



# SEQUENCES

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

## MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOOLKIT

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## **MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOOLKIT**



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES

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The Multi-stakeholders Guidelines for the Implementation of the Toolkit is one of the three Intellectual Outputs<sup>1</sup> produced within the SEQUENCES project which is aimed at improving the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care provision in Europe, based on a bottom-up approach directly involving ECEC settings and practitioners from the field. It brought together organisations from 7 countries - Italy, Romania, Ireland, Malta, Lithuania, Hungary and Belgium, joining the efforts of the specific and relevant categories of stakeholders: ECEC professionals, educational trade unions, parents, academic experts and VET professionals.

The Guidelines are a supporting document for the various stakeholders in the field of early childhood education and care for adopting quality assurance systems and tools and implementing the SEQUENCES Toolkit. It contains:

- background information on quality assurance and quality development;
- suggestions for possible methodological approaches to be used for assessing the quality of early childhood education and care;
- recommendations tailored to the needs of the different target groups on how to adopt and implement the Toolkit, supported by a “Hints & Tips” section with comments and suggestions made by those who piloted the tools.

The three main target groups of the Toolkit coincide with the ones identified for the overall project:

- ECEC professionals,
- families/parents,
- trade unions,
- policy-makers.

Based on the project partners’ piloting experience and analysis the content was classified according to each target group’s special characteristics, e.g. public/private ECEC providers, micro ECEC providers, parents or other carers within the family, etc.

The Guidelines should also be read and considered on the basis of the wide diversity that characterises the planning, designing and delivery of ECEC services in Europe, which were directly experienced by the SEQUENCES project partners. Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> The two Intellectual Outputs are: the *SEQUENCES Toolkit for the Self and External Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care Provision* and *Training Curriculum and Support Didactic Materials*.

rationale behind this document is to make available lessons learned and a set of hints on how to better implement both the Toolkit for self and external evaluation and the Training Curriculum, considering that quality itself is characterised by relevant differences among EU Countries. How it is concretely implemented and achieved also differs, based on the overall juridical and educational systems in place.

Having mentioned the target groups it is worth to briefly recall for them, including not only professionals from the sector, such as ECEC setting educators, management and auxiliary staff, but also Parents and children, Policy Makers and Trade Unionists.



## QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality education is of great concern and interest all over the world. In a highly competitive education sector, success depends on the quality of education. An increasing number of stakeholders (teachers and educators, policy makers, children, and researchers) are adopting Total Quality Management (TQM), the art of organizing the whole to achieve excellence as it is often called<sup>2</sup>.

TQM is not a method or a simple programme; rather, it is an effective management philosophy for continuous improvement, customer satisfaction, and organisational excellence.

Originally, the concept of Total Quality Management was developed in the 1950s for manufacturing organisations, and has gradually become popular since the early 1980s in other service institutions, including banking, insurance, non-profit organizations, health care, etc. Now, TQM is recognised as a generic management tool that is applicable to any organisation, including educational settings.

People development (or talent management) is given high priority in TQM because excellence depends on the extent to which employees/members of an organisation are capable in their respective fields. TQM means the continuous improvement of employee capabilities which are used in all activities and processes. TQM strengthens collaborative work and promotes a quality culture within the organisation. TQM fosters a culture of trust, participation, teamwork, quality-mindedness, motivation for continuous improvement and constant learning; as a result, it creates a work culture that contributes to the organisation's success. In TQM all members of an organisation participate in improving processes, products, services, and the culture in which they work.

Total Quality Management provides guiding principles that make it particularly applicable in an ECEC setting<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) Synergistic relationships: the idea of synergy suggests that performance is improved by combining the knowledge, skills and experience of individuals to produce a total effect greater than the sum of their individual effects; therefore teamwork and collaboration are essential. Within the context of a TQM organisation, the primary focus

2 Farooq, M.S., Akhtar, M. S., Ullah, S.Zia (2007). Application of Total Quality Management in Education. *Journal of Quality and Technology Management*, 3(11), 87-97.

Sohel-Uz-Zaman, A.S.Md. and Anjalin, U. (2016) Implementing Total Quality Management in Education: Compatibility and Challenges. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(11), 207-217.

Wani, I.A., & Mehraj, H.K. (2014). Total Quality Management in Education: An Analysis. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 3(6), 71-78.

3 Fort he 4 pillars of TQM, see: Bonstingl, John Jay: "The Quality Revolution in Education" (1992). In: *Educational Leadership*, 50:3, pp. 4-9.

is on suppliers and customers, and in a TQM-informed ECEC setting everyone is both a customer and supplier. For example, teachers, management and staff members supply learning tools, environments and systems to learners who are the educational organisation's primary customers. Learners, in turn, are also suppliers or workers whose product is their own continuous improvement and personal growth.

