

Good practice from European countries on supporting outcome-orientation in early childhood education and care

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR OUTCOME-ORIENTED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Supporting young children's acquisition of socio-emotional competences, early literacy and numeracy, and facilitating their transition to primary education

A TSI project for Lower Saxony (2024-26)













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List of Acronyms

CfE Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland) **CPD** Continuing Professional Development

CSI Czech School Inspectorate

DfE Department for Education (England) **ECEC** Early Childhood Education and Care

ECTS European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ELC Early Learning and Childcare (Scotland)

EQF European Qualifications Framework

EYFS Early Years Foundation Stage (England)

EYFSP Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (England)

GIRFEC Getting it Right for Every Child (Scotland)

International Standard Classification of Education **ISCED**

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

MoER Ministry of Education and Research (Estonia)

MoEYS Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (Czech Republic) **OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Ofsted Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (England)

QI Quality Indicator (Scotland)

RBA Reception Baseline Assessment (England) **SEND** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

TSI **Technical Support Instrument**







Executive summary

This report presents examples of good practice in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision in Europe and approaches which could strengthen the establishment and implementation of outcome-oriented pedagogy in Lower Saxony. The report was commissioned as part of a project funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), and implemented by UNICEF, in cooperation with the European Commission, with the aim of building a framework for outcome-oriented ECEC. The aim of this research is to contribute to the development of consolidated recommendations for creating a framework for outcome-oriented ECEC to improve approaches and competences of ECEC staff in supporting young children's acquisition of socioemotional competences, early literacy, and numeracy, and facilitating their transition to primary education.

Methodology

The research employed a phased qualitative methodology, beginning with a high-level overview of outcome-oriented ECEC systems across Europe to establish a long list of relevant examples. This was narrowed to five countries for in-depth review: Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, and Scotland. Data collection involved comprehensive document analysis and semi-structured interviews with relevant representatives from each country.

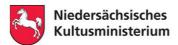
The study focused on four key components from the UNICEF Build to Last Framework: enabling environment, curriculum and pedagogy, workforce culture, and quality assurance, with specific attention to systems for continuous reflection on children's development and learning outcomes, systematic planning of pedagogical interventions, and the development and evaluation of learning environments.

Key Findings

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic demonstrates good practice through:

- A comprehensive Framework Educational Programme that balances acquisition of key competences and promoting learning in educational areas with specific expected learning outcomes while promoting flexibility in implementation
- Extensive implementation support through the National Pedagogical Institute's methodological resources
- Intentional alignment between ECEC and primary curricula despite organisational differences
- Explicit requirements for family cooperation supported by practical resources
- Systematic pedagogical planning that acknowledges that children develop at varying rates
- A comprehensive quality assurance system through the Czech School Inspectorate
- Mandatory diagnostic portfolios documenting children's individual progress







Denmark

Denmark exemplifies good practice through:

- A decentralised approach with the "strengthened pedagogical curriculum" providing six curriculum themes with broad objectives and significant setting autonomy in pedagogical implementation
- Structured alignment between ECEC curriculum themes and kindergarten class competence areas
- Formalised parent councils with substantive rights in ECEC governance
- Robust qualification framework with the 3.5-year Pedagogue qualification (210 ECTS)
- Responsive professional development through annual development conversations
- Legislatively required "evaluation culture" focused on pedagogical learning environments

England

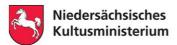
England demonstrates good practice through:

- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework organising learning around prime and specific areas with 17 Early Learning Goals
- Non-statutory "Development Matters" guidance supporting implementation without constraining autonomy
- Independent quality monitoring through Ofsted with significant emphasis on pedagogical quality
- Balanced approach to monitoring children's development combining ongoing formative assessment with three formal assessment points, and recent reforms reducing paperwork to increase time for meaningful interactions

Estonia

Estonia shows good practice through:

- A comprehensive National Curriculum combining seven subject fields with four general skills groups
- Requirement for Early Childhood Teachers to hold Bachelor's-level qualifications
- Professional development aligned with the Teachers' Professional Standard
- Comprehensive internal evaluation system framing reflection as continuous improvement
- Multiple methods for monitoring children's development involving diverse stakeholders, including an innovative electronic assessment instrument complementing traditional observation







Scotland

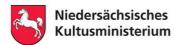
Scotland exemplifies good practice through:

- A fully integrated curriculum framework spanning ages 3-18, which creates continuity between ECEC and primary school
- Multi-layered implementation support including "Realising the Ambition: Being Me", the "Building the Curriculum" series, and the Meta-Skills Progression Framework
- Comprehensive framework distinguishing between parental involvement, engagement, and family learning
- "How good is our early learning and childcare?" framework which serves as both a national self-evaluation benchmark and inspection tool, promoting a reflective process focused on a cycle of improvement
- Multi-layered external quality monitoring with structured improvement processes
- Formative assessment approach using benchmarks as reference points to monitor child development

Conclusions

The study identified several common themes across these five countries that contribute to effective outcome-oriented ECEC provision:

