnership with other schools, community institutions (municipality, library, polyclinic, police, etc.) or with foreign partners?

- a) Yes b) No

11. Have you been consulted last year on choosing the optional activities of this school year?

- a) Yes b) No

12. How do Early Years Education Professionals respond to your individual help requests, for your child, in understanding/ deepening of how you educate them at home?

- a) they promptly respond to my requests

- b) I did not ask - I did not need help
- c) they do not promptly respond to requests

13. How often are the criteria to be used for child assessment discussed with you before the assessment?

- a) Before each evaluation
- b) Never
- c) I do not know, I do not care

14. In what way is your child encouraged to evaluate their own results?

- a) All Early Years Education Professionals encourage them to self-assess
- b) Most Early Years Education Professionals encourage them to self-assess
- c) Some Early Years Education Professionals encourage them to self-assess
- d) No Early Years Education Professionals encourage them to self-assess

15. How do you appreciate the learning conditions offered by our setting and which are, in your opinion, the issues that did not satisfy you about the learning process (degree of teacher professionalism, technical-material basis, education-primary school relationship, evaluation of primary schools, regulation, kindergarten timetable, other aspects)

Please describe in a few words

.....

WORKFORCE

16. How do you appreciate the work of the Early Years Education Professional by referring to the following aspects?

- A) Professional training
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Satisfactory
 - d) Not satisfactory
- B) Age appropriate teaching methods and motivation of each child
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Satisfactory
 - d) Not satisfactory
- C) Engaging pupils and parents in different educational projects and extracurricular activities
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Satisfactory
 - d) Not satisfactory
- D) Regular information on progress achieved by your child
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Satisfactory

d) Not satisfactory

17. To what extent are you satisfied with the work of the Early Years Education Professional?

- a) Very satisfied
- b). Satisfied
- c) Not at all satisfied

18. How well do you know how Early Years Education Professionals assessment is made?

- a) I know how Early Years Education Professional are assessed, including the results of the evaluation (grades obtained)
- b) I only know how the evaluation is done without knowing the results
- c) I do not know the evaluation process or results

19. Have you been asked this school year to evaluate Early Years Education Professional in the setting?

- a) Yes
- b) No

20. How do you communicate with your child's Early Years Education Professionals?

- a) at meetings
- b) Informal discussions
- c) Individual consultations
- d) Telephone (including SMS) or email
- e) I do not communicate in any way

21. How often do you communicate (using any of the communication methods indicated above) with your child's Early Years Education Professionals?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) 1-3 times per semester
- e) Once a year or less
- f) I do not communicate in any way

GOVERNANCE & FUNDING

22. Have you been consulted in drafting the setting budget for the current school year?

- a) Yes
- b) No

23. Have you been informed in any way (presentation at parent meetings, etc.) about how the setting budget was spent?

- a) Yes
- b) No

24. How do you rate the communication between leadership in the setting and parents?

- a) Very good
- b) Good
- c) Satisfactory
- d) Not satisfactory

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 2 – *Early Years' Setting Charter*

Tool 3 – *Plan for an Inclusive ECEC Service*

Tool 5 – *Platform to Communicate with Parents*

Tool 8 – *Nurturing Relations with and Amongst Children*

Tool 9 – *Nurturing Learning Environments*

Tool 24 – *Coaching*

REFERENCES

FamilyEduNet Guideline for planning Successful Educational Action

<http://familyedunet.blogspot.hu/p/guidelines.html>

Guiding Principles for the Development and Analysis of Early Childhood Public Policy (US National Association for the Education of Young Children)

<https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSGUID98.PDF>

SMART planning <https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals.php>

Whole child approach to reach their unique potential approach <http://l4wb.org/#/en/we-promote/page/a-framework>

TOOL 5: PLATFORM TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 1 – Provision that is available and affordable to all families and children

Statement 2 – Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

WHAT

A VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), or learning platform, is an online system that allows ECEC staff to share educational materials with their children, carers/parents/families via the web. At the outset, it is important to establish the most effective and appropriate method of communication through in consultation with parents and the Early Years Education Professional in the setting. Examples include Moodle, Web CT and Blackboard. One can also create a Secret or a Closed group on Facebook.

OBJECTIVES

- To share the current activities and experiences of the curriculum, words of songs, the books being used, as well as information updates (digital newsletter)
- To support real connection for children between the home and the setting
- To give parents and families an insight into the daily activities and experiences the children
- To encourage children to revisit, talk about and share their experiences parents and families
- To optimise parents/carers-educators communication
- To facilitate the sharing of news and information parents and Early Years Education Professional
- To foster parental involvement, and in turn, improve children development
- To upload or link resources to make them available to parents that can be used at home with their children as a continuation of what is being done at the ECEC setting

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: ECEC management; ECEC staff (both private and public), parents, families, carers

Indirect: public authorities

CHILDREN AGE GROUP 3 – 6

WHEN

Throughout the year

HOW

For many parents, connecting with ECEC staff and staying in the loop about their children's progress in ECEC settings is of the utmost importance. Thus, the Platform has the potential to create and/or reinforce a positive attitude towards ECEC settings, representing an extension of the physical classroom. Please consider the following aspects and steps in order to develop your own:

- Consultation with parents/carers about their views on the use of any such platform. Definition of an agreed access management system in order to fully respect children and Early Years Education Professionals
 - privacy (see Good Practices section). Photos are an extremely delicate issue and dealt with differently in various countries. Thus, it is important that a consent form is presented to all parents/carers and they have to give their consent for photos of

their children to be uploaded. It is important to consider also that in many cases, online platforms have ownership of whatever has been uploaded. Therefore, on these private platforms and on the Secret/Closed Facebook group, the administrator has to limit the audience to only parents/families/carers. It is also important to sign a form where they state their agreement and that will not share or tag any photos from the group if using Facebook.

- After the consultation phase the ECEC setting should nominate a member of the staff to act as an Administrator, who will moderate the posts/communications as well as to intervene to solve technical problems which do not require highly-specialised professionals. Posts uploaded should be moderated by this person before making them visible.
- The ECEC setting can invest in a virtual online platform where Early Years Education Professionals

can upload resources, photos, video clips.

- One can also create a group (not a page – as pages are accessible to all) which can be a closed or a secret group on social media platforms such as Facebook, where Early Years Education Professionals can upload photos and children’s work. A Secret/Closed group is not visible by people who are not members. Members are also asked for example to list the name of their children and class before being accepted, so that no members are accepted if they are not relatives of pupils attending that institution. Members should be only parents or legal guardians. This is an easy way of communicating. Photos uploaded should be only of those children whose parents have given consent.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 4 – Needs Analysis and Planning

Tool 15 – Parents Involved in Children’s Learning

OTHER RESOURCES / GOOD PRACTICES

MALTA

- ILearn Platform – introduced in 2012, it provides a virtual school building where Early Years Education Professional can easily upload any material they may need to share with their students. It also serves as a place where students can communicate in a safe environment.

<https://ilearn.edu.mt>

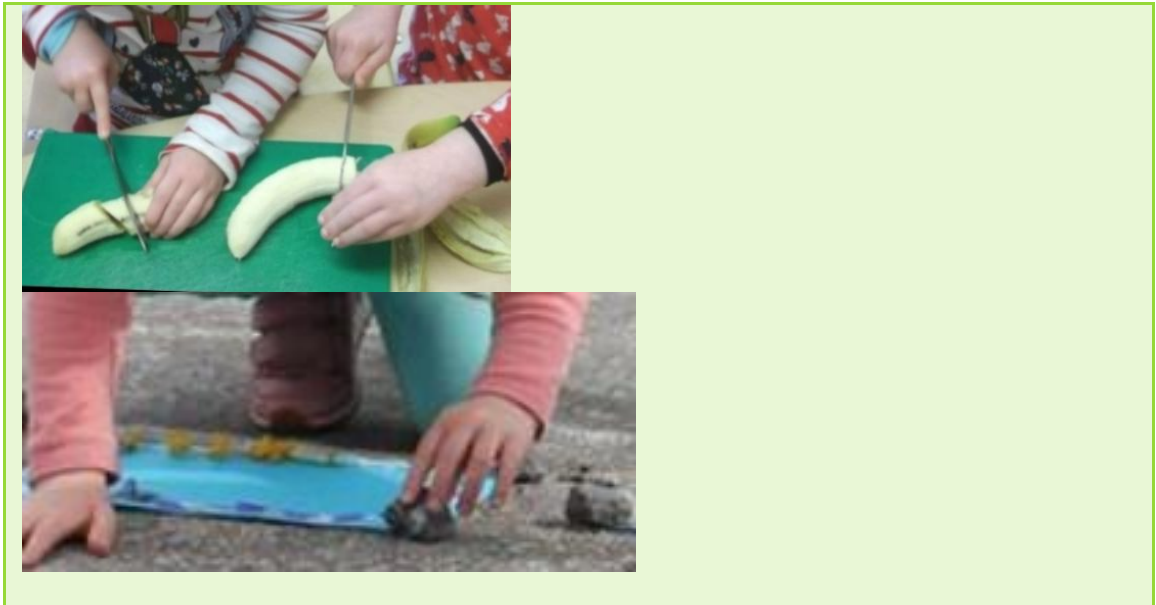
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1406608316263346/>

IRELAND

Many Irish settings have Facebook pages where they share the children’s activities with parents. Children cannot be identified in any of the photos and show “zoomed in images” of activities that don’t include children’s faces.

Another example – the setting stores images on a shared cloud and parents need a password to access it. Previous individual parental permission is sought to upload photos and parents agree not to download and share photos of other children in the setting.

Examples of possible photos:

**REFERENCES**

<http://www.bbcactive.com/BBCActiveIdeasandResources/WhyyoushoulduseaVirtualLearningEnvironment.aspx>

TOOL 6: INCLUSION OF ALL CHILDREN ACTIVITY

QUALITY AREA

Access – Statement 2 – Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

WHAT

Activity aimed at fostering inclusion of all children, to be held at the ECEC setting, involving children, ECEC staff, parents and families

OBJECTIVES

- To develop and optimise bio-psycho-social abilities of the child, and to improve child-child, child-educator, educator-parent and parent-parent relationship
- To develop the necessary skills to make friends (for example, how to join other children that are playing, how to ask and share toys, how to help others)
- To understand children's emotions
- To help children manage their emotions and support them to understand that these emotions are normal
- To support children in developing empathy and understanding of the similarities and differences between children, their cultures, etc.
- To identify and name children's own emotions and those of others, to link them to the context in which they typically occur (for example, the joy of receiving a gift, sadness when something hurts etc.)
- To help children manage challenges in interacting with others (defining their problem, search and find adequate solutions)

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Parents/families/carers; ECEC staff (both private and public), children

Indirect: ECEC management; public authorities

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: 3 – 6

WHEN

Throughout the year, mainly when new children join the ECEC setting

HOW

A really good way to achieve the expected objectives is through play, with the support of an insightful and respectful adult.

- The activities proposed imply the development of specific play-based activities to be carried out at the ECEC setting as well as at home after having experienced them with the Early Years Education Professionals. Within these activities, children and parents are involved, as are grandparents and people that are involved in their education and care.

Steps needed to organise this activity and actions for involving parents effectively: During the meetings with the parents, at the beginning of the school year, the activity is presented and described, in order to collect parents and carers availability.

The method of doing this activity: the family environment. The people involved must come to the ECEC setting and provide transport of the children to one of their homes. Number of children: maximum 6 (multiple groups can be created).

Time: 60-90 minutes

- They are asked to make a list of people who want to participate in this project and sign it. Before the start of this project, the Early Years Education Professional together with the parents who are willing to participate will meet and discuss issues related to the environment in which the child lives. The educator provides parents with information about how these activities will take place, time needed and required materials. In the beginning, these activities will be carried out by the Early Years Education Professional and then they will be carried out by the parents. Following a description, games are carried out with children between 3-6 years old, activities through which they are stimulated to discover and practice various kinds of emotions, to discover themselves and to develop their personality. An important fact to be mentioned is that each child hosting the group is able to choose between games, to set rules, to present their own house and room.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 8 – *Nurturing Relationships with and Amongst Children*

Tool 15 – *Parents Involved in Children’s Learning*

OTHER RESOURCES / GOOD PRACTICES

<u>ROMANIA</u>	
“At the car wash”	Materials
Children are invited to choose cards with human faces representing different kinds of emotional states: happiness – joy, sadness – sorrow. Happy girls place themselves in two rows. Between the two rows will pass only the children who have chosen the girls with sad faces. The latter will receive from the cheerful colleagues words of praise in order to highlight their qualities, hugs and handshakes, all these with the purpose of changing their mood. Consequently, each child who enters “dirty” in the car wash, after a process of cleaning he/she will come out “clean”.	Cards with human faces, allowing children to explore the full range of emotions
„A journey with surprises”	Materials
This sensory game is very funny and pleasant for children. It might be used with various themes: a trip in the jungle where the children will meet different animals, an underwater journey, weather change, the cooking of a cake. The child will choose the theme depending on his/her curiosity. All these journeys will take place on the back of the child. For instance, on his/her back might walk elephants, snakes, frogs, rabbits and tigers. The child could also feel the touch of water or waves, fish and starfish. As well, it might rain lightly, then heavily, thunders and lightning, in order to have a sunrise and rainbow in the end. Afterwards, you may propose the children to massage you, using one of the themes or to invent a new journey if he/she wishes. In this way, the child learns how to distribute his/her energy and the way he/she touches, he/she may differentiate the types of touches, may understand when he/she touches too hard so that to harm a person, and finally the children develop their imagination. Some children will love this activity and others might find the element of touch etc. difficult . Maybe there are some other ideas within the group	Stuffed animals, water, bottles etc.

,for example, reading a story that depicts children from different backgrounds, abilities etc./using bean bags etc.	
“Feet Bath”	Materials
In four small tubs you will pour water that is at different temperatures. Each child will enter with bare feet the tubs one after the other. He/She will feel the temperature of the water and will say which of them is the coldest, cold, warm and warmest. With a temperature thermometer, it will be assessed ho putting their feet in the water felt. Variations: The child will place the tubs in order, according to temperature. Instead of feeling the water temperature with their legs they will feel it with their hands. Two children are playing together. One child will insert his hands and the other his feet. They will make a decision together.	4 small tubs with water at different temperatures, towels, thermometer to measure water temperatures.
Invitation for parents –Saying Hi	Materials
As a way of inviting parents into children’s games can be done in a form of the song “Hi, hello, I’m glad that you’re here”. During this time, everybody stays in circle and wave at each other and the parent will enter the circle.	Guitar
Games developed with a parent that is present	Materials
The child will stand exactly in front of the parent like standing in front of a mirror. First, the child will make a move that the parent must imitate almost simultaneously. Then, the roles change. The parent who is present creates obstacles over or under which children must pass.	None
“Bubble Exchange”	Materials
In the game, everyone will sit again in the circle. All players will receive one glue and one colour. You will alternatively name two, three of them and those who have those colours will change their seats. At the cry „The balloons fly” everyone will change their seats.	Coloured glue, balloons made out of card board
Common dinner	Materials
In the end, snacks will be served, which will be prepared by children in advance.	Food, drinks
Farewell	
As a farewell, the song „Hi, hello, I’m glad that you’re here” can be played differently.	



WORKFORCE

The quality of the care and education received by young children is greatly influenced by role of the Early Years Education Professional. Research consistently links the level and quality of the initial and on-going training of the adult directly to the quality of the learning outcomes for children. While the initial qualifications required to be an Early Years Education Professional may differ in many European countries, the value of on-going professional development is universally seen as essential to this role. While there may be constraints within the physical environment or the curriculum content, the emotional environment created for children and families and appealing and meaningful curriculum content is very much in the hands of the Early Years Education Professional team within the early years setting. In addition to nurturing reflective practice, on-going professional development ensures the adults who ignite life- long learning in young children also experience it- by being committed, open to new learning, carrying out action research and engaging in further training and professional dialogue with families, colleagues and other professionals.

Within this section of the Toolkit the Early Years Education Professional is supported in very practical ways to engage in professional development by critically reflecting on:

- *all the influences on their daily work with children, (Tool 7),*
- *their relationships with and amongst children (Tool 8),*
- *the environment they create (Tool 9),*
- *incorporating their unique strengths and interests into their work with children and families (Tool 10).*

In addition to helping Early Years Education Professionals identify supports and resources needed to enhance their work, these tools will also support managers when providing regular support and supervision and appraisals (Tools 7-10) and in empowering staff by delegating tasks based on staff's skills, experience and interests (Tool 11).

TOOL 7: REFLECTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

QUALITY AREA

Workforce – Statement 3 – A well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

Statement 4 – Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

WHAT

A pack to assist Early Years Education Professionals to identify relevant supports needed to fulfil their professional role by reflecting on their own professional development and evaluating their skills and challenges. Child-free hours are essential for Early Years Education Professionals to engage in this process. Team discussion, support and supervision, appraisals and further formal or in-service training and other resources will be necessary to support Early Years Education Professionals to address their personal challenges and engage with effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

OBJECTIVES

To support each to reflect on, document and track professional development process for each Early Years Education Professional involved, in order to identify and recognise:

- individual strengths and challenges in their role
- areas for further development
- supportive working conditions needed to improve the quality of care and education

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: educators, managers

Indirect: children, parents, families, carers

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

On-going, at planned stages: initially and twice yearly thereafter

HOW

The ECEC setting managers invite Early Years Education Professional and other ECEC staff to fill in the attached templates individually, in order to identify individual professional strengths and challenges:

- reflect on daily practice [template a]]
- reflect on the strengths of, and challenges for, each child and family within the group [template b]]
- reflect on recent developments in the ECEC sector [template c]]
- reflect on your professional strengths and challenges [template d]]
- identify available resources to further support you in your role [template e]]

Then, during an ad hoc meeting, all the ECEC setting staff discuss what emerged from the reflections and define a work plan, detailing the interventions required and the expected impacts and results. This is intended as an individual educators' plan to be shared with the manager. Nonetheless, other team members may be the support or it may indicate a trend in the teams' requirement for the manager.

Template a) **My reflection on daily practice**

To assist you in completing your personal professional reflection please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible

What parts of the daily routine do I enjoy most?

Why?

What parts of the daily routine do I find stressful? (Is this a stressful time for the children also?)

Why?

What might be done to reduce/relieve the stressful times of the day? (consider the physical environment, the timing, time allotted, adult/child ratios, other considerations)

What can I do?

What can the team do?

What can supervisor /manager do?

Use this information to complete template 5(d) to help you as a professional educator to identify

Template b) **My reflection on the group of children in my care.**

Complete one box for each child in your care to assist you to reflect on the strengths of and supports required for each child. (e.g. a child may be very capable but needs extra support because his/her first language is not the language spoken in the childcare setting). The reflection may be supported by colleagues, parents, outside help. The information on this template informs the final template where supports and resources are identified.

Use this information to complete template 5 d) to identify strategies to help you as an Early Years Education Professionals to provide the supports required for each child



<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>	<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>
<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>	<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>
<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>	<p>Child's Initial: _____ <u>Strengths</u></p> <p><u>Supports Required</u></p>

Photocopy this page to record information for each child in your care

Template c) **My reflection on changes & developments in ECEC**

Take time to consider changes and developments in your setting, and at a local and national level. Identify the changes that may pose a challenge for you as an Early Years Education Professionals

Changes in my setting (*consider operational and structural changes, the changes in the team composition, diversity of children and families attending, etc.*)

Changes at local level (*new or revised requirements by the local authority or municipality, diversity in the local population*)

Use this information to complete template 5 (d) to identify further supports you may need as a professional educator to address these challenges

Changes at National level (*consider new/revised legislation, guidelines or policies*)

1Template d) **My Strategies for engaging in professional development**

Strategy	Area		
	Daily Practice (a)	Child's Individual needs (b)	Changes & Developments (c)
Reflective Journal Keeping			
Personal research -on-line, text books, articles, subscription to professional publications			
Action research (Plan, Do, Check Act Monitor review)			
Peer support – discussions with colleagues			



Professional affiliation e.g. member of a Teachers' Union, or other organisation			
Member of a professional network			
Consultation with manager/management			
Consultation with Parents/Family			
Support and supervision			
Appraisals (Meeting with Manager to discuss CPD)			
Mentor			
Coaching			
In-service training			
On-line courses			
Workshops			
Mandatory re-training			
Additional training			
Specialised training			
Liaising with other professionals or organisations			
Study trips/Mobility Programmes			
Seminars/conferences			
Other (please specify)			

Adapted from: Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association, (2009). Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education. IPPA. Dublin

Educator's Name: _____ Date: _____

Use the information recorded on templates 5(a), 5 (b) & 5(c) to help you identify possible strategies to engage in professional development.

Template e) My action plan for professional development

Wish/Challenge	Intervention/ Action required	Resources required	Expected impact	Timeframe

Name: _____

Date: _____

This template can be used during individual support and supervision with the manager

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

- Tool 3** – Plan for an Inclusive ECEC Service
- Tool 8** – Nurturing Relationships with and Amongst Children
- Tool 10** – Nurturing Professional Development
- Tool 11** – Empowering ECEC Staff
- Tool 16** – Pedagogical Documentation
- Tool 19** – Self-Assessment Grid
- Tool 21** – Logbook
- Tool 23** – Parents’ External Evaluation
- Tool 29** – Participative Leadership Approach
- Tool 33** – Successful Educational Action

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

ISSA’s Principle 7.1

Siolta standard 10 (components 10.4, 10.5 – http://siolta.ie/daycare_standard10.php)
 Siolta Standard 11 (components 11.1, 11.3,11.4 – http://siolta.ie/daycare_standard11.php)

Aistear Guidelines for Good Practice

http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Guidelines_ENG.pdf

ROMANIA

Teachers allocate time to meet weekly where they plan their activities together for the next week, discuss the issues encountered, and set a plan to solve these issues. They also organise monthly meetings through methodical activities. During these meetings, all Early Years Education Professionals meet with the kindergarten director and discuss about the issues that arose and each educator has to present a filmed activity. The Early Years Education Professional receives feedback on the work to improve the quality of early education. Feedback is given on the quality of each Early Years Education Professional completing his/ her school documents and conducting his/ her group activities.