- 2) Continuous improvement and self-evaluation, personally as well as collectively: educational settings must have the necessary resources (time as well as money) for reflection, training, research, and communication with stakeholders. When evaluating learners, assessment focuses on their strengths, individual learning styles, and recognises different types of intelligences and talents.
- 3) The organisation is understood as a system of ongoing processes: instead of focusing on results, TQM focuses on the processes that produce the desired outcome, continuously improving and adjusting them when and where necessary.
- 4) Leadership: the success of Total Quality Management is the responsibility of top management. School leaders must commit to creating and maintaining an environment of continuous improvement and collaboration to enable learners to realise their best potential.

There is no doubt that TQM, with its synergistic and process-oriented holistic approach, has great potential to serve education. However, there could be obstacles that prevent success. Most importantly, the lack of commitment by the parties involved within the education system, especially the top management and teachers, may undermine all TQM efforts and result in failure. Also, there is an inherent danger of bureaucracy in implementing the TQM approach that may lead to an overwhelming amount of meetings and paperwork and delay critical decision-making.

Early childhood education and care has become a matter of priority for policy makers in many countries. A rising body of research has identified that early childhood education and care provides a wide array of advantages, including the increase in social and economic benefits, child happiness, learning outcomes on the one hand, and a decrease of poverty on the other. Furthermore, research results consistently find that children who attend a high-quality preschool will become more successful in school and beyond – both academically and socially.

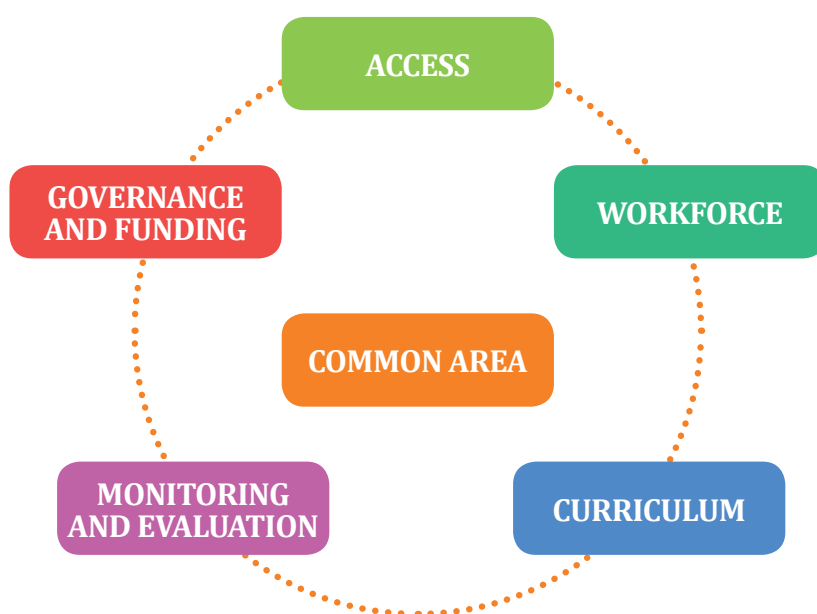
In ECEC settings, quality differs from other sectors, because in education the service is provided in a very specific way, with players and beneficiaries having different roles simultaneously. In addition, because the concept of quality, both perceived and expected is contextual depending on the Quality 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 quality while quality management aims to create good quality through management actions. Quality management uses strategies and tools, together with constant reflection on their effectiveness, to enhance the quality of education.