- Curriculum and pedagogy: Effective systems balance structured frameworks with
 professional autonomy by providing clear developmental goals while allowing flexibility
 in implementation. They offer comprehensive resources that translate curriculum into
 practice without constraining professional judgment. Successful curriculum alignment
 between ECEC and primary education creates continuity while respecting age-appropriate
 pedagogical approaches. All examined countries recognise the critical importance of family
 participation, though implementation approaches vary.
- Workforce culture: Systems with robust initial education qualifications establish a strong
 foundation for pedagogical quality. Ongoing professional development opportunities
 translate qualifications into continuously improving practice. Advanced systems embed
 self-evaluation and reflective practice deeply into quality frameworks. Effective pedagogical
 approaches explicitly acknowledge that children develop at different rates and reach
 milestones at different times.
- Quality assurance: Comprehensive quality frameworks evaluate both structural requirements and process quality, providing meaningful feedback while maintaining consistent standards. Effective monitoring of children's progress prioritises observationbased, continuous assessment focused on development rather than compliance, informing planning and supporting transitions.







Implications for Lower Saxony

The research identified good practice that could provide orientation for building a framework for outcome-oriented ECEC in Lower Saxony:

- Curriculum and pedagogy: England's EYFS and Estonia's curriculum framework offer valuable models for balancing flexibility with clarity in defining expected learning outcomes while maintaining play-based, holistic approaches. Scotland's emphasis on planning for learning demonstrates how an outcome-oriented approach can retain child-centred principles.
- Workforce culture: Estonia's comprehensive approach to pre-service education and Denmark's responsive approach to professional development could address gaps in connecting theory to practice. The Czech Republic's approach to pedagogical planning, which explicitly acknowledges different developmental paces, offers a model for individualised support that respects developmental variation.
- Quality assurance: Scotland's comprehensive external evaluation system provides a
 robust model for assessing pedagogical quality beyond structural compliance. England's
 structured approach to monitoring children's development offers a balanced model that
 combines ongoing observation with key assessment points without creating excessive
 documentation burdens.

By drawing on these successful practices, Lower Saxony can further outcome orientation in its ECEC provision that will respect the distinctive nature of early childhood education while ensuring children's acquisition of essential competences for future learning and development.







Introduction

The European Commission and UNICEF are currently providing technical support to the authorities of the Federal State of Lower Saxony to build a framework for outcome-oriented early childhood education and care (ECEC) in order to improve the outcome-orientation of ECEC provision in supporting young children's acquisition of socio-emotional competences, early literacy and numeracy, and facilitating their transition to primary education.

To this aim, UNICEF commissioned a study that identifies examples of good practice for outcomeoriented ECEC provision in Europe. The identification of key aspects of these practices provide guidance for strengthening outcome-oriented pedagogy to support young children's acquisition of socio-emotional competences, early literacy, and numeracy, and in turn facilitate their transition to primary education.

The project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI). The TSI is the EU programme that provides tailor-made technical expertise to EU Member States to design and implement reforms. Technical support is provided by the Early Childhood Development section of UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in co-operation with the European Commission. On the side of the authorities in Lower Saxony, the project is led by the Ministry of Education and is supported by stakeholders from the areas of ECEC provision, professional training and primary education.

The present report presents an analysis of ECEC policy and practice in five countries, examining approaches that can positively influence outcome-orientation in ECEC. During the course of this study, understanding of what constitutes effective outcome-oriented ECEC provision evolved through ongoing dialogue with Ministry stakeholders. To provide clarity on the focus of this analysis, the following definitions of key concepts were developed:

- Outcome-oriented ECEC provision creates an enabling environment for ECEC staff and its leadership to provide high quality outcome-oriented pedagogy. It entails a joint responsibility of all who have ECEC provision in their remit.
- Outcome-oriented pedagogy involves educators planning for children to achieve learning and development outcomes as a team, thinking from the perspective of the child and collaborating closely with children and their families. The designing and re-designing of learning environments in support of children's learning further involves continuously observing and documenting children's progress as well as constantly self-reflecting on the effectiveness and effects of pedagogy in the setting. Outcome-oriented pedagogy has to take care that all children feel safe and well. Its ambition is to ensure that each child can realise their full potential by scaffolding self-determined learning and enabling self-efficacy. Taking children's needs, learning pathways and circumstances of life into account, outcome-oriented pedagogy systematically encourages and challenges every child throughout elementary education with a child-centred attitude to step by step acquire the competences needed for a successful transition to primary education.
- **Learning and development outcomes** are competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that children achieve through the enabling of self-efficacy and (learning) experiences.

Based on these definitions, the analysis focused particularly on ECEC system which entail continuous reflection on children's development and learning outcomes, systematic planning of pedagogical interventions, and the development and evaluation of learning environments—areas that emerged as central to effective outcome-oriented ECEC provision, even though they were not explicitly part of the initial selection criteria framework.







Methodology

This study aimed to identify good practices in relation to outcome-oriented ECEC primarily through a qualitative research approach that relied on secondary data analysis. In order to develop the final report, the research employed a phased methodology, with the research team initially undertaking a high-level overview of outcome-oriented ECEC systems across Europe to establish a long list of relevant examples of good practice for outcome-oriented ECEC provision in Europe. This was further narrowed down to a final selection/short list of countries for an in-depth review of good practice for outcome-oriented ECEC provision.