Semi-annual meetings through Pedagogical Circles on development levels – in these meetings, all Early Years Education Professionals from the small group meet together with a Pedagogical Circle Coordinator who addresses a certain topic received in advance. During these meetings, each educator is given the opportunity to present his/ her point of view on the topic. In this way, each Early Years Education Professional can improve and enrich his/ her activities. These activities are presented through filmed activities, through papers, through role play in which the Early Years Education Professional take the role of a child and another the educator together perform sequence of activities. The Early Years Education Professionals focus on promoting creativity and pedagogical mastery. The Pedagogical Circle Coordinator ensures that each Early Years Education Professionals receive all presentations by email. In the end, Pedagogical Circle Coordinators meet and work on a brochure or book with these models of activities.

TOOL 8: NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND AMONGST CHILDREN

QUALITY AREA

Workforce - Statement 3 - A well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

Statement 4 – Supportive working conditions including professional leadership⁷ which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

WHAT

Short suggestions for practice to support Early Year Education Professionals nurture relationships with and amongst children

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To help Early Years Education Professionals to reflect on the quality of the relationships with and amongst children and the current practices adopted
- To motivate staff to reflect on their practice and evaluate how they support children to develop high levels of well-being and positive self and group identities
- To help Early Years Education Professionals and staff identify and negotiate actions to further improve practice
- To evidence how favourable and supportive working conditions can affect relationships with and amongst children

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: educators, managers

Indirect: children, parents, families, carers

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

On-going practice

HOW

The short suggestions for practice indicates key actions to be followed by Early Years Education Professionals and ECEC staff, during the different phases of daily work, in order to achieve the defined objectives:

Before Attending and During the Initial Settling-In Period

- Gather relevant information sensitively from the family/parents/carers about the child's cultural background, care practices and individual preferences before starting in the ECEC setting
- Invite the child and family (parents and carers) to visit prior to starting in the setting to support smooth transitions
- Support parents/families/carers during the settling-in period

Daily Routine at the Setting

- Allocate a key worker who will have special responsibility for the child by observing his/her learning and progress, and liaises with the family/parents/carers

⁷ Leadership is here intended as the ECEC setting manager in charge of both creating supportive working conditions and opportunities for their and staff observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

- Provide flexible settling- in strategies
- Closely observe the child to become familiar with his/her cues/signals/temperament
- Adopt flexible routines to meet the individual preferences/interests/needs of the child
- Discover the activities or materials in the setting of interest to the child
- Discover the child's funds of knowledge – knowledge they may acquire, in a particular area as result of family activities [e.g. beekeeping -see link to example]
- Provide opportunities for the child to build and extend their knowledge and interests
- Respond positively and respectfully to the child's emotions
- Use one-to-one care routines to build close positive relationships with the child
- Name the child's actions and emotions in the moment to support self-registration and language development, particularly for the child who has not yet developed expressive language or the child whose first language differs from the main language spoken in the setting
- Demonstrate positive regard for each child in your care
- Acknowledge and share the child's achievement with the child, family and other children
- Connect children to each other
- Encourage kindness and friendship amongst children
- Support the development of empathy amongst children
- Refer children to more capable peers for help as appropriate
- Empower children to manage conflict in a consistent manner
- Model positive interactions for children at all times with children, with colleagues, with parents, families and carers.

Template. a) **Reflecting on current practice**

How do you show respect to young children in your care?

How do you nurture young children's sense of emotional well-being?

How do you develop authentic relationships with young children in your care?

Ref: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (2009) *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin, NCCA.
 Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (2006). *Siolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, Dublin, CECDE.
 Aarts, M.(2000) *Marte Meo Basic Manual* the Netherlands, Aarts Publications.

Template b) Reflecting on current practice

How do you begin to develop a relationship with infants, young children and their families before they begin to attend your centre?

How do you support smooth transition of infants and young children into and out of your setting each day?

What strategies are in place to support you to build a secure relationship with infants and young children in your setting?

What care routines do you perform each day with infants and young children?

How much of your daily routine is devoted to these care routines?

How do you ensure that care routines deepen your relationship with infants and young children?

How do you nurture your relationship with infants and young children during play time?

How do you nurture connections between infants and young children on a daily basis?

How do you ensure you nurture a responsive caring relationship with all children in your care?

How does your relationship with colleagues & families provide positive role modelling for infants and young children?

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

- Tool 4** – Needs Analysis and Planning
- Tool 7** – Reflecting Professional Development
- Tool 12** – 4 Pillars Curriculum
- Tool 19** – Self-Assessment Grid

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

Síolta standards, 5,
 Aistear Theme: Communicating
 Marte Meo method of communicating

Consultation and Participation

It is important that children, parents, families, staff and other relevant stakeholders are consulted about relevant areas of provision. However, consultation alone does not ensure everyone’s participation. Information gathered through consultation must be considered and acted upon and those consulted should be informed of the results/impact of the consultation.

Mosaic approach

The Mosaic approach combines a number of methods to support young children to express their views on matters which effect them. For example, to explore what children like about the setting, the materials they prefer, their favourite place etc:

- Give the child a camera to take photographs of the above;
- The child takes the Early Years Education Professional on a tour of the setting and points out the above;
- Child can paint or draw in response to any of the above questions;
- The child can give their opinion of areas, materials in the setting by showing them photographs and recording their comments.

For children who are not yet verbal or whose first language is not the main language spoken in the setting it is important that Early Years Education Professionals are attentive to children cues, gestures and actions to indicate preferences. Props such as real materials or photographs can be used as visual aids.

ROMANIA

Following, a questionnaire for children developed within the “Scoala Altfel” (A Different School) programme: “Know more, be better”

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN

GROUP: _____

1. 1. Make a circle around 2 of the activities you enjoyed the most in the week "Scoala Altfel": "Know more, be better!".





2. Draw how you felt during these activities.
3. Draw other activities you would like us to do in "Scoala Aitfel: "Know more, be better! "

REFERENCES

Funds of Knowledge:

<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FundsofKnowledge.pdf>

Building Positive Teacher-Child Relationships:

csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb12.pdf

Kei Tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars is a best practice guide that will help teachers continue to improve the quality of their teaching:

<https://education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/assessment-for-learning/kei-tua-o-te-pae-2/assessment-for-infants-and-toddlers-he-aromatawai-kohungahunga-tamariki/reciprocal-and-responsive-relationships-nga-whakawhanaungatanga/>

Mosaic approach:

https://in.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43997_9781446207529.pdf

Consultation in practice -example from the Australian Museum:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10645578.2011.557626?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

TOOL 9: NURTURING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

QUALITY AREA:

Workforce Statement 3 – A well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

WHAT

Short suggestions for practice to support Early Years Education Professionals in reflecting on the learning environments to ensure it is nurturing, rich and stimulates all children's holistic development.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To ensure that the indoor and outdoor learning environments provide all children with spaces, materials and equipment to encourage creativity, curiosity, imagination and support children's independence and encourage appropriate risk taking
- To allow children to choose from a wide variety of activities and materials, suited to their family and cultural background, interests, abilities and dispositions and exhibit high levels of well-being
- To support children's holistic development through enriching environments, where the environment is considered "The third adult" affording educators time to observe and listen to children's conversations and plan a meaningful curriculum for the children in their group

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: children, educators, managers,

Indirect: parents, potential parents, families, carers, external evaluators

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Initially – each team is responsible for their own room and all the team take responsibility for shared areas such as entrances, corridors, outside areas. Reflection on environments is ongoing to accommodate children's progressive learning, changing interests and group dynamics.

HOW

How does your environment:

- Convey respect for the children, families and Early Years Education Professionals in your centre?
- Welcome all children, families, carers including those from diverse backgrounds and those with differing abilities?
- Nurture all children's sense of identity and belonging?
- Reflect the diversity of children, families, carers attending the setting? For example, posters, materials, books, props and equipment?
- Display images of the children and families and children's work respectfully at the children's eye level?
- Offer children defined interest areas indoor and outdoor -including book area, home area, cozy area for relaxing, areas to construct, to be creative, to problem-solve, to be with friends or to be alone?
- Promote a sense of calm and order – for example, neutral colours, adequate accessible storage, uncluttered walls and shelves?

- Provide material and equipment relevant to the children's stage of development and interests?
- Provide different materials as provocations – real, natural, sensory, open-ended, loose parts?
- Provide appropriate challenges for children?
- Encourage children to explore and experiment both indoors and outdoors?
- Support children to experience nature in all seasons?
- Provide comfortable, pleasant and, when necessary, private spaces for all children, adults and visitors?

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 3 – *Plan for an Inclusive ECEC Service*

Tool 4 – *Needs Analysis and Planning*

Tool 12 – *4 Pillars Curriculum*

Tool 13 – *ECEC Setting Mission Statement*

REFERENCES

Aistear Síolta practice guide Learning Environments Birth to Three:

<http://www.ncca.ie/en/Practice-Guide/Creating-And-Using-The-Learning-Environment/Creating-and-Using-the-Learning-Environment-Self-evaluation-Tool-Babies-and-Toddlers-birth-3-years-.pdf>

Aistear Síolta practice guide Learning Environments 3 – 6 years: <http://www.ncca.ie/en/Practice-Guide/Creating-And-Using-The-Learning-Environment/Self-evaluation-Tools/Creating-and-Using-the-Learning-Environment-Self-evaluation-Tool-Young-Children-3-6-years-.pdf>

Síolta Standard 2 Environments and Standard 6 Play

<http://siolta.ie/media/pdfs/23746%20Full%20and%20Part%20Time%20Text.pdf>

TOOL 10: NURTURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

QUALITY AREA:

Workforce Statement 4 – Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

WHAT

Supporting managers in early years settings to nurture the professional development of Early Years Education Professionals

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To support managers to provide professional leadership
- To support managers to adhere to employment legislation and best practice
- To support regular professional dialogue between the manager and the individual Early Years Education Professionals and individual auxiliary staff
- To support reflective practice among Early Years Education Professionals and auxiliary staff
- To encourage and support Early Years Education Professionals and auxiliary staff to engage in various methods of professional development on a continuous basis.
- To ensure Early Years Education Professionals and other staff are valued and supported in their roles and responsibilities

Child free time is essential to achieve these objectives

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: educators, managers, auxiliary staff

Indirect: children, parents

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

On-going

HOW

- Managers nurture a supportive, collaborative atmosphere with and amongst all staff
- Managers are familiar with and comply with employment legislation and best practice guidelines when recruiting, inducting and regularly supporting early years education professionals and auxiliary staff in their roles.
- The early years setting has clear policies and procedures for recruiting, inducting and supporting all staff
- There is documented evidence of each staff members' recruitment and induction and individual support and appraisal sessions.
- Managers ensure all staff receive regular support and supervision and annual appraisals
- There is documented evidence of each staff members support and supervision and appraisal sessions.
- Managers identify how supports required by all staff can be met
- Managers ensure they themselves receive time and supports to reflect upon and carry out their role and responsibilities
- Managers invite staff's suggestions to further promote all staff's well-being and team spirit within the centre.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

Tool 12 – *4 Pillars Curriculum*

Tool 18 – *Mentoring in Monitoring and Evaluation*

Tool 19 – *Self-Assessment Grid*

TOOL 11: EMPOWERING ECEC STAFF

QUALITY AREA:

Workforce Statement 4 – Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

WHAT

A model to nurture collaboration and teamwork with and amongst all staff in the early years setting. Time is required for staff to reflect on and share their skills etc. and to discuss possibilities.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To affirm staff members' unique strengths, skills, knowledge, experience and relevant interests and explore possible ways to share and utilise them within the centre.
- To share and integrate new learning into practice
- To enrich team work and enhance practice

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: educators, managers, auxiliary staff

Indirect: children, parents

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Initially, with the whole centre staff and on-going as new training or hobbies are pursued and as new staff join the team

HOW

- Support all staff to identify their unique skills, knowledge, experience and interests (see template 1)
- Provide space, time and a variety of ways for staff to share and discuss these with all other staff members
- Provide a variety of ways for staff members to reflect on and share new learning from training, research, conferences etc. (see template 2)
- explore ways to incorporate skills, knowledge, experiences and interests into their work

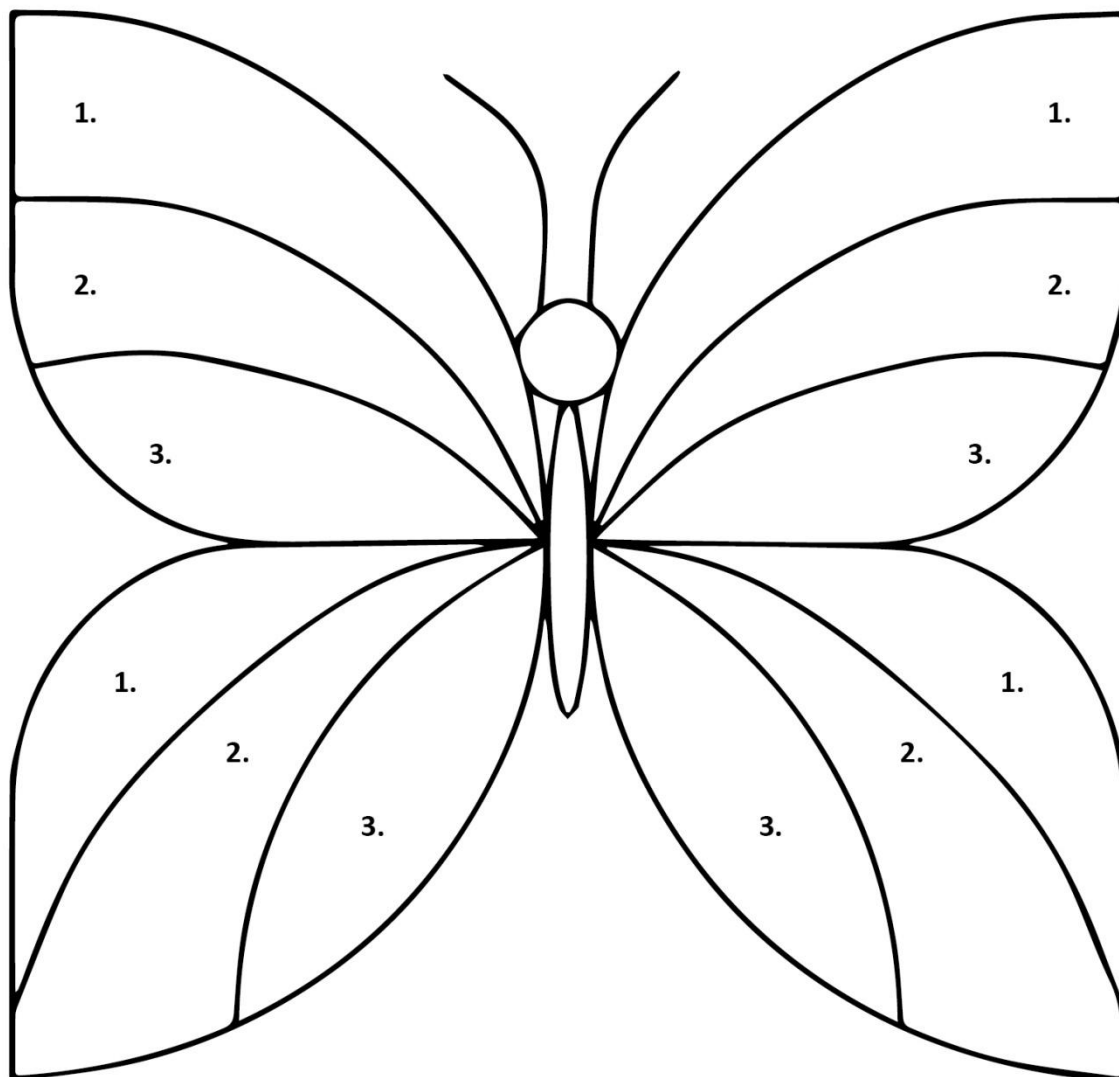
Template 1

Take some time to reflect on your unique professional strengths, skills and knowledge and then on your personal talents, interests and experiences. (Your colleagues might help you with this exercise). When you have identified these note them on the left side of the butterfly. Then think about how you might incorporate your uniqueness into your work with children, families and colleagues. Note these on the right side of the butterfly.



Professional role:
What are my unique strengths?
What are my unique skills?
What unique knowledge do I have?

Practice:
 How can I further integrate my unique strengths, skills and knowledge in my work?



Personal attributes:
What unique talents do I have?
What unique Interests do I have?
What unique experience do I have?

Practice:
 How can I further integrate my unique strengths, skills and knowledge in my work?



Template 2

Origin of information/new learning <i>(e.g. article, seminar, training, conversation with other professionals)</i>	Information/new learning	Considerations/discussion/implications for practice	Actions to be taken

Name: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

Tool 12 – *4 Pillars Curriculum*

REFERENCES

Síolta - Standard 10 Components 10.4 & 10.5 and Standard 11 components 11.3 & 11.4



CURRICULUM

In this Toolkit curriculum refers not only to the content, (What we do) but also the context in which we deliver it (Where and How we do it). When planning the curriculum, it is important to keep to the fore the image of the child as a capable, competent, active learner. The uniqueness of each child's personality, cultural background, funds of knowledge and learning style requires Early Years Education Professionals to constantly reflect on how they support each child's learning and development.

While acknowledging that some European countries have a specific curriculum, others have broader curriculum frameworks, or follow a particular curriculum approach (e.g. Montessori, Steiner, etc) this section of the Toolkit supports Early Years Education Professionals to incorporate the Four Pillars of Learning identified as essential for 21st century education. In addition, respecting children as competent capable learners, who have theories, ideas and questions about the world in which they live, requires a balance of child initiated and adult initiated, play based curriculum contents (the emergent, play based curriculum). While there is comfort and certainty for Early Years Education Professional in planning the curriculum for a whole year in advance, the challenge for Early Years Education Professionals is to share responsibility for curriculum with the children with whom they work and incorporate their diverse and changing interests. Tools 12– 4 Pillars Curriculum and supports reflection on curriculum content and offers some suggestions. Other suggestions are offered in Tool 14.- Curriculum for Environmental Education

Parents as the primary educators of their children, should be informed of the early years setting's approach to the curriculum to help them decide if it fulfils their expectations and is suitable for their child

(Tool 13). Research tells us that parents who engage in their children's early education remain engaged through their school years and tool 15- Parents Involved in Children's Learning and Tool 16. Pedagogical Documentation supports early years settings offers suggestions to support parental engagement. Sharing pedagogical documentation also makes learning visible for the child supporting them to develop a positive self-image as a learner, an important foundation for life-long learning.

TOOL 12: 4 PILLARS CURRICULUM

QUALITY AREA

Curriculum – Statement 5 – A curriculum should be based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches that enable children to holistically reach their full potential.

WHAT

The curriculum should define and implement a proposal to aid Early Years Education Professionals in creating effective learning environments for 3-6 years. These environments should support and promote children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

The curriculum should provide opportunities for all children to engage in a wide variety of activities and experiences, to explore and experiment with a range of materials, including natural, real and open-ended items. The curriculum should also incorporate time for discussion to facilitate co-construction of knowledge and meaning-making

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To plan and describe the opportunities the Early Years Education Professionals will provide, with children and parents, and according to the different children’s needs and interests. This is based on 4 main pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together;
- To improve the quality of the pedagogical activities to be developed during the year. Diverse, social & cultural background along with the local environment should be included.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Early Years Education Professionals & ECEC staff.

Indirect: Children, Parents, Families.

CHILDREN AGE GROUP 3 – 6

WHEN

At the beginning of the school year.

HOW

The pedagogical staff at the beginning of the school year defines the plan through which the 4 *Pillars of Curriculum* will be developed. These principles should be followed:

1. The learning to know pillar is about developing competencies in cognitive tools, including literacy, numeracy and life skills. These competencies help children to understand and build a relationship with the world around them. Learning to know implies learning how to learn through activities that help concentration, memory skills and thinking skills. In supporting the Learning to become familiar with the pillars, Early Years Education Professionals nurture children’s positive dispositions towards learning. This includes resilience, independence, perseverance, risk-taking and decision-making.

It is important to ensure children have time, opportunities and choices to:

Explore materials through their senses:

- Find and explore real materials such as; shells, corks, smooth stones, fabrics of different textures, feathers, pine cones.
- Suitable items made from metal, wood & leather.

- Sand, water, playdough.
- Gloop, finger paint, foam.
- Windchimes, wind socks, windmills, mobiles (perhaps made from C.D's).
- Shakers, rattlers, musical instruments.
- Herbs in the garden or pots to touch and smell.
- Fruit and vegetable to smell and taste.
- Peg-boards, threading, cutting, sticking, jig-saws etc.

Engage in physical activity:

- Tummy time, rolling over, crawling, pulling to stand, climbing, running, jumping, throwing, swinging, sliding, balancing.

Express themselves creatively:

- Large chunky crayons/chalk for babies and toddlers.
- Markers, crayons, pencils for drawing.
- Paints, brushes variety of paper etc.
- Junk materials – egg cartons, card, ribbon, string, bottle tops, etc.
- construction materials – blocks, sticks, cardboard boxes of various sizes.
- Singing, dancing, acting.
- Role-play – doctors, workers, hairdressers, mothers and fathers, dentist etc and accompanying props, tea-sets, dolls, dress up etc.

Develop language skills:

- Lullabies, rhymes, songs action-rhymes.
- Puppets, phones, microphones.
- Variety of books, photographs, posters, making story books, acting out stories.
- Games such as peek a boo, Hide and seek, word games, picture games.
- Engage in discussions in pairs, small groups and large groups with adults.

2. The learning to do pillar is developed by a mix of skills and experiences. By involving people living in the local environment, children can learn skills and capacities that may be needed to perform specific tasks in the early years setting and in the community at large.