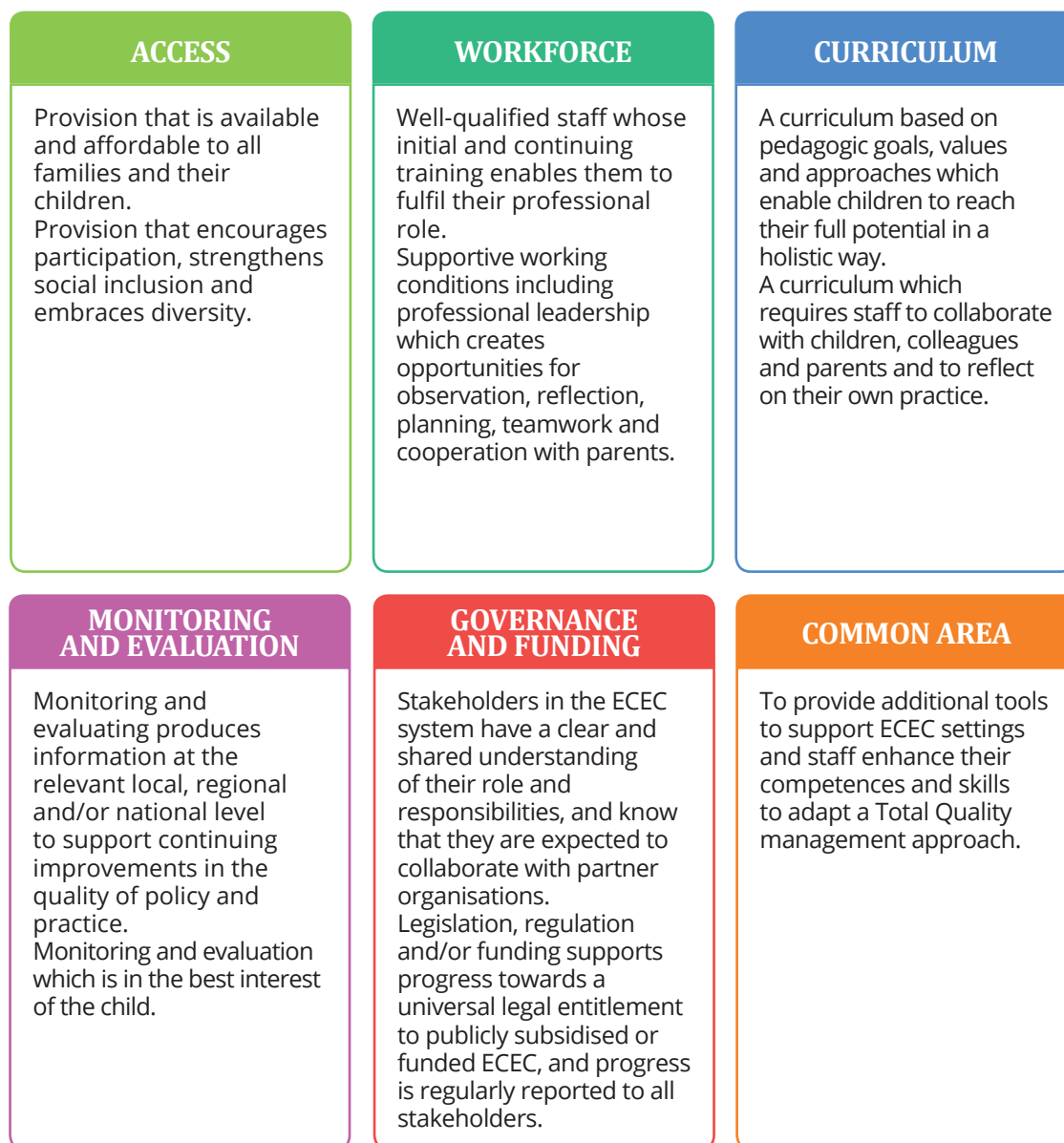
The TQM approach is a community-based approach where the standards come from the customers in general. In the case of ECEC settings, the most important stakeholders are children and their parents. The TQM approach aims at improving quality and increasing customer satisfaction by reviewing the organisational culture, restructuring, and 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 important, that all staff (including non-educational staff), as well as all parents/families/carers and children are 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 improvisation. It requires a continuous and systematic approach to gathering, evaluating, and acting on data about what is occurring in an organisation.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In an October 2014 report by the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care operating under the auspices of European Committee, 5 quality areas were identified that are fundamental to quality early years practice and by improving these areas, the efficiency of early childhood education can be increased.



The aim of the SEQUENCES project was to improve the quality of early childhood education through the development and adaptation of tools that facilitate external and self assessment. This was achieved through the provision of easy to use tools that come directly from day-to-day practices of ECEC professionals across the seven European countries in order to cover the 5 quality areas that are included in the SEQUENCES Toolkit. In addition to the 5 areas highlighted by the European taskforce, the project partners decided to include a sixth category, namely the “Common Area” to assist ECEC professionals in reviewing all the areas above.



For this end, partners developed such quality management tools, that are applicable for both external and internal assessment and through which, the efficiency of the education setting can be increased effectively with special emphasis of the following 5 areas: access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, governance and funding.

In addition to the Toolkit, a Training Curriculum was developed to offer specific support for trainers in terms of identification of learning outcomes, resources, challenges and training activities for each tool, so as to guarantee an effective application and implementation by ECEC professionals.

Managers and ECEC professionals together, or with a trainer/mentor can work through an element of practice as outlined in the tool descriptions in each of the five Quality Areas included in the Toolkit. The specific learning outcomes and activities in the manual

match the numbered tools and will contribute to an improved quality experience for children, their families, managers and ECEC professionals, by referring to:

- Explanation of how the Training tools are correlated to the Toolkit, through the learning activities and the 5 Quality Areas;
- Specific directions on how to use the attached evaluation tools as both training and quality management evaluation tools, including suggested training plans and session plans;
- Consider child-free hours and financial resources as transversal issues/challenges to be taken into account as they affect the effectiveness of training and tool;
- Brief explanation of the structure of each tool: specific comments on the learning outcomes description in terms of expected skills/competences to be performed in the settings; resources to be used to deliver the training as well as to implement the tool in the settings;
- A training plan and how to use the tools in practice as learning /(teaching) activities.

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## THE SEQUENCES TOOLKIT

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The SEQUENCES Toolkit is a collection of practical and flexible tools that allow users to adapt them according to their own needs or even combine them with practices they already have. The tools are suitable for both attaining quality improvement and being a component of quality assurance system.

The Toolkit is currently composed of 34 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 during a Study Visit in Ireland and based on the observations carried out during the visits to ECEC settings in Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta and Romania. 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, and parents association representing home/families' interests. It is expected to also influence practice at local level by offering a model for multi-stakeholder's cooperation to providers themselves.

The Toolkit is divided into different sections, corresponding to the 5 Quality Areas: Access; Curriculum; Workforce; Monitoring & Evaluation and Governance and Funding. Each tool is part of one of these areas, following 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 to assist in working with the tools in the five areas.

The contents of the Toolkit provide the opportunity to actively develop a quality culture within the ECEC setting, and indeed the benefit of the tools is that they can be used directly and integrated into daily practice. 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.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING THE TOOLKIT

According to TQM and Quality Assurance approaches, it is worth mentioning the P-D-C-A- cycle (included also among the Common Area tools in the Toolkit), to which both the approaches refer as a guideline that ECEC managers should follow when planning and implementing quality in their settings.



Thus following the cycle and according to the experience of the SEQUENCES partners during the project development, we suggest the following steps:

- Firstly, the ECEC setting management, in consultation with other relevant stakeholders (parents, ECEC professionals working inside and outside the settings), analyse the quality improvement of current practices and improvements needed in the setting; and upon carefully reading the Toolkit they select the appropriate tool(s) to be tested and implemented. The involvement of key staff is essential to ensure all necessary quality goals are identified and to motivate staff members. A working group, responsible for the implementation, should be established accordingly.
- The ECEC setting management should also define a specific plan of action, including the monitoring system in terms of timeline, steps to follow, data to collect, resources available evaluation methods to be used and stakeholders to involve (See Action planning template).
- At the end of the implementation phase, the working group reports to the management and the whole organisation, providing data, comments and any useful information to verify the effectiveness of the implementation process and the usefulness and



potential transferability of the tools tested. This allows for motivated management decisions consistent with the setting's quality goals.

The SEQUENCES Toolkit should be used as a source of knowledge to learn from practices that partners have found relevant to improving quality, skills and competences of ECEC staff and which focus on the 5 Quality Areas of the Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care plus the Common Area, that SEQUENCES partners have identified.

The Toolkit can be used as a source of information on various areas of practice for different situations. 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 ECEC setting staff and in cooperation with external stakeholders. Tools can be used informally for development purposes or as a formal instrument in the quality assurance of the ECEC Setting.

Tools can be adjusted to meet particular and changing circumstances. We remind users that it is mandatory to retain the project and funding logos in the personalised versions. The Toolkit in its published format, can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons regulation.

Each tool has a number and a title. Information is also provided about their objectives, the time required for their use, the references and links with other tools. In many of the tool descriptions there are examples of actual practices or projects by 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.

A Toolkit is most useful substitute when it offers simple instructions for its users and contains practical, inspiring and easily adaptable examples. During the creation of the Toolkit partners aimed for an end result that meets the aforementioned expectations. Once completed, the Toolkit was tested in practice. The pilot took place in six European countries and involved nearly 20 educational settings. The majority of the 34 tools from the six quality assurance areas have been tested by the pilot settings. Four of the tools were not chosen at all, three are part of the "Common areas" topic, one is from "Governance and funding". The most popular area was "Workforce", its tools were chosen most often.