Ensure children have time and opportunities to become competent and confident by:

Developing self-care skills:

- Children are involved in feeding themselves, their own hygiene, dressing themselves and taking care of their own belongings.

Caring for the playroom/classroom environment by:

- Using materials and equipment carefully.
- Tidying away materials and equipment.
- Growing and tending to seeds, bulbs, plants.
- Using real tools responsibly- Scissors, staplers, sweeping brushes, dustpans, trowels, cutlery etc.

Exploring roles and helping within early years setting:

- Cook, Maintenance person, administrator etc. (where relevant and appropriate)

Exploring different roles with the community:

- Invite parents, grandparents and other family members to share their roles, skills or hobbies. Arrange visits to or from Emergency services, Police service, road safety etc.

3. The learning to be pillar is developed through personal discovery. This involves the exposure to and enrichment of opportunities to explore creativity. It involves body, mind and spirit and promotes holistic personal development.

Provide opportunities for children to explore and appreciate:

- The arts
Wide range of books – poetry, fiction, factual
Introduce author and illustrator in each book
Support children to make their own books
Introduce famous:
Artists - discuss light, colour, etc.
Musicians - listen to a variety of music, explore musical instruments.
Dancers - Ballet, modern, old-time etc.
Invite parents to share the arts from their culture.
Visit the local libraries, art galleries and theatres.
- Sport
Identify and explore sports families are interested in, local /national/international sport.
- Science
Explore and discuss simple scientific experiments e.g. making play dough.

4. The learning to live together is based on diversity, similarities and differences, individualities.

Motto: "It's OK to be the same and it's OK to be different!"

Provide time and opportunities for children to explore:

- Themselves - mirrors to see themselves, action rhymes such as "head, shoulders, knees and toes",
art activities to represent themselves.
- Discuss similarities and differences in appearances, ability (if appropriate).
- Family structures: members of the family, the extended family.
- Homes: different types of houses in the group, the community, the world.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 3 – Plan for an inclusive ECEC Service.

Tool 8 – Nurturing Relationships with and Amongst Children.

Tool 9 – Nurturing Learning Environments.

Tool 10 – Nurturing Professional Development.

Tool 11 – Empowering ECEC Staff.

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

Suggestions for **learning to know pillar**:

Suggestion 1: Are you MR. Tickle?

Purpose: Explore the sense of touch.

Resources: Blindfolds, feathers, cotton, small items with different texture.

Activities: Children are blindfolded. Ask them if they can feel where and when a feather is touching them. Are some parts of their body more sensitive than others? Are they ticklish everywhere?

The children use feely bags to guess what is inside.

Assessment: Can the children name unseen objects through touch?

Suggestion 2: Noah's ark and pairs of animals – an example of how a topic can be explored through different media to support meaning making and deep understanding.

Purpose: To raise awareness of the different kinds of animals while also developing sorting and grouping skills.

Resources: Model ark and toy animals, the story (there is no need to say it is from the bible), modelling materials, PE hoops, books, charts.

Activities:

Ideally this activity could be offered when the children have an interest in the zoo or animals but may also be introduced after children have visited to the zoo or local pet shop and have seen real animals. If this is not possible, perhaps begin with pets animals the children are familiar with or show them pictures of real animals (books, the internet, posters etc.).

Introduce the toy animals to the children. Discuss each animal – size, colour, attributes, the noise the animal makes etc.

Encourage the children to find a partner and give each pair an animal to mimic and then to use as a prop while the Early Years Education Professional tells the story.

Once the children are familiar with the story act it out together, standing on a carpet that represents the ark, moving in pairs, miming the different animals. Play games, animal snap, sorting and making sets of animals using modelling/creative materials. Provide paint and drawing materials to support children to represent their knowledge of animals. Divide the animals into sets using different attributes, e.g.: by colour, size, number of legs. Use the PE hoops to sort. Find pairs of animals, either toy models or pictures. The children can retell the story using models, toys, pictures or drawings.

Guessing game – choose an animal and mime how it moves for the other children to guess.

Introduce songs or rhymes about different animals.

Investigate and explore the different habitat of animals, names of baby animals, diet etc. with small groups of interested children.

Create small world habituates in consultation the children reflecting and extending their knowledge.

Assessment: Does s/he show interest and curiosity and want to handle the animals?

Does s/he participate and contribute to discussion about the animals

Can s/he put the animals in pairs and manipulate the models?

Can s/he examine the animals and put them in different categories?

Can s/he identify some of the features of the animals and communicate these through mime, drawings, paintings, or by matching them to pictures on books?

Suggestions for **learning to do pillar** activities:

Suggestion 1: Do you have a happy face?

Purpose: To observe closely the features on a face and where they are positions.

Resources: Plastic mirrors, paper plates, plastic bottles, balloons, decorative materials such as pipe cleaners, glue, cards, used wrapping paper, etc.

Activities: Look in the mirror to observe features. Look at your peers and see if the faces are the same. Match hair colour to strands of wool or other materials. Give a paper plate to each child. Provide them with a wide range of materials to add features, e.g. pipe cleaners for eyebrows and round balloons for noses. Try positioning different cut-out mouths on the face to make it appear to cry, be angry, smile, etc.

Be very careful that children do not put anything in their mouth and support the use of tiny scissors.

Assessment: Is he/she able to match facial expressions to feelings?

Suggestion 2: Incy Wincy Spider

Purpose: To investigate and discovery living things and to use creative skills to make our own versions.

Resources: Pictures, YouTube clips of the song Incy Wincy spider, video clips on spiders to talk about, captive spiders, plasticine and eight plastic straws or wool pom-poms and eight pipe cleaners, elastic, large cardboard tube, string, weight, table tennis ball, water tray, to make home for spiders: plastic sweet jar, twig, cotton wool.

Activities: Learn the rhyme of Incy Wincy Spider and sing it together. Watch spiders to see how they move on the video clip, go outside and look for spider webs. Watch a spider make a web. Make a home for the spider. Make spider models using a ball of plasticine with eight plastic straw legs, or wool pom-poms with pipe cleaner legs. Attach to a length of elastic to bob up and down. Use large cardboard tube as a pipe and ask the children if they could help Incy Wincy climb out. Use a model attached to a piece of string with a pen on the end. As the weight is dropped outside the tube the spider will shoot up inside.

You can also make a model spider with a table tennis ball. Use the water tray to explore how the spider will float and rise up when the tube is filled with water.

(Make sure once activity is ready, spiders are put out again)

Assessment: Can s/he recognise and draw a spider?

Examples of **learning to be pillar** activities:

Suggestion 1: What's in the pond?

Purpose: To appreciate the variety of living things in pond water.

Resources: bucket, plastic aquarium, hand lenses, white plastic tubs, identification cards, books.

Activities: These activities can take place either on site or in the classroom. Use a bucket to collect pond water and fill a plastic aquarium. Use a hand lens to observe the variety of living things in fresh water. Notice how they move about. White containers or lids are useful as small creatures are easily seen against white. Use pictures, books, clips or charts to identify the creatures.

Assessment: Can s/he observe and discuss the variety of creatures they see?

Examples of **learning to live together** pillar activities:

Suggestion 1: Can we hear you?

Purpose: To appreciate that we can make a range of sounds with various parts of the body. Learn to work together.

Resources: Recorder from laptop, computer or mic - recorder + blindfold.

Activities: Challenge the children to make three different sounds with their hands, feet, legs, voices, etc. Record these and ask other children how they think they were made. Blindfold children in turn and ask them to guess how a friend has made a sound. (with his hands, mouth, feet, etc.)

Assessment: Is he/she able to make different sounds?

Suggestion 2: Make paper people.

Purpose: To observe and discuss body parts and to compare length of limbs, counting pairs and adding vocabulary.

Resources: Various lengths of white paper, felt-tip pens.

Activities: Ask a child to lie down on lengths of white paper joined together to form a carpet and draw around them. Cut around it and use as a display. Discuss parts of the body, compare sizes

of parts of the body, e.g., shoulder and waist, length of an arm and a leg, size of head compared to the body. Make labels to pin on this display.

Each child can represent themselves in this way – provide a variety of skin tone and eye colour paint, wool (for hair) and fabrics (clothing).

Assessment: Can s/he name simple body parts?

Discuss the similarities and differences in appearances.

Suggestion 3: Pets.

Purpose: To observe similarities and differences in animals (same as in humans).

Resources: Pet shop or a sanctuary, video clips/pictures/photographs of animals, plastic animals, soft toys, equipment for pet keeping: animal food, bedding, cages, etc.

Activities: Visit a pet shop or a sanctuary. Look at the different colours of birds, furry animals and fish. Talk about what each animal needs: food, habitat, care, warmth, etc. Look at the animal foods and match it to each animal.

In the classroom make a collage with pictures and/or look at clips or photos of animals. Make pet shop using toy animals, food, bedding, cages, etc. Explain that it is not good to purchase a dog or a cat from a pet shop. Discuss adopting stray animals.

Safety: Wash hands before and after handling animals, beware of any problems with asthma and allergies, ensure proper child: adult ratio for the visit.

Assessment: Can s/he point to a named pet on a picture? Can s/he respect animals?

TOOL 13: ECEC SETTING MISSION STATEMENT

QUALITY AREA

Curriculum – Statement 5 – A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enables children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

WHAT

A shared understanding amongst Early Years Education Professionals of pedagogical goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way. These include learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To support reflective practice and mutual understanding among early years teams about their curriculum approach and its effectiveness in supporting all areas of the child's development.
- To encourage the adoption of the national early years curriculum (if present), the four pillars of learning (UNESCO), and the emergent play-based curriculum.
- To develop common mission and curriculum statements that are living tools.
- To ensure the curriculum is meaningful, relevant and engaging for children and nurtures all areas of their development.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, educators.

Indirect: children, parents, families, inspectors.

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

All practices in the early years setting should be underpinned by a clear mission statement. The mission statement once developed, should be reviewed annually in collaboration with the staff team.

HOW

The ECEC setting managers and owners are responsible for the definition and implementation of the mission statement, together with the early years education professionals, the children and the parents. The way this process is concretely carried out depends of the specificity of each ECEC setting as well as of the social and cultural context.

The following steps must be followed to better perform the process:

1. Reflect on the overall vision of the setting and what we want for children and families, ensuring that this is reflected in the curriculum statement.
2. Reflect on the ways in which the early years environment supports learning.
3. Adopt a play-based curriculum which supports children to actively engage with, and explore the world and relationships around them.
4. Adopt an approach that supports the child as a capable and competent, active learner and provides opportunities for children to be active in their learning and exploration.
5. Adopt a strengths-based approach to assessing children's learning.
6. Locate the child's learning within relationships with children, early years education professionals, parents and families.
7. Include children, early years education professionals, parent and families in the development of a shared mission statement.

8. Explore ways of sharing information about the curriculum with children and parents and families.
9. Develop a statement in a written form, that outlines the principles of the curriculum.
10. Ensure all new staff are familiar with and have a good understanding of the curriculum approach.
11. Ensure that all new families coming into the setting are familiar with and have a good understanding of the curriculum.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 2 – *Service Charter*.

Tool 9 – *Nurturing Learning Environments*.

Tool 12 – *4 Pillars Curriculum*.

Tool 29 – *Participative Leadership Approach*.

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

ITALY

Examples of educational curriculum related to a specific area of Umbria Region.

THE EDUCATIONAL PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT

The Educational Pedagogical Project refers to a complex and articulated series of choices regarding the pedagogical organisation and structure of the early years setting. The most important choices involve: the structuring of sections, the organisation of spaces and times, the provision of tools and materials, the relationship with the families, the services, the ways of settling-in, the ways of social management, initiatives to promote different transitions and the functional organisation of the working group. Programming means building an educational project which includes the general and specific targets for the age to which it is addressed. It represents a methodology of work that allows to give depth and meaning to the educational path.

Programming is not the task of a single operator, but it must be the outcome of the work and commitment of all staff working in the ECEC setting. It is a programme that must be constantly monitored through a timely and systematic observations.

THE DIDACTIC PROGRAMMING

The didactic programming is entrusted with the task of organising, planning to set up and identify the activities in order to pursue the achievement of the educational objectives and development of the educational project. It represents the temporal and organisational structure of the activities; the procedures used by Early Years Education Professionals to define and manage the intensively proposed training courses for children.

REFERENCES

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TOOL 14: CURRICULUM FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

QUALITY AREA

Curriculum – Statement 5 – A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

WHAT

Educational programme aimed at laying the foundations for life-long environmental education, development of a health-conscious attitude and lifestyle habits. The curriculum is continuously integrated into the pedagogical programme, during the whole school year. It contributes to the development of all the eight key competences (i.e., a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, that individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment), as per the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2006. It is inspired by the Green Kindergarten programmes: “Zöld Óvoda”⁸

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To positively influence children’s awareness and care of the environment.
- To provide opportunities where children can explore and be aware of their role in contributing to the natural environment.
- To increase the visibility of the concept of “green kindergarten” to broaden the direct and indirect impact of green education.
- To promote and integrate the principles of sustainability into early childhood education.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, educators, children.

Indirect: parents, families, local communities.

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: 3 – 6

WHEN

At the beginning of the school year, when the pedagogical program is being developed.

HOW

Any ECEC institution can decide to “go green” and shape its activities, modify the facilities, etc. accordingly. Below some inspirational steps are suggested to implement the tool.

The first step in the planning of the implementation of a ECEC provider curriculum for environmental education is drafting with a philosophy of sustainability in mind. The characteristics of the local environment and natural heritage are explored, studied and taken into consideration when planning and implementing the pedagogical programme.

⁸ Green Kindergartens aim at educating the next generation to become environmentally conscious and responsible citizens. Principles of sustainability and environmentally responsible attitudes and habits inform all aspects of all activities carried out at the facility. Green Kindergartens engage members and organisations of the local community in various ways; local values and concerns are incorporated into the pedagogical programme of the kindergarten. What differentiates Green Kindergartens from other ECEC institutions is their commitment to the cause of environmental awareness and sustainability, therefore the development of children’s social and civic competence is of particular importance. Green Kindergartens educate the adults of the future to become responsible, environmentally informed citizens who actively care about sustainable development and the preservation of our natural assets. As of 2016, 931 Green Kindergartens were established in Hungary.

Principles of sustainability and environmentally responsible attitudes and habits inform all aspects of all activities are carried out at the facility.

Green content and green philosophies are incorporated into the pedagogical programmes and plans for the ECEC Setting. They are not additional “extra” features; rather, they are reflected on and reckoned with when the overall planning of the institution’s goals, and the means to achieve them, takes place.

ECEC settings engage members and organisations of the local community in various ways, therefore, local values and concerns are incorporated into the pedagogical programme of the kindergarten.

Then a specific annual work plan is prepared which is further specified in the educational plan of each individual kindergarten group. This green content that forms and shapes children’s environmentally conscious attitude and behaviour is already included in the pedagogical plans.

To promote a healthy life style, a kitchen garden is maintained. With the active participation of parents, special events are organised when, for example, children are involved in preparing their own meals, or learning about the importance of fruits and vegetables. Parents are also consulted regarding a healthy nutrition plan.

With respect to the children’s emotional, moral and social education, a positive attitude to the natural environment is formed through experience. The ECEC setting provides a learning environment for all children, equally, which encourages and practices play, exploration, community relations and access to outdoor spaces. Opportunities and experiences are play-based and allow sufficient time for children to explore, think and play in the natural environment. Trips can also be arranged. Solid foundations of an environmentally conscious lifestyle and attitudes are laid with the active involvement of parents (e.g. selective waste collection, recycling). Children are engaged in discussions about the changing world they live (e.g. the importance of wildlife protection, the negative effects of environmental pollution).

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 9 – *Nurturing Learning Environments.*

Tool 27 – *Green Kindergarten Award.*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

HUNGARY

“Sensory Cave”

Combined with other types of activities, “Sensory Caves” provide a special opportunity for children to obtain new information about the environment. In one of the Green Kindergartens in the city of Szombathely (“Szűrcsapó Óvoda”) sensory caves are set up three times a year: in spring, autumn and winter. It is a special educational space protected against most forms of external stimuli so that children can concentrate on a set of objects that are particularly characteristic of the season. Children experience the world through emotions. Sensory caves are constructed in a way that allows children to simultaneously use several sensory organs in a small, confined space, surrounded by objects that they had already met (saw, smelled, listened to, touched or even tasted) in their immediate surroundings, while taking a walk or spending time in the playground or in a forest kindergarten. First contact with leaves, crops, seeds, other plant parts or insects, etc. always happen outdoors, in a natural environment. When these are collected and put on display in a sensory cave, children can recall and then expand on their first experience. Most things in the sensory cave are directly related to children’s past experiences.

Having experienced them through their senses children are often emotionally attached to these natural objects.

Composting Kindergarten (Komposztóvoda Program)

The main goal of the 'SZIKE' Environment and Health Protection Association, established in 1995, is to change the present attitude to waste, to shift from end-of-pipe waste management towards source reduction and recycling. The Association publishes educational and awareness raising posters, flyers and booklets and organizes "Compost-Master" trainings for individuals and communities, schools and municipalities, including the management of ECEC institutions. Their composting scheme has been integrated into the pedagogical programme of several kindergartens all over the country.

The Composting Kindergarten Programme draws attention to the importance of composting and familiarises participating ECEC staff and children with the process of soil renewal.

The programme is differentiated to suit the different needs of different age groups. Children learn the fundamentals of composting through play and experience-based activities. In addition to a core module, the programme consists of various optional elements. For example, groups of children may compete against each other in a relay race in which they must sort out the pictures of compostable and non-compostable items.

ITALY

Agricultural nest

The farm is an educational service connected to agricultural companies. It develops multi-sensory experiences related to the rural context with a strong focus on natural environments. It promotes environmental sustainability and ecological and rural pedagogy as the natural rights of all children and the plurality of their intelligence.

IRELAND

Example of a child initiated activity that demonstrates environmental awareness and the emergent, play-based curriculum. *(with thanks to the children, parents and staff of ABC Child Care, Cork)*

Penguins' Gardening Adventure

On a cold January morning Emilia and Emma decided it was a day for exploring our Fairy Garden. So, with hats, scarfs and jackets securely fastened, off we went.

Their first mission: Find Fairies but instead they found watering cans and thus a new mission unfolded: "Let's find ALL the flowers and water them ALL"

Alas there was a problem though "there's no flowers, only leaves". A decision was made "let's just water all the leaves and see do they grow bigger"

On returning to the classroom this flowerless disappointment began the question, "Why didn't the flowers come out today?" We explored the life of a flower, what was needed to help them grow and a plan was put in action. It was time to put our knowledge into place and get to planting, but on these frosty winter mornings it would have to be a classroom garden. "The flowers would get too cold outside in the rain", "Maybe we could give them some clothes"

The children got to planting with the intentions of giving the flowers to their moms for Mother's Day. We carefully placed our bulbs into flower pots and covered them with compost. "Maybe we could put them on the window sill so they can see the sun" Due to all our care and attention checking and watering our plants every day, they grew to the size of our windows and had to be sent home early. "They're going to grow out the windows" "My Mom is going to love it" As the months passed by the planning for toy gardens made from playdough and talk about flowers continued. As Spring came to an end and Summer approached Emma told us about all the

flowers beginning to appear in her garden. “The flowers are growing in the garden but if Dad forgets to water them they will die”. This caused some commotion amongst the group. I suggested making our own little community garden just outside the building for the whole estate to enjoy. We had a new mission!

The date was set, the parental permission was retrieved and we were off! A visit to Kiernan Garden Centre was a short car trip away.

We hopped into two cars and the excitement was something else. “Fasten your seatbelts” was echoed through the cars as we all got ready to head off. We were headed “down the hill”. One car was full of song “the wheels on the car go round and round” while the other was full of discussion over what colours they would choose with Daragh insisting “I’m picking a big pink flower for my mom, it’s her favourite colour” While Rachel decided “I want to get rainbow flowers”. When we arrived, we were met by a very friendly man called Brian who presented us with baskets and showed us to the flowers that would suit our needs. “Let’s follow Brian out here”. “He’s got grass growing from his head” said Nina as we passed a statue of a head. After much searching and choosing over colours we completed our purchases. It was a fresh sunny May Day and Brian asked if we would like to explore a little around the centre to see if there was anything else we needed while he totted up our purchases. Beyond the wilderness of all the plants and flowers we found some garden furniture which looked like it needed to be tried out for size. “I’m sitting in a flower pot” proclaimed Emma. “The cushions on this bench are really cosy” said Daragh. Chloe even tried out a wheelbarrow for size. Unfortunately, they were not a fit for our little garden space.

Just as we found a nice place to sit for a moment to rest while we waited to travel back we were surprised with an ice cream treat. Just what we needed after our busy day! “We’re having yummy ice cream”. “My one is all swirly”.

The very next day was planting day. We grabbed our tools and headed on our way”. I brought my own tools from home”. We invited our parents to come and assist us as well. We placed our flowers where we would like them and began to dig holes to put our plants in. “Mine is the biggest so it should go at the back”. After digging all the earth, we made holes and planted our flowers. Next came the big job of adding the compost to the plants to help them grow, “in a nice warm blanket” of soil. “Sprinkle, sprinkle” said Chloe as she collected compost into her cup. When the planting was finished we cleaned up our mess and looked at the masterpiece we had created. Most important of all was to water our plants. This we did every day when we were in school and at the weekends Chloe would come over from her house across the road along with her brother (a former Penguin) to tend to our little garden.

Rachel even suggested “maybe we could sing to them”. On the way to school in the morning little voices could sometimes be heard. “The flowers love the Mr. Sun song” The Penguins have shown great enthusiasm during this whole process and are so proud of their achievements. They have worked together to make this garden and have grown into competent carers of their surroundings but also for each other. It is this care for the environment and community that I hope the children can take with them as they grow and bloom just like their flowers.