## HINTS & TIPS BASED ON THE PILOTING PHASE

### Selecting of quality areas to improve, related tools and necessary preparation.

If an ECEC setting decides to use the examples from the Toolkit, professionals might find themselves facing the questions: which tools to choose, on what level, who is to decide what tools to use. In practice, it's mainly the management and colleagues taking part in the decision. Parents and children are not left out of course, but they are more passive participants of the procedure, given that they are only being informed of the decision rather than actively involved in it. In some countries - e.g. Lithuania - early childhood settings - mostly run by the government - are under tight control so they need the authorities' (e.g. council) permission.

In the best case, selecting the quality areas to improve is not a random decision. Carrying out a needs assessment before the selection of the tools is warmly recommended, as in case of the Romanian settings. According to this, a Needs Analysis Scheme is available as one of the Annexes of the Training Curriculum. Of course, the participants involved in decision making might not be fully aware of one quality area or another, therefore, a general overview contributes to a reasonable decision. Therefore a gradual approach to Quality Management tools implementation is also a useful recommendation.

A setting may decide to begin improving quality at any time quality any time, but according to our experience during the pilot, the implementation went more smoothly in settings that started at the beginning of the school year ( e.g. Ireland) than those who introduced the tools during the year. The reason behind this is that introducing a new method is always time consuming as some pilot settings reported. Furthermore, in a number of cases certain resources need to be acquired if they were not available in the institution before.

### Challenges - suggestions for solutions

Despite the most careful preparation, complications may occur during implementation. Demands on workforces' time is specifically an area where there's hardly any solution without significant financial resources. However, some settings came up with innovative ideas to overcome the lack of workforce time. On several occasions, parents were asked for help with some tasks:

*"We invited parents to accompany children during outings as we needed more human resources to make sure children are safe." (Malta)*

In some cases, in order to complete the tasks, colleagues worked out of hours (e.g. Irish

setting). However, in the long run this is not an ideal solution, it may generate frustration, decrease efficiency and can have an adverse effect on one's motivation. Building and keeping up motivation may become challenging for management especially when methodological innovation happens in an environment that already has high demands on the workforce's time.

*"The challenges faces were financially and human wise. We needed more finances for resources during activities and for outings. We also needed more human resources for outings." (Malta)*

*"To motivate people to get involved in this implementation and to be consistent." (Romania)*

Management can do a lot in order to motivate staff. The burden of extra tasks has high demands on the workforce's time by enhanced wages or extra days off. However, both options require freely useable financial resources - in the first case the reason is obvious, in the latter case, cover for the absent staff member must be available, which is extra cost again - and may not available for every setting. "Employee of the month" award, with an additional minor gift does not require significant investment, yet it may have a positive impact on motivation.

Limited financial resources may make some tool requirements harder to implement. The majority of the tools presented in the Toolkit do not cause massive costs. However, depending on an setting's facilities, in some cases minor infrastructural investments may be needed. Many toys and accessories can be made from recycled materials it all depends on creativity.

*"Additional resources used were mainly consumables like play dough, cardboard paper, string, paint, shaving foam food colouring and pipets etc. Other resources used were recyclable material like toilet rolls." (Malta)*

Of course in some cases creativity is not enough. Management may ask for extra funds if it's possible - e.g. the setting has a foundation -, parents can be asked to make a contribution to the innovations which can be of a financial, material or physical (workforce) nature. Last, but not least it's worth finding out if there is a domestic or international funding strands that suits the settings goals and apply either independently or in consortium.

*"Expenses cannot be covered by the school. The government could offer free transport, especially to small groups (as this was just for the kinder classes) or deal a fixed rate for school outings with transport companies. Expenses can become a burden on parents and this could create grumbling and oppositional reactions." (Malta)*

## Opinions on tools presented in the Toolkit - pilots' experiences

According to experiences of settings involved in the pilot phase, we can say that the tools listed in the Toolkit affected the quality of work in early childhood education settings in a positive way.

As a result, parents participated more actively, they could find out about the education process in a calm, friendly atmosphere. The open day was a success in particular.

*"Parents reactions to folder were very good. Very impressed with observations, activities, open evening went very well. Parent were able to ask questions in a very relaxed atmosphere."*

*"Working with the toolkit resulted in more meaningful communication with parents, improvements to the environments and a renewed focus on documenting children's learning." (Ireland)*

Things look different for ECEC professionals. In most settings educational staff described the testing of the Toolkit as a positive experience. In the report they highlighted the fact that reacting to the parents' needs was motivating for the colleagues, not to mention the improved communication between parents and teachers.

*"Parents were pleasantly impressed by the patience and involvement of educators in enrollment of children in kindergarten. Educators said they felt more satisfied because they were sure they had responded to their parents' needs. Once children were coming to school happy, even parents were feeling relieved." (Romania)*

However, there were different opinions as well. Professionals who saw the introduction of new methods as mandatory duty, were less enthusiastic and dedicated than the ones who took it as a challenge, a chance to self-improve.

*"Reactions were various. Some educators managed to incorporate the tools and adapt them accordingly in their planning, taking on-board the toolkit with enthusiasm. Some other educators struggled to implement the tools as they considered it as something extra, over and above what is expected of them rather than considering it as a resource to improve and enhance their teaching, school environment and the classroom activities in all aspects the tool kit presents." (Malta)*

For management it's worth consulting with colleagues and decide together on any questions related to the work of educational staff and thus on methodological innovations as well. Furthermore, providing professional and moral support is also important as it helps avoiding staff seeing their task ahead as an inconvenient duty.

Finally, pilot settings mentioned a change in approach as a bonus. Teachers' mentality became more structured. It manifested in a more conscious evaluation of their own work. On top of that, cooperation between teachers has improved as well.

*“The staff has gained a greater awareness of themselves and their daily actions and have developed a greater critical sense.” (Italy)*

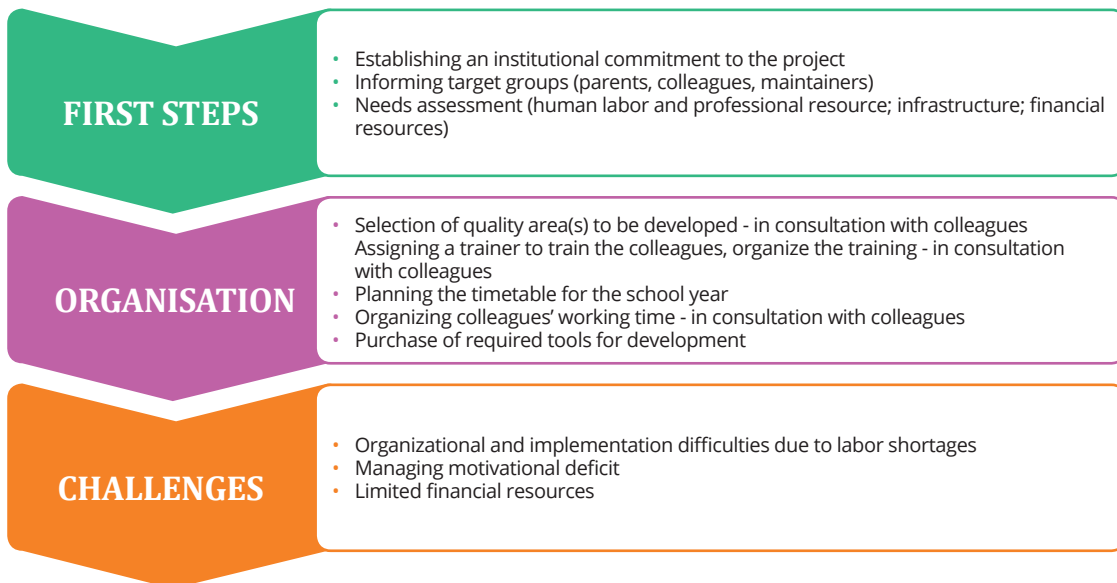
*“They could relate more as they were working together on the same tools and had the same aim. They also felt that they collaborated more.” (Malta)*

## TASK DEFINITION BY TARGET GROUPS

### Institutional management

The head of the setting is a role of high importance - regardless of whether the head of setting or educational staff initiated to have a go at quality improvement - without his/her permission development cannot materialize. Ideally, in case where the manager is dedicated, open to ideas from colleagues, is supportive and creates an ideal atmosphere for improvement. In case the initiation comes from the head of the setting, that during the introduction phase co-workers don't see the development-related tasks as burdens or mandatory duties. It is recommended that they are made through relevant decisions with continuous consultation.

Preparing co-workers to engage in quality evaluation and improvement is also the management's duty. A trainer/mentor to lead the quality initiative can either be a freelance professional or the company's own employee. A trainer/mentor should be genuine and professionally well prepared. Hiring a freelance professional may be a significant expense. But the training itself may not be the only extra expense, device requirement of certain exercises or infrastructural development can also cause extra costs. Covering these expenses is the management's duty as well. How to adequately inform and, if possible, engage Public Authorities in order to ask for funds or other supporting materials it is also a measure to be taken into account. Considering ECEC settings as key actors of the local community, whose improvements affect the quality and well-being of the society as a whole, is a principle to which managers need to be able to refer to. In this direction, the activity related to the Tool 34 of the Training Curriculum should be considered an inspirational one, specifically for what concerns the learning outcomes of the “Understanding the Quality management” aspect which helps ECEC settings managers in better identifying key stakeholders' needs and the possible answer to provide.