“Why try to explain miracles to your kids when you can just have them plant a garden” – Robert Brault



Agricultural Nest: www.querciadellamemoria.it

Penguins' Gardening Adventure:

https://www.google.hu/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwj_2rHrjebXAhVHoaQKHeLGDlkQFgggMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.earlychildhoodireland.ie%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2017%2F10%2FPenguins-Gardening-Adventure.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1xPYIHYeBggSCCdUx1SeuJ

TOOL 15: PARENTS INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING

QUALITY AREA

Curriculum – Statement 6 – A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

WHAT

Parents Involved in Children's Learning (PICL) is a tool inspired by the methodology developed and used at Pen Green Centre⁹. It is a model of cooperative working which is informed by the respect for parents as co-educators of their children, treating them as equals of ECEC practitioners.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To strengthen and improve collaboration of parents and ECEC providers for the benefit of children.
- To actively involve parents in their children's learning journey.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, educators, parents.

Indirect: children, local community.

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

At the beginning of the school year, during the planning process of the pedagogical activities and programme.

HOW

Methodological approach, inspired by the Pen Green's PILC method, aimed at strengthening and improving collaboration of parents and educational institutions for the benefit of children. Previous research has concluded that if the home learning environment is provided in partnership, it is closely associated with improved cognitive attainment in the early years. It is therefore particularly important that ECEC institutions/practitioners seek to cooperate as closely as possible with parents. The method has been successful in this regard and thus could provide ideas and inspiration for practitioners and managers of ECEC settings who want to improve this cooperation.

The first step to implement the official method is a short course for ECEC providers. This is a three-day programme which involves two days exploring beliefs and values about working with parents and how to work together to support children's learning. Participants are then asked to engage in project work over a three-month period, which includes:

- work in the setting with their staff team;
- an audit of current practice;
- a child study with one family, using videos.

Participants return for a final day to share the project work and action plan for the future.

If ECEC providers are already experienced in cooperating with parents, they may not necessarily need to attend the course and can follow these suggestions:

⁹ The underlying philosophy of the PILC method is that active cooperation and a "developmental partnership" between parents and ECEC professionals is crucial to maximize children's achievement and wellbeing. The more closely educators and parents share views and work together in the upbringing of children, the more children benefit from their early years education, both at home and in the setting.

- Parents need to feel that they are active participants in partnership with ECEC providers:
 - "Parents as first teachers" approach: a firm belief that the parent is the child's first and most influential teacher and informs all communications with parents
 - Pre-school learning alliance: parents and a practitioner meet to discuss their partnership.
- Key definitions (parent, family, service users, educator, family support, safeguarding, local authorities, group leader).
- Parents and ECEC providers share knowledge regularly about children's learning and development:
 - The information from home should feed into the planning for that individual child in the setting or home-based project plan.
 - The information from the setting or practitioner feed into what the parents provide for their children at home.
- ECEC providers should know their community and the families.
- ECEC providers and parents analyse together what works and what does not work in terms of engaging families.
- ECEC providers are aware of and appreciate the diversity of families and life experiences; they are familiar with various systems that are in place to monitor the level and quality of engagement with families so that they can choose the best possible option for the family who are engaged.
- ECEC providers have regular support and supervision sessions, they have time for self-reflection and review.
- An active parent forum or parent group is set up; the views and opinions of absent parents should also be taken into account.
- Parents should be involved in evaluating the ECEC setting's services and have a voice in what is evaluated and how evaluations are conducted.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 5 – *Platform to Communicate with Parents.*

Tool 6 – *Inclusion for All Children Activity.*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

Pen Green Centre

Pen Green Centre offers ECEC services for children under age five and their families, especially with low socio-economic status. Facilitating access to and maximising the benefits of ECEC services to parents and prospective parents and their children.

The team is over 120 practitioners and work with an average of over 1,800 families every year.

The main aim is to improve outcomes for children, parents and workers/practitioners.

The Pen Green Centre has three branches that mutually rely on and support one another:

- Pen Green Integrated Centre is responsible for providing ECEC services for children and their parents, relying on the active involvement of parents.
- Pen Green Teaching School offers training courses, degree programmes (BA, MA), leadership and research opportunities as well as support to other schools.
- Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base is an extension of Pen Green Centre for children and families where parents and practitioners collaborate as co-researchers.

Continuous, the centre is open 48 weeks each year, seven days a week.

The centre provides a wide range of services to families including baby and toddler provision, nursery, crèche, after school club and holiday play scheme. The nursery school provides places for 240 children on a flexible and part-time basis. The setting also offers a wide range of family support including family visiting, family room, therapeutic groups, young parents and father's

groups and community education.

Shared language and knowledge

The PILC framework evolved from the realisation that parents felt uncertain about exactly what pieces of information about their child's development were useful and relevant to be shared with the ECEC providers. To facilitate the dialogue with parents, Pen Green developed a shared conceptual framework and language for observation, and trained parents in it. Speaking the same language is essential to finding a common ground.

In the PILC model, video recordings of the children are analyzed to facilitate reflection and information sharing, using the following key concepts:

- **Involvement:** this concept is used to establish the child's level of involvement in the activity they are doing; the more absorbed and concentrated they are, the more effective their learning is going to be. Using the 5-point "Leuven Involvement Scale" developed by Ferre Laevers, educators and parents can judge just how involved the child is in the learning situation by watching closely for body language and other signals (e.g.: concentration, energy, complexity and creativity, facial expression and posture, persistence, precision, reaction time, verbal utterances and satisfaction).
- **Well-being:** the concept of well-being is a prerequisite for involvement; low well-being can prevent the child from feeling involved, and thus from effective learning. The level of the child's well-being can be assessed by watching for specific indicators in their behaviour such as enjoyment, self-confidence, spontaneity, energy, openness, etc. Laevers also developed a 5-point scale to determine the child's well-being and at least half of the signals must be affirmed to indicate positive emotional wellbeing.

Educators and parents can use the well-being and the involvement scales to discuss the child's learning, their needs to be met and the kind of activities they can be engaged in next.

- **Schemas** are repeated patterns of action which children exhibit when they are exploring the world around them. They help children to develop theories about how things work and to develop an understanding of concepts. Common schemas young children exhibit: trajectory, transporting, envelopment, and enclosure.

Identifying the child's schemas can enable practitioners and educators: 1) to support the child's schema by providing the right materials, interactions and activities, and 2) to extend the child's learning by enhancing and adding on to the persistent schema the child is showing as opposed to random or general (not child-specific) material and content provision.

Parents at Pen Green are given a schema booklet and are taught a very specific, technical language to describe what their children are doing. A shared language is crucial to partnership with parents, and to this end, instead of simplifying the vocabulary, parents with poor educational backgrounds are given one-to-one training sessions on the key concepts and technical terms.

- **Adult teaching strategies** enable parents and ECEC providers to reflect on how they interact with children and how their approach can support and impact on a child's learning.

Based on a detailed analysis of video clips of children's activities and interactions with adult both at home and at the nursery, researchers at Pen Green identified eight effective adult teaching strategies:

1. Subtle intervention.
2. Knowledge of child's embedded context and ability to recall child's previous experience.
3. Affirmation of child through facial expression and physical closeness.
4. Encouraging children to make choices and decisions.

5. Adult supporting child to take appropriate risks.
6. Encouraging children to go beyond the adult's own knowledge base and accompany them into new experiences.
7. Adult has an awareness of the impact of their own attitudes and beliefs and how these might affect the child's learning.
8. Adult demonstrates learning as a partnership. Adult is committed to own learning and generates a spirit of enquiry.

The Pen Green Learning Loop

The PILC approach promotes the continuous flow of information and feedback between parents to ECEC providers. The continuous sharing of knowledge through dialogue enables both groups of adults to improve their understanding of children in their care and thus support the learning and development of the child.

The PILC method consists of, among other things:

- Informal chats at drop-off and pick-up times;
- Home visits, to share and exchange information about the child's learning and development at the centre and at home;
- Organising events that involve parents, children and practitioners;
- Encouraging and engaging parents to join in with the activities of the setting;
- Encouraging parents to be active partners in research projects;
- Involving parents in the assessment of their children;
- Videotaping children's activities and discussing it with parents.

REFERENCES

Since the early 1980s educators at Pen Green Centre (Corby, Northamptonshire UK) have been engaging parents as decision-makers in the planning and implementation of their educational programme.

The centre became a 'one-stop shop' for families with young children in the local community; Pen Green Centre provides the following services:

- a high-quality, developmentally appropriate, early childhood education with care provision;
- a place where children could meet, learn and grow; where their affective and cognitive needs are met;
- appropriate provision for children in need;
- inclusion of children with special educational needs;
- partnership with and provision for parents (adult education, health and social welfare services).

Pen Green Centre also launched research projects, focusing on issues related to teaching and learning and the curriculum, involving all stakeholders: parents, ECEC practitioners and researchers.

About PEN Green Centre: <http://integrated.pengreen.org>

PICL approach:

[http://www.c4eo.org.uk/local-practice/validated-local-practice-examples/the-parents-involved-in-their-children%E2%80%99s-learning-\(picl\)-approach.aspx](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/local-practice/validated-local-practice-examples/the-parents-involved-in-their-children%E2%80%99s-learning-(picl)-approach.aspx)

<http://research.pengreen.org/parents-involvement-in-their-childrens-learning-pic/>

OFSTED: Inspection report for Pen Green Centre for Children and Families.

<https://primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/pen-green-centre/UploadedDocument/105e4d0fc22f4f87808fd16c150d9e90/ofsted-cc.pdf>

<http://archive.c4eo.org.uk/themes/families/vlpdetails.aspx?lpeid=451>

The PICL approach and the research results it is based on are described in Margy Whalley: Involving Parents in their Children's Learning, 2007.:

<http://sk.sagepub.com/books/involving-parents-in-their-childrens-learning>

<http://research.pengreen.org/parents-involvement-in-their-childrens-learning-pic/>

Chapter on 'Pen Green and the PICL Framework:

http://www.academia.edu/19598170/Developing_Early_Years_Professionalism_Evaluation_of_the_Early_Learning_Initiatives_Professional_Development_Programme_in_Community_Childcare_Centres_in_the_Dublin_Docklands

Principles for engaging with families. A framework for local authorities and national organisations to evaluate and improve engagement with families:

http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/engaging_with_families_0.pdf

TOOL 16: PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

QUALITY AREA

Curriculum – Statement 6 – A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their practice.

WHAT

Child's personal portfolio/Class Diary – Pedagogical documentation.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To guide reflection and encourage dialogue amongst educators, children & parents, and families about how and why we document children's learning.
- To adopt an approach which makes children's learning visible within the ECEC setting and the wider community.
- To improve the ways in which pedagogical documentation can make children's learning visible in the ECEC setting and thus inform curriculum planning.

TARGET GROUPS:

Direct: children, educators, parents, families.

Indirect: inspectors.

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Pedagogical documentation helps the educator to create a rich portrait of the child's learning. This approach can be used throughout the year to make children's learning visible within the ECEC setting. Allotting regular and adequate time for planning and documenting learning in collaboration with children and colleagues and time to share with parents and families is essential. At least starting from the beginning of the school year, it is recommended to regularly work on the documentation once a week, to concretely encourage dialogue amongst educators.

HOW

It is underpinned by the view of the child as a competent and capable learner, locating the child as an individual, learning with others.

1. Early Years Education Professionals as a team clearly define the way the setting intends to document children's learning to establish a common approach and support educators in their tasks/role. Please be sure to define:
 - Documentation format and media.
 - Timing.
 - Roles of each team members.
 - Expected results.
2. Early Years Education Professionals consult with parents and families as to how best to engage and involve them in the process of documentation and on their preference for accessing this documentation and sharing children's experiences and observations. Possible ways to address this:
 - a. Raise parents and families' awareness at the preliminary meeting of the importance to children's growth and development of making their learning visible by documenting learning activities. This will also help to demonstrate the educational quality of the setting.

- b. Share documentation with parents regularly throughout the year and invite their written or verbal comments
 - c. Notice board/Blackboard always available at the settings, for parents and families to make comments or suggestions about the activities on offer. Ensure Early Years Education Professionals are sensitive to possible literacy or language difficulties.
3. Early Years Education Professionals regularly use the approach to document the experiences of children from birth by:
- a. recording their expressions, interests, things that they take delight in and their interactions with people and the world around them
 - b. providing a rich profile of children's learning using a range of media including creative arts, dance and drama to make children's learning visible
 - c. including children in the process of documenting their learning by providing opportunities for them to reflect on their learning experiences and to choose what to include in the documentation. This can happen through shared conversation, mark-making, drawings, painting, photographs and various other media.

In the process of documenting is highly recommended to:

- focus on the process rather than the outcome and encourage children to see the value of process;
 - adopt a strengths-based approach which focuses on what the child can do as opposed to what she/he is not yet able to do;
 - celebrate and make visible the child's learning by capturing significant experiences, which provide a window into the child's learning, interests and dispositions
4. Early Years Education Professionals use documentation to inform the next steps in children's learning, based on their interests and abilities. To do that and based on the agreement of point 3), they:
- a. organise brainstorming session among Early Years Education Professionals on completing specific activities.
 - b. make use of documentation produced from the previous years or with different groups with the setting while planning curriculum implementation.
 - c. reflect, among educators, on the approach to documenting children's learning regularly to identify what is working well and areas for improvement.
 - d. Make children's learning visible to other children in the group through shared conversation and enquiry.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 5 – Platform to Communicate with Parents.

Tool 7 – Reflecting Professional Development.

Tool 19 – Logbook (With Portfolio).

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

Child's Individual learning journal (as observed in IE during the study visit)

This is an individual journal that records each child's learning and progress. It contains samples of the child's work – drawings, paintings, photographs of creations, friendships or acts of kindness. The older child makes the book his/herself and chooses what to include. It can also include

written observations and comments by the educators, which are shared with the child before being included. The educator can include links to the aims/goals of the curriculum. The journals are stored carefully and are accessible to the children always, the educator is responsible for making the individual journals for babies and younger children. Entries are made on a continuous basis and shared regularly with parents.

Learning Journal - Compilation of a group/class Learning Journal which is in a place that is accessible to the children and parents daily. The entries in this journal are recorded with small groups of children which supports them to recall the activity, discuss it, share ideas, make suggestions, problem-solve, co-construct shared meaning-making and identify further lines of enquiry to deepen their understanding and knowledge.

Examples of a learning journal that would show examples of the various group activities and experiences -the curriculum in action.

See the example of the curriculum in action Penguins' Garden Adventure in Tool 14

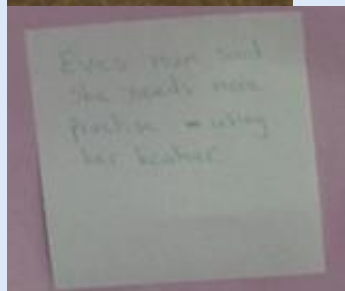
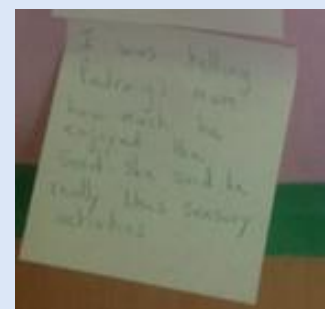
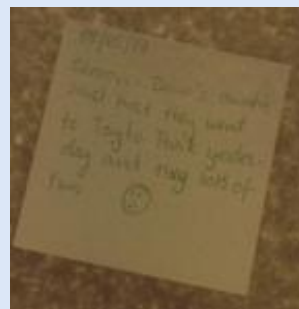
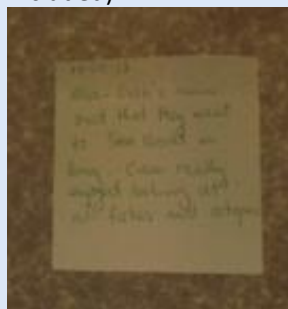
See also :

<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/work/quality-practice/awards/learning-stories/>

<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/work/quality-practice/awards/inspired-practice-awards/>

Parents Voices - Inviting parents to contribute to the curriculum.

Each room in the centre has an area on the wall entitled "Parents Voices". Under this heading are lots of post-it notes written by the Early Years Education Professionals who work in the room. These notes are about topics parents share with the Early Years Education Professionals each day when they bring their child into the centre. This is not about care routines but rather about something the child experienced at home which Early Years Education Professionals may explore further with that child and indeed with other interested children. For example, "We went for a walk in the forest at the weekend" or "the budgie died" or "...Will be going into hospital in two weeks' time ...". These topics contributes planning the emergent curriculum – topics children are interested in, things they have experienced or are about to experience. They are meaningful for the children, related to the children's reality and because of this the children are more likely to engage enthusiastically with curriculum topics (a photo of the wall could be included)



Alva and Cian's Mum, said they went to Sea World in Bray. Cian really enjoyed looking at all the fish and the octopus.	Sharon - Daire's Aunt said they went to Tayto Park yesterday and they had lots of fun.	I was telling Padraig's Mum how much he enjoyed the sand, she said he really likes sensory activities.	Eve's Mum said. she needs more practice using her beaker.
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ITALY

Within a framework that recognises families as co-protagonists of the educational project of services, carrying their own values and cultures, as well as the rights to information, participation and sharing of activities carried out within the services, engagement of parents in "laboratory" situations is proposed not only to improve the organisation of the service, nor even with the prospect of supporting a parenthood in need of care or particular care, but is rather a concept of education as process of reciprocity, sharing, listening, communication and dialogue, among all the actors involved.

The "laboratories" are in fact conceived and designed as spaces where new shared awareness is produced, in which the actions expand and enrich themselves in the search for new possible meanings. The proposal of the laboratories comes to parents not as an obligation within the educational project, but as one of the possibilities of involvement as another possible pathway that opens for those who are interested.

Some examples of laboratories for the realisation of:

- books, musical instruments, puppets, story dramas, cooking workshops etc.

METHOD:

The educator leaves the floor to parents, the protagonists of ideas, to bring out the resources present, resources that may arise from professional skills, personal attitudes, hobbies cultivated in free time. In this way, experiences are shared, tools and materials are shared, and starting from doing together, then the other important goal of the adult labs is achieved, which is the comparison and reflection on the education of children.

Trying to build together kindergarten games is for your parents an informal opportunity to exchange views on why choosing an object, material, or form with respect to another. Additionally, doing together gives rise to more in-depth questions than the most appropriate features that the subject must possess, but also about the ways and strategies with which children through the game engage in specific learning paths.

The informal climate of these contexts generally facilitates dialogue and exchange of ideas as it breathes a serene and exhilarating air. And it is in these "cracks" that the educator can silently seize what a parent says to widen the discussion and solicit reflection by telling stories about the nest or reading newspaper articles.

SWAPPING BOOKS:

The exchange of books is aimed at encouraging reading in favour of children together with their parents and creating a bridge between the nest experience and the family. Children can bring home the books they have already known to the nest and will be read by their parents, so they can share a continuity of intent.

REFERENCES

Aistear Síolta Practice Guide/ Planning and assessing



MONITORING & EVALUATION

These tools are offered to support ECEC settings and staff identify the strengths and weaknesses of their provision in order to promote an approach of continuous improvement and facilitate the adoption of improvement measures across the whole spectrum of quality areas addressed by this Toolkit.

The rationale behind these tools is the evidence-based approach, considered by the Total Quality Management principles as fundamental to systematically record, document and track how key quality processes have been implemented. “Let the data speak!” is the motto to keep in mind to constantly inform choices and internal decision-making processes with concrete and reliable information and data. By doing so, ECEC settings may also become more accountable to external stakeholders – not only parents/carers/families, but also public authorities and funders.

Specifically, these tools guide ECEC staff in: self-assessing processes and results (Tool 19 – Self-assessment Grid); provides samples and procedures to apply external evaluation through Peer Reviewing (Tool 20), Mentors (Tool 18) or Action Research (Tool 17); offers tools for monitoring the curriculum (Tool 21 – Logbook, with Portfolio) and child development (Tool 22 – Child Assessment), consistent with the principles stated in the General Introduction. Also included is an important, practical example of how to identify parents’ satisfaction level with the delivery of the ECEC service provided (Tool 23 – Parents’ External Evaluation).

In conclusion, to make effective and relevant use of the tools presented in this section, it is recommended to adjust them to the characteristics of the individual ECEC setting and to the external context, e.g. adapting the indicators provided, involving other relevant professionals or groups where collaboration exists.

TOOL 17: ACTION RESEARCH HUBS IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and Evaluation – Statement 7 – Monitoring and evaluation produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice

WHAT

To identify the areas for improvement, monitor the implementation of the changes and to evaluate the outcomes, information needs to be gathered from all actors and beneficiaries of the service. A multi-stakeholder *Monitoring and Evaluation group* including Early Years Education Professionals, managers and ECEC staff, families, parents, carers, local Civil Society Organisations and other relevant stakeholders is organised at the setting. The main aim of the group's work is to improve the quality of ECEC policy and practice in the ECEC settings.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To ensure the involvement of all stakeholders in monitoring and (self)evaluating the quality of the ECEC provision
- To enable the improvement of ECEC practices and policies ensuring they are responsive to the local needs (linked to regional and national policy)
- To enable (self)reflection of all stakeholders' practices in a systematic way to provide relevant information to identify desired improvements, and document the required policy changes needed to address high quality provision rather than merely complying with regulation or inspection requirements.

Specific aim and purpose: e.g.