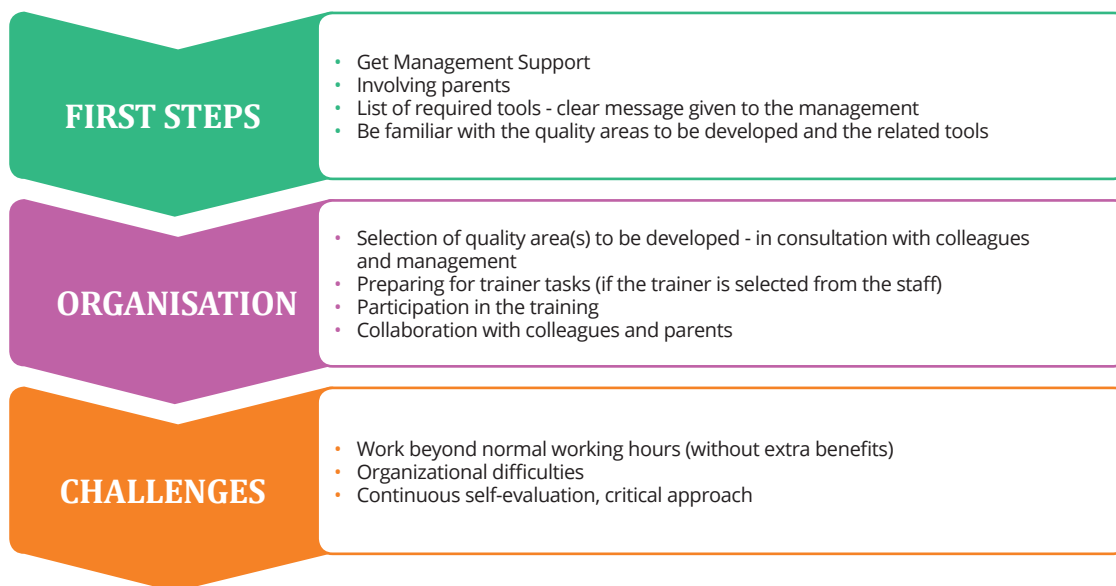
## Educators

Early Years professionals' role is just as important as management's in a setting's improvement process. Where ECEC professionals initiated the improvement, they will need to have the support of management, since their support is essential for development. Informing and involving parents is also a requirement. Educational staff must be aware that quality improvement is a time consuming and energy demanding process, for that very reason it can only be successful if dedication comes from within and participants are willing to commit time and effort. (e.g. unpaid overtime).

Involving parents has been mentioned as one of the most difficult tasks by many participants in the pilots especially when it comes to the so-called "hard-to-reach" parents (parents from a low socio-economic and/or migrant or refugee background, parents with a low educational level,...) but also overprotective so-called "helicopter-parents".

The Toolkit offers a variety of possibilities to engage with parents in the framework of the TQM as sending out formal invitations to meetings will often not have the desired effect so other ways of communication may have to be explored like making time in the morning when children are brought to the setting or at pick-up time in the afternoon, phone calls or communication by other appropriate electronic means (messenger services) can complete a short conversation at the door-step. In some countries visits to the family's home are part of the regular practice sometimes in combination with other services (midwife, health care and/or social workers, etc.).

The collaboration between services can play an important role in these cases as integrated systems not only create synergies in terms of time and energy but also result in better understanding and adjusting to individual family's needs and are hence beneficial to both parents and children.

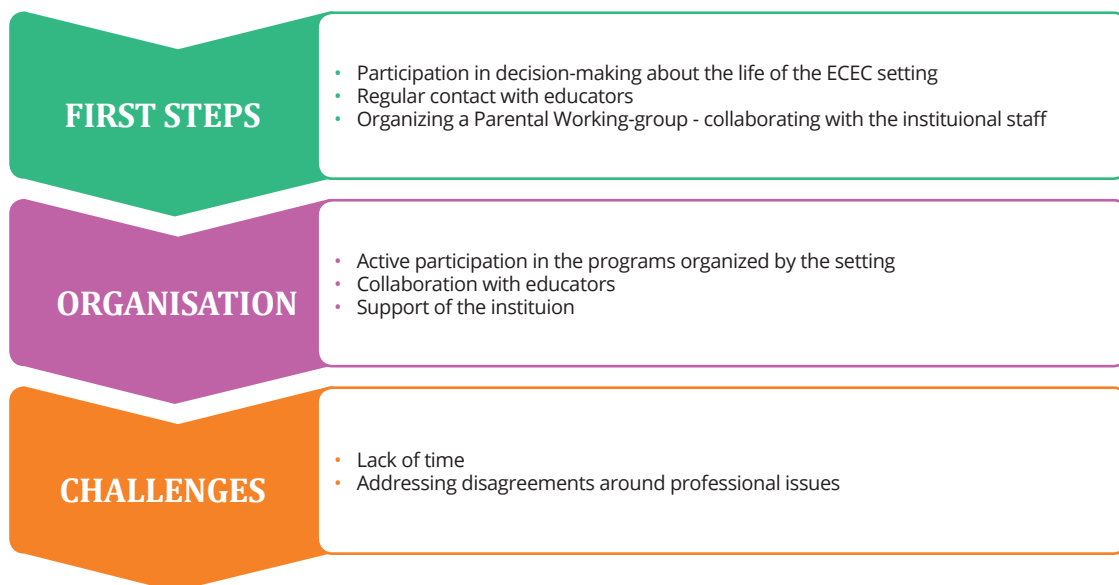


## Parents

Parents as primary educators of their children have different roles and tasks in the TQM system. On the one hand they are the main responsables for their child's rearing and education and as such in charge of the preparation of their children for participating in the settings' activities (arriving on time, wearing or bringing along adequate clothing, snacks,...), on the other hand they should take part in the co-creation of the offer at the setting.

In order to be adequately supported by the setting's professionals, parents and carers need to provide information about the child as well as its home and family situation to receive help and guidance wherever necessary to complement the parenting process but also to help educators and other personnel to better understand their child and its needs and interests. This need for close collaboration applies to all children but is especially true for the inclusion of children with special needs.

Parents and other family members and carers may also contribute to the quality improvement of the setting by offering financial (donations, organizing/participating in fund raising events,...) or material resources (providing material for handicraft, music,...) but also by providing human resources (accompanying person for excursions, connecting the setting with other institutions,...). Taking part in such activities will create a stronger relation between the home and the setting and have a positive impact on everybody involved.



### Policy Makers

Policy makers, mainly at community level, are promoters of quality in ECEC settings, because are usually those who control effectiveness and efficiency of the funds allocated for the education service. In this light, they can share quality measurement tools and methods, to monitor and continuously improve the ECEC provision, according to established requirements and community needs. They can contribute in defining initiatives involving key actors and aimed at raising awareness towards a culture of Quality. In addition, following preventive approaches they can promote an active listening and interest towards community well-being indicators and values.

### Educational Trade Unions

Similarly to policy makers, trade unions can play an active role as community key actors who have a say on how public funds are allocated and spent, according to quality standards/requirements and beneficiaries expectations. Trade unions can support a better professional development of ECEC educators in terms of both their competences and skills and their commitment towards quality continuous improvement. By taking care of ECEC professionals conditions, they can cooperate with all the key stakeholders, to find adequate and feasible solutions that can combine high quality level of ECEC professionals performances with limitations of public resources.



## Lessons learned

With this final chapter we would like also to introduce some key lessons learned by carrying out the project and piloting its main activities, such as the tools implementation and the related training.

It is important for readers to consider the potential of further development behind this learning, to inspire to go beyond the experimentation and the tools proposed, also adding or changing some aspects as suggested by these challenges that are still open.

Universities working with ECEC settings to offer their students internships and work-based learning, can support the acquisition and further development of this different mind-set, based on the adoption of the Toolkit as key working set of instruments and skills. By elaborating on students' experiences and working together with them and the ECEC settings, they can contribute to re-design and update the expected competences of newly trained teachers and educators.

Continuous Professional Development of ECEC professionals, including the tools and methodologies proposed by the SEQUENCES project can represent a pivotal activity to concretely learn, plan and implement the continuous improvement approach to Quality.

The preliminary research activity and the following piloting phase carried out within the SEQUENCES project, have proven to be effective and useful for ECEC settings to work with and in quality, should be further consolidated and made ready for a wider use, also exploiting the Structural Funds available for this purpose at both National and Regional level. Specifically, the Italian partners have learned it through the transferring of some of the tools indicated in the Toolkit towards ECEC settings in the province of Alba Iulia (Romania), through a project<sup>4</sup> funded by the European Social Fund.

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<sup>4</sup> "Scoală prietenoasă" (Friendly school) id. POCU 74/6/18/106468 2018-2021.



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