- accountability for the audit of public funds
- improvement purposes: identify strengths and weaknesses of ECEC systems and describe appropriate strategies to address them in consultation with stakeholders
- identify staff learning needs: to tailor the provision of continuing professional development to focus on the needs of children and families within local communities
- support policy-makers: to provide information for administrators which helps them to make informed choices and to adapt/re-direct their interventions responsively and effectively
- to inform the public: results from monitoring and evaluation procedures could, for example, be used by parents and stakeholders for policy advocacy

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff, parents, families, carers, local CSOs/community groups, social partners and other relevant stakeholders

Indirect: children, policy makers at local, regional, national levels, research institutions

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Periodically, throughout a year, at least twice a year

HOW

Preparatory Actions

1. Through the initiative of one or more ECEC settings, a core team (at local, national or regional level) that will lead and coordinate the Action research hub is selected. The support of the Public Authorities is recommended.
2. The Core team makes a list of all stakeholders involved in young children's lives in the local community (keeping in mind all categories of staff at the setting as well as potential academic society, community groups and other services – social, health in the area).
3. A plan for the first meeting, the goals of setting up an Action Research Hub and initial ideas for a working plan should be prepared (a particular aspect/topic/practise for the initial action research should be chosen).
4. An initial meeting is then organised to introduce the idea of the Action Research Hub. The aims of the first meeting includes building a respectful relationship among all participants; creating and adopting the rules of common work and presenting the aspect/topic/practice that will be the initially researched. Participants should have an opportunity to introduce themselves and their role in children's education and care.
5. Introduction to a SWOT (Strengths – Weakness – Opportunity – Threat)¹⁰ analysis may be useful (if the participants are not familiar with it) in relation to the aspect/topic/practice that will be researched.

Implementation Action

6. The analysis of the aspect/topic/practice through data collected and research findings, could serve as an introduction to the common work and is the first step. This could be managed by a relevant external expert/researcher.
7. The second step is to define a particular problem/practice that needs improvement.
8. A third step is to collect specific data and evidence from the practices experienced by the participants, about the chosen problem or practice to be improved. Data collection can be achieved by describing one's own experience in that aspect, observation of different children's behaviour relevant to that aspect, talking to children, through questionnaire or focus group among various stakeholder groups or in any other appropriate way.
9. Based on the data collected, an action plan for improvement is made. This plan can include several activities for different stakeholders. For example, actions can be assigned to the employees of the setting, or to the parents of children to be done at home and, if needed, to the representatives of local authorities

Follow-up Actions

10. Each activity should be accompanied by careful observation and improvised observation grids/checklists.
11. After an agreed period of time, members of the Action Research Hub meet to evaluate the effects of the actions taken and if needed, suggest new actions for further improvement.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

SERBIA, CROATIA, MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO

Monitoring and Evaluation of respect for diversity in the settings

Challenge identified:

According to the results of the SWOT analysis, there are several challenges regarding respect for

¹⁰ See TOOL in the Common Area

diversity in early childhood education and care in our kindergarten. The main challenges are:

- stakeholders do not all have the same picture (understanding) of social injustice, inequity and discrimination (some parents, some members of staff and neighbours of the setting have different views)
- some Early Years Education Professionals do not feel that they have the necessary competences to improve respect for diversity in the learning process.

Each of the challenges listed can be a separate theme of one action research, but they also can be treated together. This is possible when all participants are to engage in the research process.

A precondition for this is that all participants:

- have basic knowledge about conducting action research (on-line guides and training animations can be used to support this) https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Action_Research_Booklet.pdf
- understand that these challenges are broad enough to allow an important range of insights and findings, and narrow enough so they are manageable.

Methods of Data collection:

Case studies, focus groups, attitude and rating scales or questionnaires or relevant experiences could be used to explore the challenges mentioned. The Action Research Hub can develop its own instruments, and participants' experience can also be used.

For example:

- each participant can write his/her own experience in the field of respect for diversity in the kindergarten, family and neighbourhood;
- participants can make an agreement that each of them will organise one focus group in their own organisation/group/association/institution;
- a smaller group of participants can prepare a few vignettes/scenarios and each participant can ask her/his colleagues to write their responses to questions connected with each vignette/scenario;
- participants can propose questions which they find important for the topic and a common questionnaire can be developed;
- the Action Research Hub can be divided into two groups, and each group can collect data for one of the challenges;
- everyone should know what, why, where and how the data will be collected.

The Coordinator of the Core team should ensure that both challenges (or other challenges highlighted in the SWOT analysis) are covered by the collection of data and that collected data is used in the action plan, as well as in the evaluation of the planned action. Using different forms of data collection, will ensure that multiple perspectives of the challenges are available.

Plan of Action:

The plan of action depends on the data collected in the previous phase, especially those which show some weak points regarding each challenge.

For example, to harmonise the picture of social injustice, inequity and discrimination of all stakeholders, several actions could be implemented:

- some trainings and workshops about respect for diversity in early years for different stakeholders can be organised (however, the kindergarten needs to ensure some financial support and human resources for such activities)
- some interesting media campaigns can be developed and implemented (this activity usually also implies some financial resources, but voluntarism of some non-profit media is also possible)
- participants of the Action Research Hub can be additionally educated in the field of

respect for diversity in early years, to expand their new knowledge and skills in their own environments.

The activities for the improvement of competencies of Early Years Education Professionals respect for diversity could be:

- to motivate some Early Years Education Professionals to participate in specific training to implement practices that help/ensure inclusion and respect for diversity
- to develop a network of mentors who will support Early Years Education Professionals in their daily practice
- to establish peer-support, where each Early Years Education Professional meet with her/his colleague, to discuss and to improve their practice
- to organise regular supervision of their work (at a local level, with trained supervisors)

Each activity should be accompanied by careful observation, and should be based on the data collected in the previous phase. Moreover, all implemented actions should lead to a new strategy or approach to respect for diversity in early childhood education and care setting.

Analysis of Data:

The purpose of the data collected at the beginning of the action research, as well as all actions, is to better understand all dimensions of the process of respect for diversity in the setting and to experience the value of the actions taken. The members of the Action Research Hub should take some time to discuss what they have learned from the data, actions and outcomes, as well as any patterns, insights, and new understanding they now have of the challenges researched and information/solutions they have discovered.

TOOL 18: MENTORING IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and Evaluation –Statement 8 – Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

WHAT

Network of mentors who, in close cooperation with parents, carers and families, will support Early Years Education Professionals (especially in the induction period) in their daily practice of monitoring the effects and impacts of the practice and the achievement of the desired objectives, helping them also in defining the next steps. This may be a proposal to be considered by the local authorities or trade unions.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To enable the improvement of ECEC practices and policies that are responsive to the local needs.
- To enable (self)reflection of all stakeholders' practices in a systematic way to provide relevant documented information for improvements and policy changes needed.
- To support the continuous improvement of ECEC settings, based on related improvements and monitored results achieved.

TARGET GROUPS (both direct and indirect, if relevant)

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, parents, families, carers

Indirect: children, policy makers at local, regional, national levels, research institutions, trade unions

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

Throughout the year, at defined stages. Recommended: twice a year

HOW

Who is the mentor?

The mentor is an external expert in ECEC public and private settings, highly experienced (at least 5 years' experience as an Early Years Education Professional and/or manager of ECEC setting), who can support ECEC settings staff and managers to constantly improve the quality of the service delivered, through a peer approach.

What should the do mentor?

In order to successfully accomplish the role, mentor should:

- be well acquainted with quality standards, regulations and broadly accepted approaches in the best interest of the child;
- build a relationship of trust with Early Years Education Professionals;
- build team relationships within the setting/kindergarten;
- encourage reflexivity;
- encourage Early Years Education Professionals to work with children, listen to and respect the child's perspective;
- put him/herself in a position of equal partnership with staff when working on developing and improving practices, not that of a supervisor or controller of the mentored Early Years Education Professionals

- support networking and exchange among Early Years Education Professionals within and among kindergartens/settings in the area.

Mentor tasks and roles

1. Provide important support to Early Years Education Professionals, including consultation, staff training or coaching support, to enhance their continuous professional development.
2. Represent a link between settings and developments in the field. She/he acquires insights on which he/she gives suggestions, explores resources through consultation and provides necessary support.
3. Collect relevant data for monitoring and evaluating the practices.

Mentor’s involvement

Mentors can be assigned directly by the ECEC setting managers as well as through shared assignment among different settings. In some localities, special agreements may be in place with the relevant Public Authorities in charge of the ECEC system, mentors could be directly assigned by them.

Description of mentor’s consultative work

- A) Once mentors have been appointed the consultative work begins with visits to the settings at regular intervals (minimum once per month for each Early Years Education Professional) and through electronic communication.
- B) Consultative visits are planned according to the specific topic/focus of consultation (see the form: Consultation Topics) through the following steps:
 1. Visit the group/s and carry out observations based on the criteria outlined in each area of practice. (see form Protocol for observation). If the child's subjective experience of an ECEC setting is the true determinant of its effects, a meaningful assessment of the programme quality and content requires an answer to the central question, "What does it feel like to be a child in this environment?"
 2. The purpose of observation is to gather information on the content of the curriculum/framework or practice which is used as a basis for dialogue with the Early Years Education Professionals.
 3. The dialogue with Early Years Education Professionals is based on the evidence gathered during the focused observations on a given topic.
 4. Encouraging self-evaluation and reflective thinking through reflective questions which are associated with beliefs of the Early Years Education Professionals and the existing (demonstrated) practice.
- C) After each consultation, the mentor writes a report (see Form for report) to be shared with the ECEC setting Early Years Education Professionals and managers.

The form of consultation topics

Topic	Content
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Protocol for observation



INTERACTIONS		
Topic	Description	Comments
<p>The Early Years Education Professional interacts with children in a friendly and respectful manner that supports the development of each child's construction of self/identity and learning.</p>	<p>The Early Years Education Professional 's interactions are warm and caring, expressing appreciation and enjoyment of children.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional 's interactions with and expectations of children are consistent with the process of child developmental and learning.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional interacts frequently with individual children throughout the day, building on their strengths and stimulating their learning and development.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional 's interactions are responsive to each child's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive strengths and needs.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional provides opportunities for children to make choices and to have those choices realized and respected by others.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional 's interactions with children develop their initiative, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and leadership.</p>	
Topic	Description	Comments
<p>The Early Years Education Professional 's interactions promote the development of a learning community where each child feels s/he belongs and is supported to reach his/her potential.</p>	<p>The Early Years Education Professional facilitates peer interactions among children to promote their social development, building shared understanding, mutual support, and a sense of community to help them reach learning and developmental goals.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional offers activities that help children learn to distinguish feelings, to recognize them in themselves and their peers, and to communicate about them.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional promotes democratic values by encouraging every child to express his/her opinion in an appropriate way and participate in decision making.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional promotes and supports the development of children's language and communication in multiple ways throughout the day</p>	
FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES		



Topic	Description	Comments
The Early Years Education Professional promotes partnerships with families and provides a variety of opportunities for families and community members to be involved in children’s learning and development.	<p>The Early Years Education Professional invites and welcomes family members into the group and finds ways for all families to participate in the educational process and life of the learning community.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional involves family members in shared decision making about their children’s learning and development, and social life in the group.</p>	
The Early Years Education Professional uses formal and informal opportunities for communication and information sharing with families.	<p>The Early Years Education Professional regularly communicates with families about their children, their learning and development, curriculum requirements, and the events in the group.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional regularly communicates with families to learn about a child’s background in order to gain insights on the child’s strengths, interests, and needs.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional promotes opportunities for families to learn from one another and to support each other.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional keeps information about families and children confidential.</p>	
The Early Years Education Professional uses community resources and family culture to enrich children’s development and learning experiences.	<p>The Early Years Education Professional uses knowledge of children’s communities and families as an integral part of the curriculum and their learning experiences.</p> <p>The Early Years Education Professional offers information and ideas for parents and family members on how to create a stimulating home learning environment and helps to strengthen parent competences.</p>	
INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND VALUES OF DEMOCRACY		
Topic	Description	Comments
The Early Years Education Professional provides equal	The Early Years Education Professional is aware of his/her own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences and how they affect communication with children,	



<p>opportunities for every child and family to learn and participate regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, culture, native language, religion, family structure, social status, economic status, age, or special need.</p>	<p>families and teaching. The Early Years Education Professional treats each child with respect, dignity, and consideration and provides equal opportunities to engage in the life of the setting. The Early Years Education Professional treats every family with respect, dignity, and consideration and finds ways to involve them in their child’s education. The Early Years Education Professional uses language and activities that avoid gender and other stereotypes. The Early Years Education Professional makes adaptations to the environment and to learning activities so that children with different capabilities, educational needs, and social backgrounds can participate in most activities.</p>	
<p>The Early Years Education Professional helps children understand, accept, and appreciate diversity</p>	<p>The Early Years Education Professional appreciates and incorporates into his/her teaching the diversity that exists among children, families, and within the community. The Early Years Education Professional uses opportunities to draw children’s attention to diversity that exists outside the group in a respectful manner and affirms its presence.</p>	
<p>The Early Years Education Professional develops children’s understanding of the values of civil society and skills required for participation.</p>	<p>The Early Years Education Professional is aware of his/her own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences and how they affect communication with children, families and teaching. The Early Years Education Professional treats each child with respect, dignity, and consideration and provides equal opportunities to engage in the life of the setting. The Early Years Education Professional treats every family with respect, dignity, and consideration and finds ways to involve them in their child’s education. The Early Years Education Professional uses language and activities that avoid gender and other stereotypes. Children learn about the rules and respect the rights of others in the community.</p>	

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



Topic	Description	Comments
The Early Years Education Professional provides a learning environment that promotes each child’s wellbeing.	The Early Years Education Professional creates an environment that ensures each child’s sense of belonging and comfort. The Early Years Education Professional shows respect for children by being interested in their feelings, ideas, and experiences. The Early Years Education Professional creates an atmosphere in which children are encouraged to express themselves.	
The Early Years Education Professional provides an inviting, safe, healthy, stimulating, and inclusive physical environment that promotes children’s exploration, learning, and independence.	The Early Years Education Professional ensures that the learning environment is physically safe and easily supervised. The Early Years Education Professional ensures that the space is inviting to the children and comfortable for them to engage in a variety of activities. The Early Years Education Professional modifies the physical environment to meet the needs of individual children and groups of children	
The Early Years Education Professional provides an environment that promotes the children’s sense of community and participative management of children’s behaviours.	The Early Years Education Professional creates an environment that is built upon democratic values and promotes participation. The Early Years Education Professional uses consistent routines to promote children’s self-regulation and independence.	

Modified from ISSA Putting Knowledge into Practice

The scale for well being

THE SCALE FOR WELL-BEING		
Child: _____ Date: _____		
Level	Well-being	Signals



1	Extremely low	The child clearly shows signals of discomfort: whines, sobs, cries, screams; looks dejected, sad or frightened, is in panic; is angry or furious; shows signs feet, wriggles, throws objects, hurts others; sucks its tomb, rubs its eyes; doesn't respond to the environment, avoids contact, withdraws; hurts him / herself: bangs its head, throws him/herself on the floor...
2	Low	The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed all the time.
3	Moderate	The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signals indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.
4	High	The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity.
5	Extremely high	During the observation episode, the child enjoys, in fact it feels great: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it looks happy and cheerful, smiles, beams, cries out of fun; • is spontaneous, expressive and is really him/herself; • talks to itself, plays with sounds, hums, sings; • is relaxed, does not show any signs of stress or tension; • is open and accessible to the environment; • is lively, full of energy, radiates; • expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.

The scale for involvement

THE SCALE FOR INVOLVEMENT		
Child: _____ Date: _____		
Level	Involvement	Examples
1	Extremely low	The child hardly shows any activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no concentration: staring, daydreaming; • an absent, passive attitude; • no goal-oriented activity, aimless actions, not producing anything; • no signs of exploration and interest; • not taking anything in, no mental activity.



2	Low	<p>The child shows some degree of activity but it is often interrupted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited concentration: looks away during the activity, fiddles, dreams; • is easily distracted; • action only leads to limited results.
3	Moderate	<p>The child is busy all the time, but without real concentration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine actions, attention is superficial; • is not absorbed in the activity, activities are short lived; • limited motivation, no real dedication, does not feel challenged; • the child does not gain deep-level experiences; • does not use his/her capabilities to full extent; • the activity does not address the child's imagination.
4	High	<p>There are clear signs of involvement, but these are not always present to their full extent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the child is engaged in the activity without interruption; • most of the time there is real concentration, but during some brief moments the attention is more superficial; • the child feels challenged, there is a certain degree of motivation; • the child's capabilities and its imagination to a certain extent are addressed in the activity.
Level	Involvement	Examples
5	Extremely high	<p>During the episode of observation, the child is continuously engaged in the activity and completely absorbed in it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is absolutely focussed, concentrated without interruption; • is highly motivated, feels strongly appealed by the activity, perseveres; • even strong stimuli cannot distract him/her; • is alert, has attention for details, shows precision; • its mental activity and experience are intense; • the child constantly addresses all its capabilities: imagination and mental capacity are in top gear; • obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity.

Laevers, F. (Ed) (2005). *Well-being and Involvement in Care Settings. A Process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument*. Kind & Gezin and Research Centre for Experimental Education



The Form for report

Date	
Topic	
Issues that arose, dilemmas, obstacles ...	
Proposals for change	
Mode of support: resources, connectivity, the inclusion of others	
Comments, suggestions, insights of mentors	

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 10 – *Nurturing Professional Development*

Tool 26 – *Service Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader*

TOOL 19: SELF-ASSESSMENT GRID

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and Evaluation – Statement 7 – Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

WHAT

Criteria to support a multi-dimensional self-assessment of the delivered ECEC services, targeting the manager, Early Years Education Professionals and ECEC staff.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To support ECEC Early Years Education Professionals and staff, to assess the quality of their services, thus promoting self-assessment as key to quality educational provision
- To promote a continuous approach to quality improvement, based on sound data collection and analysis
- To enhance cooperation among stakeholders and within the teams by working together on the criteria available to identify areas of strengths and areas for improvement, rather than on problems and negative situations

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff

Indirect: children, parents, families, policy makers, stakeholders

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

The present tool may be used by ECEC public and private providers – during child free hours. Preferably, it is designed to be used reciprocally among services and regularly over time. Also, it could also support preparation for inspections/ external audits.

HOW

- The ECEC provider/managers inform colleagues about the process they intend to initiate, preferably by organising a dedicated internal staff meeting.
- The group select the Criteria/Components on which the assessment is to focus, this can be informed by consulting parents.
- The Early Years Education Professionals dedicate specific attention to the dimensions under assessment for a given period of time – preferably around 2-3 weeks and take note of the observations/comments using the grid.
- The staff, under the coordination of the management, discuss the outcomes of the monitoring phase and agree on the improvements to implement and plan achievable measures/actions.
- After 3 months, the team meets again to review the impact of the improvement measures and plan any further changes needed.

See table below.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - educative programming; - promotion of a culture of childhood; - monitoring and evaluation; - piloting of services; - organisation of staff training and updating; <p>b) <i>Presence of the Coordinator:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - during the opening hours; - during staff meetings; - during the training activities; - during the meetings with beneficiaries; <p>c) <i>Training of the Coordinator:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - previously; - ongoing; <p>d) <i>Sharing of the coordinator with other ECEC services</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">If present</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Team work</p> <p>a) <i>Planning of the teamwork</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - periodical meetings on a topic; - planning and programming; - registering and assessment; - internal division of tasks and responsibilities; - reflections on the organisation of work; - supporting activities by professionals during the first phase of the teamwork; <p>b) <i>Registering the teamwork</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teamwork meetings with recorded minutes - registration of presence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o topics discussed o decisions taken 	<p style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/> Not present</p> <p style="text-align: right;">If present</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

<p>CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND OUTCOMES</p>	
<p>Management of daily reception / leave</p> <p>a) <i>methods and ways related to the daily reception / leave:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring the presence of one or more Early Years Education Professionals to serve as reference for the child; - adequate time and space for welcoming the child; - Personalised strategies when the child is separated from parents and reunited with them; attention to families from different social and cultural backgrounds; - involvement of children in different activities related to the welcome and leave; <p>b) <i>setting up a tool for observing the time of reception</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>



<p><i>and leave and ways of using it</i></p>	<p>.....</p>
<p>Attention to relation between children</p> <p>a) <i>methods, adopted in a shared way by Early Years Education Professionals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure the child participates in the daily routine and activities with a group of children; - to encourage relationships, collaboration and cohesion among children; - to form groups of children based on specific activities; - to manage gender differences in relationships between children <p>b) <i>setting up a tool for observing the relations between children and ways of using it</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>..... Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Attention to relation between adult and child</p> <p>a) <i>methods, adopted in a shared way by Early Years Education Professionals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to guarantee children with individual support in various moments of the day; - to promote the autonomy of the child; - to respond to situations of discomfort or need of the child and to situations of conflict between children; - to choose activities and methods that promote active learning in the child <p>b) <i>setting up a tool for observing the relations between adult and child, and ways of using it</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Educational management of the routine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presence of Early Years Education Professional acting as reference for the child during the routine care; - adequate time and space dedicated to routine activities; - strategies, shared by Early Years Education Professionals to provide consistency in care routines 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Attention to the demands / reactions / problems of the individual child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shared methods adopted by Early Years Education Professionals to guarantee consistency in relationships and interventions; - level of attentiveness and actively listening to the individual child 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Areas of improvement:</p> <p>.....</p>

Note: The following grid is just an example and can be put into practice by selecting a set of criteria to be evaluated*.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

Tool 8 – *Nurturing Relationships with and Amongst Children*

Tool 10 – *Nurturing Professional Development*

Tool 20 – *Peer Reviewing in ECEC*

Tool 24 – *Coaching*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

The present tool it is meant to be very flexible and adaptable. For example, Ireland has already a quality framework in place called Siolta (<http://siolta.ie/standards.php>), which offers points for reflection in all areas of practice. Early Years Education Professionals may adapt the criteria in the present assessment grid to include other or more relevant criteria.

TOOL 20: PEER REVIEWING IN ECEC

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and Evaluation – Statement 7 – Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

WHAT

The Peer Review approach to monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC settings focuses mainly on staff performances. It is intended mainly for internal accountability purposes and is directed to the improvement of staff practices and skills. It is a combination of self and external evaluation carried out by Early Years Education Professionals of the ECEC sector acting as Peers. This means adopting a “critical friend” approach, in order, not to inspect organisations and/or prescribe defined measures, but rather propose a bottom-up approach to enable ECEC setting acquire and develop their own continuous improvement mechanisms.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To identify strengths and weaknesses of ECEC settings and suggest a set of recommendations for improving the weaker aspects.
- To develop/ further develop self-evaluation competencies as a practice to continuously improve the ECEC service.
- To analyse internal needs and find solutions with peers on specific areas for improvement.
- To support ECEC service providers in establishing and implementing consistent and relevant QA system.
- To improve the accountability towards parents, community and policy-makers.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff

Indirect: children, parents, families, stakeholders and policy-makers

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

The present tool can be used by ECEC public and private providers depending on their needs, promoting the use of the PDCA Cycle (Quality Circle). Preferably, it is used reciprocally among services and regularly over time. Also, it is a useful support when preparing for inspections/ external audits.

HOW

The adoption of peer reviewing is a decision made by the management, in consultation with the educating staff. It depends on the professionalism of the practitioners in the field and relies on and supports networking between settings. It represents a possible integration with self-assessment practices already in place, can reinforce the efficacy of the internal monitoring and evaluation competences, as well as support the setup and implementation of more complex quality management/assurance systems.

The process development is based on the *PDCA Quality Cycle*, starting from the planning phase led by the ECEC service management, then the implementation phase during which self-evaluation and Peers visit are carried out. After that Peers are asked to give comments and suggest improvements in the form of an evaluation report, to enable ECEC organisations’ management to review their practice according to the suggestions received/collected.



Steps:

1. The ECEC setting management and educational staff identify the areas/key processes that need to be improved and carry out a Self-Assessment (see Tool 19¹²)
2. Contact peer Early Years Education Professionals to be involved and confirm arrangements – suggested number of peers is 2, to ensure objective feedback (being mindful of room sizes and ratios so as not to overcrowd the ECEC setting)
3. The management of the setting plans the activities to be carried out during the visit together with the peer Early Years Education Professionals – class observation, analysis of curriculum documentation, interviews with staff or other relevant stakeholders (parents, public authorities, etc.)
4. Peer visit – the visit of the setting will last at maximum one day: depending on the specific objective of the Peer reviewing and on the operation of the service (e.g. opening hours). Peers could spend 2 hours for visiting the setting - 1 hour for class observation, and another hour for interviews. The interviews will address the area and criteria chosen for evaluation, identifying the positive elements and the aspects needing improvement;
5. Feedback from peers – the peer Early Years Education Professionals will document their observations and give suggestions and ideas for improvements in a report to be shared and discussed with the ECEC provider managers and Early Years Education Professionals. Collaborative professional practice includes creating opportunities for open dialogue in order to share knowledge, skills, strategies and ideas, and give and receive feedback , as in a professional learning community. *See table below.*
6. Action plan for improvements and their implementation are then made by the ECEC provider.

Criteria	Questions for assessment	Quantitative & Qualitative Evidences	Pe Assessment	Suggested Improvement measures/actions
Documentation of learning	<p><i>How do you document the each child's learning and development ?</i></p> <p><i>Are different means/evidences available?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawings, photos, paintings, etc. • Personal Logbook 	<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p><i>Areas for improvement</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	

¹² The criteria used for the self-assessment can be changed to incorporate a different framework. Even if maintained, they are subject to changes and adaptations according to the providers' specificities.



Relationships with relevant stakeholders	<i>Who, in your opinion, are the relevant stakeholders?</i>	· Informal periodical meetings with parents and families ·	<i>Strengths</i>	
	<i>Do you systematically develop relationships with relevant stakeholders?</i>	· Formal regulations of stakeholder committees · Organisation of specific events with parents, families, local authorities, communities, etc.	<i>Areas for improvement</i>	

The table contents could be further developed/modified according to the quality framework in place, its criteria and indicators. It does not compromise the value of the process and the quality of the assessment.

The sensitivity of the nursing teacher: observation criteria

Indicate how often the following behaviours of the Early Years Education Professional are present never = 1; almost never = 2; sometimes = 3; almost always = 4; always =5

1	The Early Years Education Professional notices when the child smiles, vocalises or speaks	1	2	3	4	5
2	The Early Years Education Professional learns to interpret the baby's cry's (experiencing pain, hungry, tired, frustrated etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
3	The Early Years Education Professional responds to the child in a predictable, caring and consistent manner	1	2	3	4	5
4	The Early Years Education Professional correctly interprets the child's need and responses appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
5	The Early Years Education Professional responds to most of the baby's signals, not just frequent, prolonged and intense signals	1	2	3	4	5
6	The Early Years Education Professional names the child's initiatives in the moment so that the child hears the words connected to his actions, feeling or utterances	1	2	3	4	5
7	The Early Years Education Professional structures the environment according	1	2	3	4	5



	to the needs and interests of the child					
8	When speaking about the child, the Early Years Education Professional makes positive comments	1	2	3	4	5
9	The Early Years Education Professional is well acquainted with the child: is well informed	1	2	3	4	5
10	The Early Years Education Professional is patient: can you wait for the child's response in one to one interactions	1	2	3	4	5
11	The Early Years Education Professional provides the child with materials and experiences appropriate to his interests and stage of development	1	2	3	4	5
12	The Early Years Education Professional seeks one to one interactions with the child	1	2	3	4	5
13	The Early Years Education Professional draws the child's attention to interesting elements in the environment	1	2	3	4	5
14	The Early Years Education Professional's affection for the child is obvious and includes tender physical contact	1	2	3	4	5
15	In conversations, the Early Years Education Professional is at the child's level and faces the child directly	1	2	3	4	5
16	When the Early Years Education Professional encounters the child, she/he wait for a signal from the child to begin the interaction	1	2	3	4	5
17	The interactions between Early Years Education Professional and child are lively	1	2	3	4	5
18	The Early Years Education Professional is able to stop the child's activity when it is becomes dangerous	1	2	3	4	5
19	If the child gets dirty during the game, the Early Years Education Professional can intervene in an appropriate manner	1	2	3	4	5
20	The interactions between Early Years Education Professional and child take account of the rhythms and mood of the child	1	2	3	4	5
21	The Early Years Education Professional concluding interaction with the child in positive way : It ends when the child is satisfied	1	2	3	4	5
22	The Early Years Education Professional makes a series of attempts to find the best way to satisfy the child	1	2	3	4	5
23	When the child is angry, the Early Years Education Professional can calm him down and identify accurately the cause of the discomfort	1	2	3	4	5
24	The Early Years Education Professional pays attention and responds to the child even when occupied in others activity	1	2	3	4	5
25	The Early Years Education Professional responds immediately to the child's tears or complaints	1	2	3	4	5



26	The Early Years Education Professional always positions him/herself so as not to lose sight of the child	1	2	3	4	5
27	The Early Years Education Professional responds accurately and promptly to positive signs of affection sent by the child (smiles, vocals)	1	2	3	4	5
28	The Early Years Education Professional is almost always in a good mood	1	2	3	4	5
29	The Early Years Education Professional often clearly and slowly repeats words to the child to support language development and meaning making	1	2	3	4	5
30	When the Early Years Education Professional leaves the room, he or she provides the child with explanations or reassures them (e.g. "I'll be back in 1 minute")	1	2	3	4	5
31	The Early Years Education Professional encourages interaction between the child and other children and other people who come to the nest/room	1	2	3	4	5
32	The Early Years Education Professional welcomes and meets the child's requests for physical contact	1	2	3	4	5

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 19 – *Self-Assessment Grid*

Tool 24 – *Coaching*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

Community of Practice

Early Years Education Professionals from different settings visit another setting (out of hours) that has exceptional practice in any area of practice – for example, outstanding outdoor provision. The manager shows the visiting Early Years Education Professionals the high quality outdoor area and highlights the benefits of the area to both children and Early Years Education Professionals through story and photographs. Engaging in professional dialogue about a specific area of practice in this way supports other managers and Early Years Education Professionals to identify elements they can incorporate into their own setting and helps them find solutions to challenges they may encounter. This community of practice was instigated and supported by the local County Childcare Committee and an Early Childhood Ireland early years specialist. Feedback from the visiting Early Years Education Professionals is very positive and the host setting gains professional confidence and is affirmed by their peers.

TOOL 19: LOGBOOK (WITH PORTFOLIO)

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and evaluation – Statement 8 – Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

WHAT

Observation diary for Early Years Education Professionals to reflect on their practices and to gather useful information for monitoring and making children's learning visible, assessing a child's personal development and educational attainments. It includes non-formal monitoring procedures such as ongoing observation, documentation of children's learning and socialising experiences, as well as narrative assessment of children competences (e.g. portfolios) which positively impact children's outcomes.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To allow an evidence-based evaluation of the educational practices, including addressing the needs, competences and interests of each child
- To monitor, track and document the value and impact of the practices as an internal self-evaluation activity
- To support the assessment practices with formal, written and evidence-based reporting documents of children's educational progress to parents, families, communities, etc
- To reinforce assessment competences of ECEC settings staff, in order to better perform in self-assessment practices as well as in facing external evaluations and inspections
- To support staff – individually and as a team – in analysing their practices
- To address new challenges that nurture the potential and address the needs of each child

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Early Years Education Professionals, pedagogical coordinators, children

Indirect: ECEC staff, parents, carers and families, policy makers and relevant stakeholders

CHILDREN AGE GROUP Birth – 6

WHEN

This tool is used on a daily or weekly basis to record and document the educational and nursing activities carried out, the social experiences, including narrative assessment of children's competencies (Portfolio), which could be useful for smoother transition to school¹³.

HOW

Daily or weekly systematic observation is recorded in a “**logbook**” within which the working team, after having established what to note:

- 1) Describes the activity carried out with comments on the different reactions /types of behaviour and progress.
- 2) Identify how the activities supported learning and development and what can be done to extend or enhance learning and development
- 3) Consider this as tool shared by multiple early years education professionals within a setting. Each makes a comment in order to enrich learning and contribute to teamwork.
- 4) Provide a clear and definite procedure to allow children, parents and families to access to the tool (preferably online one) in a way that respect the privacy of each child.

¹³ The individual and group journals may be used by the team to evaluate their inputs and how they might progress individual or the group's learning and development.

- 5) Discuss the notes internally, during periodical meetings aimed at evaluating pedagogical practices and assessing the child's personal learning and development.
- 6) Identify and plan improvements and changes that should be implemented based on the results achieved/desired results.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

Tool 16 – *Pedagogical Documentation*

Tool 22 – *Child assessment*

REFERENCES

Lithuanian experience: <https://www.ikimokyklinis.lt/index.php/biblioteka/vaiku-ugdymas/ikimokyklinio-amziaus-vaiku-pasiekimu-aprasas/19440>

TOOL 22: CHILD ASSESSMENT

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and evaluation – Statement 8 – Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

WHAT

Information to parents about the child's competences related to certain age group.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To assess the strengths and needs of, and challenges for each child, thinking about the of the child, with a view to supporting and building on them
- To monitor the child's progress and encourages parents/carers' reflection on it.
- To support parents in evaluating child's learning and developmental progress.
- To identify new challenges that address the potential and needs of each child.
- To monitor the effectiveness and impact of an individual education approach.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Early Years Education Professionals, pedagogical coordinator, parents, families, carers, children

Indirect: policy makers at local, regional/ national levels, research institutions

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

At the beginning of school year, at the end of school year and mid-term assessment.

HOW

Assessment will be made from both sides: parents and Early Years Education Professional.

- According to *Preschool children's achievement description* each child's progress will be assessed by the Early Years Education Professional and parents at the beginning of school year.
- According to these results the Early Years Education Professional in collaboration with parents will create an individual child's learning program for home and for the ECEC setting. The Early Years Education Professional together with parents will set the aims for year.
- The Early Years Education Professional will help parents to find areas of improvement which could be worked on also at home.
- Mid-term assessment will be made by the Early Years Education Professional to monitor the child's progress and modify the education program.
- At the end of school year, the Early Years Education Professional and parents will review the general assessment of each child and decide if the set goals have been reached.
- According to the results, the Early Years Education Professional will identify common areas for improvement in each child's achievements list and modify next year's kindergarten's working plans giving greater attention to the areas for improvement
- During an ad hoc meeting, all Early Years Education Professionals will analyse the results and compare these to other groups results.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 14 – *Pedagogical Documentation*

Tool 19 – *Logbook (With Portfolio)*

TOOL 23: PARENTS' EXTERNAL EVALUATION

QUALITY AREA

Monitoring and Evaluation – Statement 7 – Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

Statement 8 – Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

WHAT

Systematic collection of parents' satisfaction according to ECEC service delivery

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To establish a systematic exchange of information and feedback on parents' perception about the overall Quality ECEC setting.
- To listen to parents' evaluation of quality as ECEC key stakeholder
- To track the process of quality improvement through an evidence-based approach

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC managers, pedagogical coordinator, parents, families, carers, children

Indirect: policy makers at local, regional/ national levels, research institutions

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

At least once a year, preferably at the end of school year.

HOW

At the end of the school year ECEC managers provide a structured activity aimed at collecting parents' feedback on the overall quality of the ECEC service. According to the context and the usual interactions among ECEC settings, staff and parents, this activity could be in the form of a dedicated meeting, with discussion and/or a written questionnaire (also online) to be distributed to all the parents accessing the setting or via email, post.

It is important to track the recording process, including the feedback discussion sessions, in order to build possible improvements on an evidence-based approach.

Having collected the feedback from the parents, ECEC managers write a report to be discussed and shared among the ECEC staff, and in case of reported criticisms, begin working on possible solutions.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 2 – *Service Charter*

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

ITALY

Example of a quality satisfaction survey to be delivered to parents, families, carers

CARD n. _____ DATE: _____

nursery:

Educational Services

No. id	Element assessed	Evaluation
1	Professionalism and availability of Early Years Education Professionals.	
2	Educational, recreational activities.	
3	Communications with the management and / or contact person of the structure.	
4	Calendar and opening hours.	
5	Adequacy of tariffs in relation to the service disbursed.	
6	Quality of baby hygiene products and materials (diapers, creams, detergents, etc.).	

Any proposals or additional comments:



Meal service		
No. id	APPLICATION	Evaluation
1	Professionalism and helpfulness of staff (cooks-assistant).	<p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>☹️ 😐 😊</p> <p>Dissatisfied Average Satisfied</p>
2	Quality and variety of menus.	<p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>☹️ 😐 😊</p> <p>Dissatisfied Average Satisfied</p>
3	Cleaning of premises and equipment.	<p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>☹️ 😐 😊</p> <p>Dissatisfied Average Satisfied</p>
Comments or complaints:		

REFERENCES

EN ISO 9004:2009 - Managing for the sustained success of an organisation — A quality management approach, 8 Monitoring, measurement, analysis and review, 8.3 Measurement



GOVERNANCE & FUNDING

The GOVERNANCE AREA differs from other quality areas, as it relates to the ways in which the overall responsibility for the early years education and care system in any country is divided between different levels of government (national, regional, local) and includes the mechanisms for coordinating and linking these responsibilities. It is acknowledged that the performance of the ECEC system is not the full responsibility of a single service, but it certainly depends on a mature and responsible legislative system. The tools presented in this section of the Toolkit are inspiring examples which can become models for a mature governance system, easily applicable and driven by highly motivated services/advocates in search of a quality system for the ECEC sector.

The main requirements for offering the child an open, linear and continuous pathway to lifelong learning that examines not only the personal sphere, but also the contextual environment in which they live, promoting knowledge and respect, are advocates who share both the objectives and the management models.

Coordinating childcare and childcare services, creating the conditions for an ongoing educational pathway, is a choice of pedagogical attitude aimed at building an early educational system that is attentive to the diverse needs of all of its stakeholders.

These responsibilities at the local level are entrusted to the Service Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader (Tool 26) who's role is to support the team's educational professionalism and to promote communication with, and the engagement of, families.

Depending on the local or regional system and availability of funding, the ideal model would be to create a network of service coordinators/pedagogical leaders, each working with a number of ECEC settings. In addition to supporting individual ECEC settings, there would be opportunities for ECEC settings to network among themselves, while also promoting a link between all agencies and professionals who work with and for children and families. The network of service coordinators/pedagogical Leaders can also act as a strong advocate for additional local and regional resources for the ECEC settings and drive national policy changes.

The Coach (Tool 24) is a precious resource as he/she is a core of competence and professionalism, providing a place of reflection and cultural elaboration; he/she sets objectives for monitoring, qualifying, promoting and supervising on a scale that goes beyond the limits and boundaries of a single setting.

Within this framework, service coordinators/pedagogical leaders can also work towards a further goal for Educational Continuity or Transition (Tool 25) creating a collaborative approach to all associated services, so not only with the different types of early years provision and schools, but with all those who are supporting children's development (health, well-being, protection of rights, support for parenting, community participation).

Within quality ECEC educational services, all staff have a responsibility to promote and share educational projects aimed at raising the child's awareness of, and developing their respect for, the environment, thus enhancing the child's holistic development, well-being and citizenship. (Green Kindergarten, Tool 27).

TOOL 24: COACHING

QUALITY AREA

Governance and Funding – Statement 9 – Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

WHAT

Multi-stakeholder coaching activity, comprising of the Public Authority responsible for early childhood education and care (either at local, regional or national level - depending on each country's regulatory standards), Universities, relevant unions, early childhood public and private services and funding bodies

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To provide specialist supports and coaching to ECEC settings, so as to respond to the quality improvements needed by the ECEC setting
- To support the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the ECEC setting staff, according to the needs arising and in response to changing contexts.
- To coordinate and supervise the practices adopted by the ECEC services for monitoring and evaluating compliance with the accreditation/authorisation requirements in place as well as drive and progress quality practices and improvements.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff, unions, and national funding bodies

Indirect: parents, carers and families and all the practitioners and public bodies involved in early childhood services (i.e., paediatricians, volunteering associations, parents' associations, etc.)

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

This tool is directed at mature ECEC settings, where basic quality requirements are already in place and commonly agreed upon by all the relevant stakeholders. It gives support to the continuous improvement of the ECEC setting. The coaching should be provided throughout the year, according to the specific needs arising. Approximately 4 meetings a year are necessary.

HOW

The Public Authority (PA) responsible, in partnership with the local University, dedicate funding to launch an open call to set up a coaching intervention, addressing all the ECEC public and private settings operating in its region. The participation of the ECEC setting is free of charge whilst the coach/es receive a fee. The expected benefits for the participating staff includes skills development, quality assurance mechanisms and practices, exchange of practices, peer learning and improvement in the quality of the service provision.

The PA is responsible for coordinating the coaching intervention and proposing broad topics to be addressed. It can act as a coordinating body, supervising the process of peer learning and quality improvement, according with the expected results and ECEC setting as well as at community level. The coach(es) responsibility is the recording of the whole process of development, taking minutes of each meeting, assigning tasks to the participating ECEC settings, in order to track the process and the achievements.

Public authorities' role could be replaced by other types of ECEC support organizations, anticipating the acknowledgment and eventual participation of PAs.

The plan of activity the coach/es can establish and deliver could be based on the following steps:

- 1) mapping of the ECEC settings in the region, through the definition and completion of an identification form;
 - 2) formalisation of the relationship between the coach/es and the mapped ECEC settings, among those setting, and between setting and all the other professionals directly and indirectly related to early childhood (i.e.: libraries, volunteering associations, public health services, paediatricians), through a signed, written agreement;
 - 3) identification and analysis of the Early Years Education Professionals Training and Professional Development needs, in order to plan and deliver adequate trainings based on coaches' or other specialists' advice (i.e. psycho-pedagogical support, quality management tools, etc.);
1. exchange of good practices among the settings and all the other key stakeholders, to enhance practitioners' skills and competences as well as to disseminate a culture of quality;
 2. set up dedicated internal and external communication tools and actions (i.e. website creation and updating, WhatsApp groups, Facebook Page/group, etc.);
 3. annual/biannual plan, organisation and provision of various initiatives according to the needs analysis (point 3);
 4. reporting of the financial and management initiatives carried out and planning new initiatives, according to the PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT cycle.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 4 – Needs Analysis and Planning

Tool 19 – Self-Assessment Grid

Tool 20 – Peer Reviewing in ECEC

Tool 26 – Service Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader

OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES

IRELAND

The following supports are available to ECEC settings funded through Central Government (Department of Children and Youth Affairs):

City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and Voluntary Childcare Organisations (VCOs) work together locally and nationally to assist over 4,400 early education and childcare service providers improve the quality of their services. CCCs and VCOs provide supports and training to services and actively promote the adoption and application of national frameworks that improve the quality of service delivery. Pobal helps the CCCs and VCOs in working together by hosting a collaboration web portal for all the organisations to share information and work on; by managing and hosting national management and co-ordination meetings; by undertaking analysis, sharing information and helping the organisations organise and plan their work together.

City & County Childcare Committees

Thirty- three City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs(DCYA) and act as a local agent for DCYA in the administration of aspects of national early education and childcare programmes. The CCCs are often the first port of call for both parents and childcare providers when trying to access many of today's early years care and education initiatives (e.g. CETS, ECCE, CCS, Childminding grants). Having a local focus and

knowledge means that CCCs are well positioned to support the development and sustainment of early education and childcare services locally which cater for the needs of local parents and children”

Better Start Quality Development Service

It is a national initiative established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) to bring an integrated national approach to developing quality in ECEC for children aged from birth to six years in Ireland. It coordinates and extends the wide-ranging choice of supports and services already provided through City and County Childcare Committees and Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

ECEC settings are supported to engage with both the National Curriculum Framework (Aistear) and the National Quality Framework (Síolta) through the national mentoring service funded by the central government’s department of Education and Skills.

The National Aistear Síolta Initiative (NASI) was piloted in the first half of 2017. The purpose of the initiative is to support early years education professionals to develop and deepen their knowledge and skills in relation to planning and documenting the curriculum based on the National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (Aistear). This programme was delivered nationally to 162 settings by 27 national mentors and is currently under review.

REFERENCES

Pobal Website (2017) available at:

<https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/EarlyEducationandChildcare/Pages/CCCs.aspx>

Pobal Website (2017) available at:

<https://www.pobal.ie/BetterStart/Pages/Home.aspx>

TOOL 25: HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY (TRANSITION)

QUALITY AREA

Governance and Funding – Statement 9 – Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

WHAT

The continuity of the educational process leading to lifelong learning requires a logical, consistent approach beginning with children's early learning and development, which emphasizes the skills already acquired by the child and respects equally the educational dignity of each school and the dynamics of their diverse roles and functions. Educational continuity provides an organic and complete learning course, which aims to promote an articulated and multidimensional development of the subject. School, family, society are called to support an integrated learning journey, in which one action strengthens the other. In education and educational institutions, educational continuity is therefore achieved through two parallel lines, but sometimes crossed one another:

- Horizontal continuity: it is understood as the comprehension of every initiative involving families and the region's social/institutional context.
- Vertical continuity: means the implementation of a coherent educational model among the various child care/educational institutions of the region.

All those who take part in the ECEC system must have a clear and shared view of their role and responsibilities and must be aware that they are required to collaborate with partner organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the traditional institutional set-up towards a perspective that centres on the child and his family, overcoming the traditional conceptual division between child care services and educational services for early learning intervention. Care-giving and education services should use pedagogical approaches that integrate these two components into dynamic practices involving all organizations responsible for child welfare and education within the community.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To share ideas and practices
- To open professional dialogue between ECEC settings, schools and communes
- To stimulate mutual knowledge
- To lay the foundation for the creation of coherent and shared educational projects that move within a common framework

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: Early Years Education Professionals, children, pedagogical coordinator (coach), universities
Indirect: parents, carers and families

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

The word "continuity" expresses a concept of progressiveness that lasts over time, so it is hoped that this shared work tool will be implemented throughout the year, with particular attention to the design phase that usually coincides with the beginning of the year school.

HOW

Educational continuity implies the creation of participatory alliances with all actors involved:

- A) Sharing and coordinating actions between the various services in the area e.g. social and health care services.
- B) Interprofessional collaboration between Early Years Education Professionals and teachers e.g. Creation of common initiatives and events in the area;
- C) Networking activities involving the participation of the various organizations present in the locality e.g. Paediatric associations, libraries.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS**OTHER RESOURCES/ GOOD PRACTICES****ITALY**

The Network Pedagogical Coordination designs a continuity project between the various levels of a school in a territory, adopting shared a perspective regarding the consistency of educational interventions, and organizational efficiency and management by all the educational staff involved. Intervention recipients: Nursery nurseries - nursery schools - primary schools - first grade secondary schools.

At the beginning of the school year, meetings are scheduled during which the phases for project design and verification (September-May) are defined. The Pedagogical Coordinator will find a subject on which you work and the ways of its development.

Usually, the number of visits to the various partners are organised in order to share spaces, activities, and foster knowledge between children and adults. During the meetings, ideas and practices are discussed, as well as workshop activities. In order to ensure a successful project, it is desirable to present common training paths for educational staff qualified at different levels.

REFERENCES

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Final-Review-of-Occupational-Role-Profiles-in-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care.pdf>

http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Meitheal_Parents_Information_Leaflet.pdf

Educational continuity 0-6. The relationship between the nest and the school of childhood (E. Catarsi)

Acts of the Conference. Books in play, June 2011, (E. Catarsi)

I also go to school; the first days with mom and dad. Editions Kite 2010 (P. Milani, L. Gialma)

TOOL 26: SERVICE COORDINATOR/ PEDAGOGICAL LEADER

QUALITY AREA

Governance and funding – Statement 9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

WHAT

The Pedagogic Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader is a professional figure preferably holding a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Care & Education or equivalent degree. The pedagogical leader has an influential role in inspiring, motivating, affirming and also in challenging or extending the practice and pedagogy of Early Years Education Professionals. It is a journey of joint inquiry involving reflection on the important work Early Years Education Professionals do with children and families. The service coordinator/pedagogical leader works collaboratively with the Network Coordination/Service Manager. It is a reciprocal process with the pedagogical leader playing an integral role in mentoring, guiding and supporting the delivery of quality care and education in each setting.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To lead and facilitate reflective discussions about practice
- To lead in quality practice
- To monitor and evaluate the quality and documentation of experiences
- To support, guide and monitor the activities of settings
- To observe children and Early Years Education Professionals interactions making relevant suggestions
- To organise training opportunities tailored to the setting and individual Early Years Education Professionals
- To empower and encourage
- To involve families and the local community in the educational programme
- To document innovative approaches and projects
- To work with other Early Years Education Professionals such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists.
- To consider how the educational program can be linked to the community by working with community services and marginalised groups

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals,

Indirect: children, parents and families, Community Services, Policy Makers

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

The Service Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader performs his/her function through weekly meetings with the service manager and educational team. The tasks required by the service coordinator/pedagogical leader will differ depending on the size of service e.g. the amount of rooms, number of Early Years Education Professionals and children enrolled. The pedagogical leader will also consider factors such as the service facilities, resources and operational considerations that will outline the needs of each service. In addition, the Coordinator/Pedagogical Leader will conduct periodic meetings with key stakeholders, the Relevant Authorities within the area.

HOW

The appointment and performance of the pedagogical leader is the overall responsibility of the service manager. However, Municipalities/local governments, individually or associatively, in partnership and consultation with service managers, line manage the performance and responsibilities of the pedagogical leader. To ensure effective performance and an even distribution of workload, it is recommended the pedagogical leader is given an appropriate amount of services to work with and for this to be reviewed regularly to ensure the needs of each service is met.

Required expertise of an Educational Leader:

- Suitably qualified and experienced
- Approachable and flexible
- Knowledgeable about theories, pedagogy and relevant learning frameworks
- Skilled as a mentor and understands varying abilities and styles of learning
- Knowledgeable about all relevant National Quality and Regulatory Standards
- Role models quality practices through observation techniques and meaningful interactions with children.
- Work in partnership with families, meeting regularly where required.
- Promoting the pedagogical quality of services (community actions: seminars, conferences, events, etc.)

LINKS WITH OTHERS TOOLS

Tool 18 – *Mentoring in Monitoring and Evaluation*

Tool 24 – *Coaching*

TOOL 27: GREEN KINDERGARDEN AWARD

WHAT

Instigating an annual award entitled “Green Kindergarten” awarded to ECEC settings whose pedagogical program includes systematic education for sustainability as a daily practice.

OBJECTIVE

- To positively influence children’s awareness and appreciation of the environment surrounding them
- To provide opportunities where children can explore, and be aware of their role in contributing to the natural environment
- To increase the visibility of the concept of “green kindergarten” so as to broaden the direct and indirect impact of green education
- To promote and integrate the principles of sustainability into early childhood education

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, children, policy makers

Indirect: parents, families

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: 3 – 6**WHEN**

Every year according to the awarding scheme

HOW

To become a green kindergarten, the ECEC setting should foster relationships with the surrounding community. It is essential that Early Years Education Professionals and the head of the organisation are committed, passionate and motivated. The commitment of all others who directly assist their work is also important (assistants, nurses, administrative staff, maintenance people, cleaners, gardeners, etc.). The owner, (municipality, foundation, church, etc.) as well as the parents themselves can also take part in the initiative. The collaborative relationships will indirectly contribute to the child’s learning opportunities, and their understanding of the world surrounding them.

The establishment of a formal application procedure, through which ECEC settings wishing to qualify for the official title of “Green Kindergarten” can apply. The application process consists of a self evaluation component that may guide kindergartens to identify further areas of improvement. The ECEC setting should carryout a baseline to understand where they are currently at in relation to the criteria. Following this, the completion of a self-evaluation is central to the process. Based on action planning, the ECEC will continue to work on areas highlighted in supporting children to engage with the community and surrounding environment.

ECEC settings must comply with the following requirements/criteria:

Underlying philosophy

1. The ECEC setting should provide a learning environment which encourages and practices- play, exploration, community relations and access to outdoor spaces.

Goals and corresponding activities are locally situated

2. The mission statements and strategic plans of local and regional organizations, NGOs, partner institutions, parents associations are considered in the development of goals which are set.

3. Protection of the local natural environment is given priority in the definition of goals and tasks (i.e., protection of trees, waste management and recycling, promotion of healthy diet, energy conservation, etc.).

Pedagogical work, methodology

4. The planning and implementation of the pedagogical work is informed by the principles and content of environmental education.
5. Opportunities and experiences are play based and allow sufficient time for children to explore, think and play in the natural environment.
6. All children should have equal access to the programme regardless of age, ability or background.
7. Open ended materials are present, creating a learning environment which is rooted in the child's right to play, have a voice, and choice in matters concerning them.

Heritage

8. Exploring local heritage with the involvement of parents; special emphasis on the celebration of green holidays of local significance (i.e., world water day in areas near natural water, birds and trees day in kindergartens located in the vicinity of forests and mountains).

Workforce

9. Staff members are familiar with the concept of sustainability which informs all activities; they set a positive example by leading a healthy and environmentally conscious lifestyle.
10. On a regular basis kindergarten Early Years Education Professionals participate in continuing training courses in the field of environmental education.

Infrastructure, equipment, waste management

11. The interior of the kindergarten is furnished in such a way that promotes an environmentally conscious and healthy lifestyle (i.e., furnishing is economical, practical, and made of natural materials).
12. Every room has its own individual character, with lots of plants and a collection of natural treasures where children can tend to plants and even animals (under supervision and complying with health and safety regulations).
13. The outside yard is free of allergenic and poisonous plants; there are vegetable, flower and herb gardens, a rockery and a pond, etc. where children can learn how to use gardening tools.
14. The playground equipment is made of eco-friendly materials; shades and water wells are installed for the children's convenience.
15. Energy-efficient and environmentally friendly electricity, water and heating systems are installed that meet health and safety regulations.
16. Containers for selective waste collection are provided for the disposal of non-hazardous waste.
17. Used paper is collected separately so that children can re-use them (for origami, drawing etc. projects).
18. The management of the kindergarten prioritises the eco-friendly and energy-efficient operation of the facility.
19. ECEC providers keep up to date with the recent publications and news in the field of environmental education; they also influence the habits and lifestyle choices of children and their parents so that they become environmentally conscious consumers and responsible members of the local community.

Communication

20. There is ongoing and active communication between the kindergarten and the parents, members of the local community, partner organisations and other educational institutions;

collaboration and partnership are established and maintained to further the cause of environment and nature conservation.

Technically speaking, every kindergarden that complies with the above procedure and implements its pedagogical program with commitment and care can be said to be carrying out “green kindergarden” tasks.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 14 – *Curriculum for Environmental Education*

REFERENCES

<https://greenschoolsireland.org/>



COMMON AREA

This common area has been created to provide additional tools to support ECEC settings and staff enhance their competences and skills to adapt a Total Quality management approach. The rationale behind it is to foster a managerial mind-set and approach to quality among ECEC Professionals who may be more familiar with specific and technical competences (i.e. those related to pedagogy, child well-being, play-based curriculum, etc.), than those required to systematically adopt quality management procedures and practices.

These additional tools are adapted from different business and professional sectors and their general usefulness will increase ECEC staff competences to support the set up and/or the development of Quality management systems in ECEC settings. Thus, the tools described have the potential to reinforce a common understanding and a constructive dialogue among the different professionals of the education sector as well as with all the relevant stakeholders of the ECEC domain, such as policy-makers, parents, families and carers, local social and health services, psychologists, paediatricians, etc.

ECEC settings staff can benefit from the adaption of these tools, as they facilitate the acquisition of a more objective and managerial approach to quality and quality management which steps back from the specificities of the sector to pursue more effective and result-oriented practices.

Specifically, the following instruments are provided:

- *Budget planning and monitoring (Tool 28), to support the planning and management of the financial resources;*
- *Participative Leadership Approach (Tool 29) for strengthening leadership skills and empowering staff to develop a sense of ownership;*
- *PDCA Cycle (Tool 30), Plan-Do-Check-Act approach at the basis of every quality management system;*
- *SMART goals (Tool 31), a support for the definition of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound objectives;*
- *SWOT analysis (Tool 32), to identify and explore Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the setting;*
- *Successful Educational Action (Tool 33), a methodology for collaborative action.*

TOOL 28: BUDGET PLANNING AND MONITORING

QUALITY AREA

Common Area

WHAT

It is a tool for the economic management of a service; it will assist in planning and programming the desired economic objectives and can facilitate long and short term form to support investment choices.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To provide an evidence-based and clear knowledge of cost centre retail
- To identify challenges/problems in the ECEC setting economic and financial management and find solutions
- To identify and recognise the effectiveness elements of a service or the points of strength in management
- To monitor the economic and financial health and trends of the service
- To anticipate break-even point for new ECEC services

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers

Indirect: Early Years Education Professionals, families and territory

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

This instrument may be used anytime a manager needs to determine the costs of the service; it is advisable to complete it before the operation of the business and twice yearly to estimate economic forecast and facilitate regular monitoring.

HOW

The ECEC setting management data base (e. g Excel) containing many versions of all the financial information of setting to create a total budget or cost centres. Below are some of the key factors to be monitored through the budgeting tool:

- fixed costs (educational staff, general expenses of the facility, etc.)
- revenues (fees, public funds, project-based funds, etc...)
- exceptional costs
- etc.

The management, with the support of the staff (if needed), regularly collects and inputs analytical data to ensure accurate final results.

This tool can be tailored to the uniqueness of the setting and can be shared with a financial consultant that will be able to validate or modify it, based on his/her advice

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

TOOL 29: PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP APPROACH

QUALITY AREA**Common Area****WHAT**

Introducing leadership to replace management for better quality

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To introduce a leadership approach in ECEC settings day-to-day work to create ownership and help to ensure the quality desired by the staff and users alike

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers

Indirect: ECEC staff, parents/families/carers, wider community

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

Ongoing process, to be introduced first at the beginning of a school year

HOW

5 elements of a leadership approach (modified for ECEC from Wallace's principles for schools (2000)):

1. Shaping a vision of success for all children and parents, one based on high standards.
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
3. Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realising the school vision.
4. Improving the physical, social and mental environment to enable Early Years Education Professionals and other employees to work at their best and children to reach their full potential.
5. Managing people, data and processes to track the activities developed and results achieved and to foster school improvement.

The basics to build the leadership approach to are the 4C's:

- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity

The leadership approach can be applied using the following 7 Step approach:

Step 1: Adopt Your Vision

For this step you need to look at the big picture: what are the main challenges of our times and what the children attending your setting are likely to face as challenges in their school and adult life? To build your vision you also need to look for research evidence on how early childhood education can better help them face the challenges and build your vision on how to support them.

Step 2: Create Community Consensus Around the 4Cs

In this step, you will want to start a community conversation around your 21st century education vision. This is crucial to leadership and distributed responsibility, as this creates the basis, namely that people take ownership. To build a broad consensus around your vision think about the stakeholders who could potentially support this vision, such as your teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and your superiors. You will need to explain why you want to build your model on the 4Cs. For this you can use videos, literature read in a book club like manner, but storytelling is another useful too.

Step 3: Align Your System to the 4Cs

In this step, you need to develop a strategic plan for implementing your vision. This should include sub-strategies for engaging everybody, planning and assessment (see SMART goals) managing challenges, creating opportunities for personal and professional development and capacity building. The assessment/evaluation of the staff performances links to what is written in Step 6, about evaluation system.

Step 4: Use the 4Cs to Build Professional Capacity

For this step, you need to change both the culture and the contents of in-service training and other professional development activities so that everybody feels that they are challenged to critically think and communicate effectively, involved in true collaboration with colleagues and encouraged to be creative and innovative. Both training material and trainers are available in this field.

Step 5: Embed the 4Cs in Curriculum and Assessment

It is easier to implement this step in early childhood contexts than in formal education as there is no focus on standardised testing. However, it is crucial to introduce tools that are suitable for assessing learning outcomes and skills development in the 4Cs. The use of a backwards design methodology can be successful - build your curricula on desired learning outcomes, focusing on learning rather than teaching.

Step 6: Use the 4C's to support teachers and staff.

Engage all your staff, offer them resources, make them responsible and trust them, but at the same time give them regular feedback and introduce an evaluation system. As you need to build your leadership team, peer support should be given a priority.

Step 7: Improve and innovate: Create a 4C's organisation

Your primary leadership goal is to create an organisation that is constantly improving. For this you need to establish systems based on distributed leadership approaches in the fields of strategic planning, accountability, process improvement and quality management.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – *Reflecting Professional Development*

Tool 13 – *ECEC Setting Mission Statement*

REFERENCES

P21 – Partnership for 21st Century Learning, source of the 7 Steps method

Jillian Rodd: Leadership in Early Childhood – The Pathway to Professionalism (McGraw-Hill Open University Press 2013.)

How do they manage? - A review of the research on leadership in early childhood - Daniel Muijs, Carol Aubrey, Alma Harris and Mary Briggs (University of Warwick in journal of early childhood research 2004.)

Contextualizing Distributed Leadership Within Early Childhood Education: Current Understandings, Research Evidence and future Challenges - Johanna Heikka, Manjula Waniganayake and Eeva Hujala (in EMAL (Educational Management Administration & Leadership) 2012.)

TOOL 30: PDCA CYCLE

QUALITY AREA

Common Area

WHAT

The PDCA (Plan – Do – Check – Act) cycle is a four-step management method used in business for the control and continual improvement of processes and products. It is also known as the Deming circle/cycle/wheel, thanks to Mr Deming, considered by many to be the father of modern quality control

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To introduce and/or reinforce the capacity to manage quality in the ECEC providers' organisations, through a tested and effective interactive method.
- To improve entrepreneurial and managerial skills of, mainly private, ECEC providers' management
- To solve problem and/or continuously improve the quality provided, based on a scientific approach to collect data to inform the decision-making process
- To track the process of improvement in order to not repeat the same mistakes in the future and acquiring a *learning to learn* approach in facing and solving problems/difficulties

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff

Indirect: parents, families,

WHEN

Ongoing process. The PDCA approach towards a Quality Management is a continuous approach

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

HOW

The PDCA method can be applied, when a specific problem in the ECEC setting and/or a need to improve the quality of the service provided arises, in order to put into practice an effective decision-making process, based on data collection and evidences as well as on the active participation of all the key stakeholder.

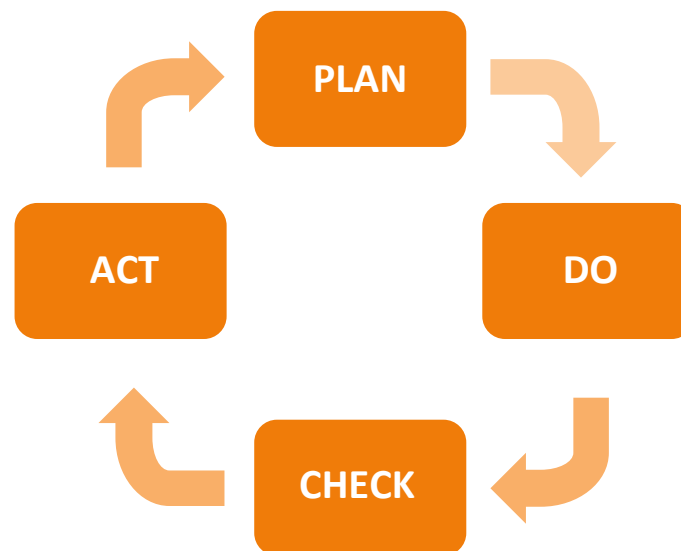
Different approaches towards PDCA for Quality Management have been developed according to the different kind of organisations and contexts in which the method can be applied¹⁴, although its aims and general structure remain the same.

Whatever the approach, the PDCA model helps in quality management on a day-to-day basis. It keeps the process under control, prevents non-conformance, and encourages development of innovative and breakthrough changes to ensure quality and performance improvement.

¹⁴ The two major approaches are Edwards Deming's Statistical Control Approach and Genichi Taguchi's Robust Engineering Approach. Edward Deming applied PDCA to reduce excessive variability in processes and products by using statistical tools. Taguchi tried to avoid variability by targeting it in the planning phase using robust engineering solutions to achieve performance on target.

Increased quality leads to increased customer expectations, which in turn drives further service and process improvement.

It is the role of ECEC provider/ management to start introducing the method as a regular practice to take decisions, following the steps detailed below¹⁵:



1. PLAN

The “Plan” phase of PDCA for quality management covers:

- defining the problem or issue that need to be addressed
- defining the ideal or desired state
- data collection to determine the problem in terms of deviance from the ideal state
- ascertaining the root cause for the problem or issue
- evaluating the various possible interventions to solve the problem and their possible outcomes
- selecting the best possible intervention
- scheduling the corrective process by planning for resources, determining people responsible for the corrective action
- mapping the corrective process through flowcharts, control charts, and other tools

2. DO

The “Do” phase of PDCA concerns implementation of the selected solution to reduce the deviation or solve the issue. The implementation of the selected solution is initially on a small scale to check its effectiveness. Successful implementation results in across-the-board implementation.

This phase can also cover training the employees for the adopted quality intervention.

3. CHECK

In traditional quality management schemes, the “Check” of PDCA became synonymous with quality inspection. Deming replaced the “Check” stage with “Study” stage that entails use of statistical tools to understanding the nature of variation in the process output in terms of what worked, what did not work, and the lessons learned from the experience. We can also associate this phase with

¹⁵ Of course, before start using the method, a specific training could be required, according to the quality systems knowledge ECEC providers staff can have.

analytical tasks and the popular motto “let the data speak”, which means that monitoring through data and evidences collection is important to verify and analyse if the designed solutions are effective (and in what measure) or not.

4. ACT

The “Act” phase in PDCA for quality management entails:

- standardisation of the successful solution and adopting the same for wholesale process improvement, involving other stakeholders such as other colleagues, suppliers, parents and families (as “customers”, policy makers and local authorities in the changed process)
- creating safeguards to check relapse into the previous stage
- explore opportunities for further improvements

REFERENCES

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TOOL 31: SETTING SMART GOALS

QUALITY AREA

Common Area

WHAT

Framework of references to support working teams as well as lone practitioners in identifying and setting clear achievable goals. SMART stands for objectives' characteristics which should be: Specific – Measurable – Attainable – Realistic/Relevant – Time Bounded (related)¹⁶

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To prepare for a team meeting, developing plans and goals
- To share a method to set and describe achievable goals in order to improve the quality of working together
- To agree on action statements

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: managers, Early Years Education Professionals, ECEC staff

Indirect: children, parents, families

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

Whenever the timeline of the academic year mentions 'develop a new (team) plan', this tool can be used

HOW

The activity is carried out as a team, it needs a coordinator/facilitator, who could be external or a colleague; both need of course to be experienced with the topic.

According to the plan to be developed and/or the issue to be tackled the facilitator invites each team member to write their topic/goal to be improved, on a piece of paper.

Then he/she explains what **SMART** target setting is:

Specific – target a specific area for improvement

Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress

Attainable – how the goal can be achieved

Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources

(Relevant – state the consistency of the goal to the activities)

Time-bounded (related) – specify when the result(s) can be achieved

- Now everyone gets time to improve one aspect of the goal by rewriting it, **including** the improvement from a SMART perspective.
- When everyone has made their improvement, read their improved goal and make any further final improvements, with the help of the coordinator and the other team members, if needed.

¹⁶ You can also use **SMARTER** target setting: **Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; Time-bound; Evaluate; Re-evaluate** (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria_-_24-5-2014)

For Example: The overall objective is to increase the use of ICT instruments in classrooms and we need to set some SMART goals.

Not SMART goal
Increase the use of ICT learning instruments (not specific, not measurable, not time bound)
SMART goals
Increase the number of teachers that use ICT tools in their classrooms by 5% within the next 12 months
Increase the proportion of computers/learners by 10% within the next academic year
15% of the teachers will follow a professional development course on the use of ICT instruments in lessons within the next academic year

SPECIFIC	<p>What do we want to achieve? What exactly are we going to do? What do we need to do beforehand?</p> <p>Eg: increase the presence of migrant children in the ECEC service</p>
MEASURABLE	<p>How will we know we're on the way to our goal? What visible difference will there be after achieving the goal? How will others (learners, colleagues, parents) know we have achieved our goal?</p> <p>Eg: 3% increase in.....</p>
ATTAINABLE	<p>Is the goal realistically in our power to achieve? What other changes are needed to make the goal achievable? How can we impact those changes? Is anyone else involved? How? Is this realistic?</p> <p>Are we supported?</p>
RELEVANT	<p>Why do we need this goal? If we don't achieve the goal what does it mean for the institution/our team/our learners ...?</p> <p>Is the goal linked to our vision, mission and values?</p> <p>Eg: yes.....</p>
TIME BOUND	<p>When exactly are we going to achieve this goal? How much time do we need to achieve our goal?</p> <p>What's our roadmap to get there?</p> <p>What are our resources? Is the roadmap realistic? What else do we have to do at the same time?</p> <p>Eg: 24 month scale</p>

TOOL 32: SWOT ANALYSIS (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS)

QUALITY AREA

Common Area

WHAT

SWOT is a basic, analytical framework aimed at assessing organisation choices, in different fields and situations, based on both internal (the strengths and weaknesses) and external (the potential opportunities and threats) factors.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To introduce and/or reinforce self-assessment skills in ECEC providers, aimed at supporting planning goals and setting priorities.
- To improve entrepreneurial and managerial skills of, mainly private, ECEC providers' management
- To enlarge and enrich the resources, skills and competences to implement more effective decision-making process in ECEC provision.

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: ECEC providers leaders and managers, Early Years Education Professionals
 Indirect: parent, non-teaching staff, wider community

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth-6

WHEN

Ongoing process, to be adopted at defined stages according to projects development, decision-making requirements, special events, etc.

HOW

The SWOT Analysis is based on graphic representation of a large square, like the one below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

A facilitator/mentor with experience in using this tool can guide settings in its use: explaining how to use it and involving all the participants in giving feedback, thus creating a cooperative environment and positive atmosphere in which to examine all factors impacting on the ECEE setting. It encourages participants and organisations to adopt a positive approach to improvements and focus on solutions rather than mistakes.

1° step:

The facilitator starts by drawing a large square on a white board or paper. Divide the square into quadrants. Label the upper left quadrant "Strengths", the lower left "Weaknesses", the upper right "Opportunities", and the lower right "Threats".

Remind the group that strengths and weaknesses are internal factors (within the setting) and opportunities and threats are external factors.

2° step:

The facilitator then asks the group members to list strengths by looking at what is currently done well, at skills and experience within the group, at leadership. Strengths might include successful stories in educational achievements, a good gender balance within the setting, practitioners' vast experience, unique competences and skills, and so on.

3° step

The facilitator then asks for weaknesses, using the reverse of the questions above. Examples of weaknesses might be: a lack of interest from children and/or other key stakeholders in pedagogical curriculum; lack of materials and games and equipment or the need for specific practitioner competences/skills, etc.

These two steps are related to internal analysis, based on factors on which the people involved in the assessment can practically intervene

4° step:

Next, the facilitator opens the assessment to the external factors, by asking group members to identify opportunities, such as external elements that could be used to benefit the group. Perhaps a parents' association is willing to cooperate by providing new toys and educational materials; or the municipality plans to deliver training for Early Years Education Professionals, and so on.

5° step

Finally, the facilitator asks the group members to identify threats - things that might negatively affect the group and its operations or cause difficulties for the setting. These threats might be related to budget cuts that will prevent/hinder investment for improvement, new laws/regulations that enforce mandatory requirements for the ECEC provision, etc.

After filling in the quadrants, the facilitator encourages group members to talk about what stands out from this analysis and what each of them can do in order to try to overcome the difficulties as well as to enhance the strengths and the positive elements that have emerged. Some possible focused questions to encourage and support participants' active engagement could be: "Is it clear where the team needs to focus attention?" "What is surprising?" "What are the next steps"?

Then, thanks to this reflection and assessment process, the ECEC provider/management can devise a work plan to be implemented according to a time schedule and budget plan, if financial investment is needed.

TOOL 33: SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTION

QUALITY AREA

Common Area

WHAT

Participants will learn about and implement the methodology of Successful Educational Action (SEA) developed by Ramon Flecha and his team at CREA

MAIN OBJECTIVE

- To understand a tried and tested methodology for collaborative action
- To solve problems/address challenges linked to education in a democratic way

TARGET GROUPS

Direct: ECEC providers leaders and managers, Early Years Education Professionals

Indirect: parent, non-teaching staff, wider community

CHILDREN AGE GROUP: Birth – 6

WHEN

On-going

HOW

Time necessary for the activity: 30-45 minutes

Necessary preparations:

Before the training: the trainer should know and understand the SEA methodology

Tools or props: flip chart, markers, SEA template for participants, background reading

Step-by-step description of the activity:

- participants learn about the SEA methodology
- they identify 3-4 needs
- Successful Education Plans (SEPs) are developed in small groups
- Participants introduce and discuss the detailed plans

Desired outcomes:

participants will become able to plan and carry out actions in ECEC setting/schools and in the family context, based on values and practices of democracy

Successful Educational Action planning

According to research carried out in the framework of the Includ-ED project the following types of action are considered to support educational success of children in addition to being lifelong learning opportunities for adults and are referred to as Successful Educational Actions (SEAs):

- actions which improve the educational success of ALL children in a school: these actions should ensure that all children in the school benefits from these actions regardless their conditions.
- actions planned, organised and carried out by families of a school: families should play the leadership role in the actions although other actors, such as teachers or students, can be invited to participate.
- actions that are part of a wider plan for the involvement of families at school: families of the school should have a plan to develop several SEAs within an organised framework.
- actions based on the existing resources of the community who is organising them: all these actions should be developed with the resources that are in the community, it is the only way for there to be realistic action.

The Successful Educational Plan (SEP): how we do it.

Key 1 / Think

1. Define what goals we want to achieve.

Consider what we need to do to improve educational success in our educational community and what objectives must be defined to meet these needs.

2. Remember that we have experience and competencies.

We know what to do and who could work with us and help us.

3. Consider what we need.

Resources, people, skills, time, etc. What else? Should we learn something before starting? How do we do?

Key 2 / Organise

1. How will we disseminate outputs to reach all families?

Let them know what we want to build. What do we tell the families? What do we want to ask of them?

2. How do we distribute the work?

Do we form a committee? What time availability do we have? And skills? Do we have allies within the community?

3. What timetable do we propose?

Both for meetings and for the activities we do. How often should we meet: weekly, monthly? When do we start?

Key 3 / Act

1. Communicate. Maintaining communication and coordination with the rest of the educational community is always helpful, though this may be difficult to do initially

2. Share the experience. It will be very useful to disseminate the results to the families, strengthening links with the educational community, inviting people not yet involved, etc.

3. Learning. We learn by doing and sharing all that we discover! If something does not go right the first time, we must remember that we are learning by doing! Do not be afraid to change or make a mistake.

Key 4 / Value

1. Results. What have we achieved and what have we not? Why? How do we feel?

2. "Lessons learned." What have we learned from this whole experience? What has it brought us individually and collectively, as an ECEC Setting?

3. The future. Now what do we do? Do we continue our successful educational actions? Do we want to add more fields, modify some aspects, and continue this first experience of educational success?

Dr. Joyce Epstein’s six themes of involvement, the keys to successful school, family and community partnerships

1. **Parenting** Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
2. **Communicating** Communicate with families about school programmes and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
3. **Volunteering** Improve recruitment, training and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in other locations to support students and school programmes.
4. **Learning at home** Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.
5. **Decision making** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams and other parent organisations.
6. **Collaborating with the community** Coordinate community resources and services for students, families and the school with businesses, agencies and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Template for a SEP:

Needs Identified	
Specific objective/s	
Involvement theme	
SEA/s	
Resources needed	
Participants and target groups	
Dissemination	
Timetable	

Expected results	
Evaluation	

Example of a SEP

Needs Identified	Reading habits and skills appropriate to the different developmental stages
Specific objective/s	Improving reading skills of students
Involvement theme	Participation
SEA/s	Create a literary café for parents, where families can bring their concerns and proposals about reading (propose books, lectures, unforgettable personal stories or reading habits (school library, storytelling, extracurricular activities, book exchange, reading club, literary competitions, theatre, ...))
Resources needed	Adequate space and resource materials, specific materials (resources in different languages, etc.), volunteers, resources for dissemination.
Participants and target groups	P – teachers, parents’ organization, volunteers. T – teachers, parents and students of the school
Dissemination	Disseminate before and after each activity organized by the committee.
Timetable	At the beginning of the school year, create the committee and organise a schedule of meetings of the literary cafe. It will be monthly or quarterly (depending on availability of volunteers. At the initial consult with attendees about frequency and dates for future meetings. At the end of the year summarise the sessions (Materials read, sharing concerns/solutions; include photos, etc.)
Expected results	Increasing the % of active participation in the parents’ organisation; increasing the parents’ participation in all other activities for reading. Collect feedback in book format (with photos, stories, etc.)
Evaluation	Quarterly: the committee will carry out an assessment of their work. At the end of each literary café, a quick assessment of the dynamics and of the target End of school year: participants questionnaire with evaluation, proposals, etc.

LINK WITH OTHER TOOLS

Tool 7 – Reflecting Professional Development

KEY DEFINITIONS

During the development of this project partners found it necessary to produce some key definitions related to the project, in order to have an accurate, shared understanding of recurrent and typical terms adopted, specifically in the Intellectual Outputs, ensuring they are intelligible and comprehensive.

Starting from the key concepts reported in the Annex of the *“Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care”* and based on partners experiences, the SEQUENCES project consortium has selected those considered most meaningful for Early Years Education Professionals who want to begin addressing Quality and Quality Assurance in their settings. The terms described below are intended to support a comprehensive overall picture of the sector at European level.

A COMPETENT ECEC SYSTEM

Competence in the ECEC context should be understood as a characteristic of the entire system. A competent system includes competent individuals; collaboration between individuals and teams in an ECEC setting, and between institutions (ECEC settings, nurseries, pre-schools, schools, pre-primary settings, support services for children and families etc.); as well as effective governance arrangements at a policy level.

ACCESS

Access to early childhood education and care means when a place is available or can be made available in a quality ECEC setting where neither distance nor cost presents a barrier to attendance.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility refers to problems parents experience in gaining access to ECEC services. These can be caused by explicit or implicit barriers, such as parents' inadequate knowledge of procedures or the value of ECEC, physical barriers for children with disabilities, waiting lists, a lack of choice for parents, language barriers etc.

ACTION RESEARCH

A reflective process of progressive problem solving led by Early Years Education Professionals working in teams to improve their educational practices and address issues and solve problems.

CHILDCARE RELATIONSHIP

Any care relationships provided especially to children from birth to 3 years in ECEC settings, based on a dedicated educational relationship among children and practitioners/Early Years Education Professionals, including diapers changing, sleeping etc.

CHILD-CENTRED PEDAGOGY INCLUDING THE INTEREST OF THE CHILD

A child centred approach is one which builds on children's interests, needs, and experiences. These include cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs. A child centred approach is one that uses a pedagogy which promotes children's holistic development and enables adults to guide and support their development.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE

A comprehensive service is one that extends beyond the provision of ECEC and includes a cooperative approach with other services to focus on all other aspects of children's development

such as their general health and well-being, child protection and support for them and their parents in their home and community environments.

CHILD-CENTRED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Structuring of a child-friendly environment offering time, spaces, opportunities and interesting materials for free play and structured learning activities in addition to ample spaces for care needs such as eat/sleep (if relevant).

CHILDREN FROM GROUPS WHO ARE AT RISK OF DISADVANTAGE

Children can be at risk of disadvantage because of their individual circumstances or because they, or their families belong to a group which is disadvantaged in society. These children may include those with disabilities, with mental health problems, in alternative care, at risk of neglect/abuse, undocumented child migrants/asylum seekers, those whose families live in poverty or are socially disadvantaged, those whose families have a migrant and/or second language background, those whose families have limited access to services, Roma and traveller children.

CURRICULUM

An ECEC curriculum (which includes those aspects which are implicit rather than explicit) covers developmental care, supportive interactions, children's learning experiences and supportive assessment. This is usually set out in formal documentation, which promotes all young children's personal and social development, their learning and prepares them for life and citizenship in their society.

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

A curriculum framework (which can be a national, regional or local arrangement) expressing values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the content of and approach to children's care and learning.

DOCUMENTATION

A collection of evidences of child's learning activities and progress developed during the whole year (photos, drawings, child's works, etc.), in order to make children learning and social experiences and progress visible. It could also contain brief thoughts and notes written by the Early Years Education Professional, CD,s and/or videos.

Documentation gives parents and families a practical insight into the daily life of their child in the ECEC setting, the progresses made, the activities experienced, the learning achieved, etc.. in addition to supporting reflective practice among Early Years Education Professionals.

ECEC

Provision for children from birth through to primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e., it is obliged to comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures.

ECEC PROVIDER

ECEC refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age - regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content - and includes nursery/day-care centres and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision.

ECEC SETTING

The place, appropriately equipped with equipment, materials, toys, educational resources, where the educational and care curriculum is deployed and the relationship among ECEC staff and among

them, children and parents takes place. It refers to any public and private education service for children from birth to compulsory school age delivered in a formal environment/context.

ECEC STAFF

The qualified workforce of an ECEC provider whose professional activities directly and/or indirectly support and guide children's learning. All members of the workforce (Early Years Education Professionals, auxiliary staff, pedagogical coordinator) are included in the definition of ECEC staff.

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL

Qualified professional taking a holistic approach to the care and education of children from birth to six years and who is skilled in planning, delivering & monitoring the ECEC curriculum and sharing this with children, parents and families and colleagues.

EVALUATION

The systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the design, implementation or results of an on-going or completed ECEC project, programme or policy.

GOVERNANCE

Governance is the allocation of responsibility within and across levels of government and between public and non-public providers, and includes mechanisms to coordinate these responsibilities.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

High expectations occur when the ECEC system, and staff within the system, are child-centred and focus on what individual children can do; what they can learn; and what they can achieve with support. This helps to create an environment where children are actively encouraged to reach their full potential and their success and achievement is recognised and seen as an important part of the learning and caring environment.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

A holistic approach to ECEC is child-centred and means paying attention simultaneously to all aspects of a child's development, well-being and learning needs including those which relate to social, emotional, physical, linguistic and cognitive development.

INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

Integration refers to a coordinated policy for children where related care and education services or systems work together. In this context, other services such as social welfare, schools, the family, employment and health services can also collaborate to support children in an ECEC context. When all ECEC services for children are integrated, this is usually described as comprehensive provision. Collaboration includes a close working relationship for those with administrative responsibility for providing ECEC services at a national, regional and/or local level.

LEGAL ENTITLEMENT

A legal entitlement exists when every child has the enforceable right to benefit from ECEC provision.

LOGBOOK

Journey observation diary in which Early Years Education Professionals record information about the main activities offered, the daily routine and the child's experiences/work in a "class"/group. It contains a brief description of what has happened. This information can be adapted to monitor and assess the child's personal learning and development,

MANAGER

The person who has responsibility for the smooth operation of all aspects of the ECEC setting including the care, education, safety and protection of all children, the supervision of staff, collaborating with parents and families other relevant professionals/agencies and ensuring compliance with legislation and regulations. The manager is supported by the management committee or employer/owner.

MENTORING

Provision of regular consultation with experienced professionals acting as mentors, to support ECEC manager and Early Years Education Professionals to develop the curriculum programme in a respectful, empowering manner. Mentors represent a link between the ECEC setting and developments in the field. During consultation with the manager the mentor informs, brings insights, makes suggestions, provides or suggestion additional resources, and collect relevant data for monitoring and evaluation of the practices.

MONITORING

In an ECEC context monitoring refers to the continuous and systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data which supports regular review of the quality of the ECEC system. It is based on pre-agreed quality standards, benchmarks or indicators which are established and modified through use to support self-reflection.

OBSERVATION

Non-formal monitoring procedure of children competences to deepen an Early Years Education Professional's understanding of children and their holistic learning processes in the everyday life of ECEC setting.

OUTCOMES

Outcomes are the actual or intended short-term and long-term changes arising from the provision of ECEC services that will benefit children, their parents and families, communities and society.

These changes are measurable and the benefits for children typically include:

- broadening minds, enriching communities and advancing civilisation;
- the acquisition of cognitive skills and competences;
- the acquisition of non-cognitive skills and competences;
- balanced emotional and psychological development;
- physical development;
- the successful transition to school;
- participation in society and preparation for later life and citizenship.

PARENTAL SUPPORT/EMPOWERMENT

Structured and defined activities to support parents in their role as the primary teachers and nurturers of their own children. These activities can be organized at ECEC setting level as well as at community level and implies mutual trust among ECEC staff and parents.

PEER REVIEW

A combination of self- and external evaluation with the aim of supporting the review of ECEC setting in its quality assurance and quality development efforts; it is conducted by a group of external experts, called *Peers*, who work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the methodology and of the assessed practices.

PLAY INCLUDING FREE PLAY

Spontaneous and unstructured play is child-led and child-initiated activity. It offers children opportunities to freely explore and reflect on their interests and issues that are relevant to and

meaningful in their lives. The role of ECEC staff is to encourage children's play through creating the right environment and using play as a pedagogic approach to learning.

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Professional leadership in an ECEC context requires skills, behaviours and competences related to supporting children's care and education, pedagogy, engagement with parents, the local community, staff management and organisation. As with other leadership roles in the education sector, ECEC leaders need to establish a culture and purpose which ensures high quality provision is available to all children, and where all staff and all parents and families are involved and supported.

PROFESSIONAL ROLE

A professional role is one which is regulated and requires individuals to develop and reflect on their own practice and with parents and children, create a learning environment which is constantly renewed and improved. Those fulfilling these roles will have appropriate qualifications and will be expected to take responsibility for the provision of high quality ECEC services in line with the available resources and the requirements and expectations of their system.

QUALITY IN ECEC

Quality in ECEC is a relative concept based on values and beliefs, and is a dynamic, continuous and democratic process. A balance is required between defining certain common objectives, applying them to all services, and supporting diversity between individual services.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM/QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ECEC

Quality Management systems are based on the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle which implies that every working process affecting the quality of the ECEC services is planned, provided, evaluated and standardised, through a continuous improvement approach, based on defined indicators, qualitative and quantitative monitoring and data collection and management decision making.

The Quality Assurance systems are management systems which ensure the capacity of ECEC services to provide quality services, using an evidence-based approach,

SCHOOL-READINESS

Where a Member State uses this concept, school readiness implies that a child possesses the motivation, and the cognitive and socio-emotional abilities that are required to learn and succeed in school.

SELF-EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT

Any methods and/or procedures systematically used by ECEC staff to assess their performance and key work processes according to established performance indicators and quality criteria.

SELF-REFLECTION

Specific ECEC work methodology based on a process of reflection at defined stages during the educational programme and at the end of it. It is based on both individual and team analysis of what has been developed during the year, what has gone well, what needs to be improved, and informs preparation for coming year, bearing in mind the further challenges and unanswered questions.

SPLIT SYSTEM

ECEC provision is offered in separate settings for different age groups, often under different administrative structures. The age ranges vary between countries but usually covers birth/1, 2/3 years and 3/5 years up to start of primary schooling (usually 5/6 years).

SUSTAINABILITY

The capacity to maintain an adequate, quality standard of ECEC provision, according to the resources available in terms of financing, human resources, social and cultural context

UNITARY SYSTEM

Provision for all children from birth to primary school is organised in a single phase and delivered in settings catering for the whole age range. The age range is usually defined in the national or system context. Unitary systems are usually governed by one administrator.

WORKFORCE

The workforce refers to all staff members working directly with children in any regulated setting that provides education and care for children from birth to primary school age. The workforce includes leaders and managers, and other staff working in ECEC settings (i.e. Early Years Education Professionals, auxiliary, etc.).