Long list selection

The selection process for long list case studies followed a systematic approach to identify exemplary education systems. First, countries were broadly mapped in relation to educational outcomes as demonstrated in international educational assessments, where available, as well as other pertinent criteria. These additional criteria included, but were not limited to, broader measures of "access," "quality," and "affordability" in ECEC as defined by UNICEF Innocenti (2021) in relation to higher income countries, as well as related factors such as parental leave entitlements, and performance in other relevant metrics in academic literature, and reporting by intergovernmental organisations.

This approach was adopted because of the well-established relationship between the quality and accessibility of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and long-term educational outcomes, as evidenced by cross-national studies and international large-scale assessments such as PISA and TIMSS (OECD, 2017). High-quality ECEC is associated with improved cognitive and social outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children, which can translate into stronger educational performance in later years (Melhuish, et al., 2015). By initially mapping countries against these international assessment scores and complementary indicators, the research team was able to identify systems where outcome-oriented ECEC provision is both theoretically sound and empirically supported. This evidence-based filtering ensures that shortlisted countries reflect exemplary practices not only in terms of structure and policy but also in their tangible impact on children's learning outcomes.

The following countries were selected using this approach:









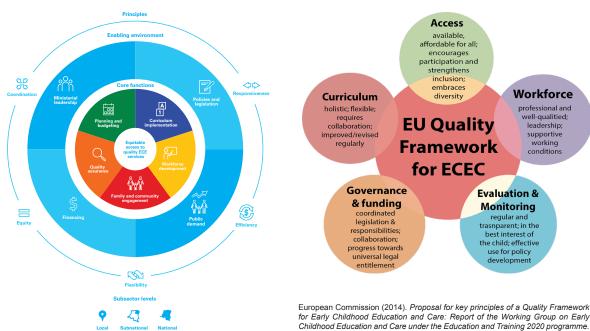
Additionally, the following country was included in the list because of the strong interest expressed by key Ministry stakeholders during preliminary meetings:



Following this selection, countries were examined case-by-case in relation to the criteria defined during the inception stage of the research project, drawing on the UNICEF Build to Last Framework (UNICEF, 2020). This framework was selected specifically because it offers a systems perspective that recognises the interconnected nature of ECEC quality factors, moving beyond isolated programme elements to examine how different components work together within the broader educational ecosystem.

The framework encompasses several key areas, including components that describe the core functions of ECEC systems,¹ as well as a focus on the overall enabling environment² (Figure 1). These core functions and the enabling environment largely correspond to the five dimensions addressed in the EU ECEC Quality Framework (Figure 2).

Figure 1: The Build to Last Conceptual Framework Figure 2: The EU ECEC Quality Framework



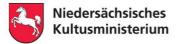
UNICEF. (2019). Build to last: A framework for building sustainable, universal and quality pre-primary education. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

European Commission (2014). 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 Education and Training 2020 programme. Reproduced in: Council of the European Union (2019). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (2019/C 189/02). Official Journal of the European Union, C 189, 5.6.2019, pp. 4–14.

While both frameworks offer a comprehensive and internationally recognised foundation for evaluating the structural, process, and contextual factors that contribute to the quality and sustainability of ECEC systems, the Build to Last framework provides additional tools and valuable guidelines for analysing good practice in systematically supporting competence development in ECEC and facilitating a smooth transition to primary education.

¹ The core functions of ECEC defined in the Build to Last framework are: planning and budgeting; curriculum development and implementation; workforce development; family and community engagement; and quality assurance.

² The key elements of an enabling environment as defined in the Build to Last framework are: ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, financing, and public demand.







Given the wider focus on competence development as part of an outcome-oriented ECEC pedagogy, dedicated attention has been given to the curriculum and pedagogy, workforce culture, and quality assurance components of the Build to Last Framework. Notwithstanding this, the selection has also touched upon enabling environment aspects of the ECEC systems in order to provide an overview and context of the legislative and governance aspects of each country's ECEC system. The following provides an overview of the selected criteria:



Enabling environment: A supportive or enabling environment which includes factors which can help leverage the necessary resources for outcome-oriented pedagogy

- Governance structures of the ECEC system that are similar or comparable to Germany/Lower Saxony.
- Sector specific policy and legislation
- Leadership capacity and expertise within relevant ministries, government bodies or agencies like municipalities and ECEC settings
- Established channels of communication and coordination between the various stakeholders



Curriculum and pedagogy: A developmentally appropriate curriculum framework that supports children's holistic development and learning

- A curriculum, that supports systematic competence development in socioemotional skills, early literacy, and numeracy
- Clear guidance on the practical application and adaptation of the curriculum
- A curriculum that is aligned with the primary education curriculum. supporting a smooth transition from ECEC to primary education
- Evidence of practice that encourages family participation in children's learning and development



Workforce culture: Levels of knowledge, attitude and practice, appropriate qualifications, and standards, and availability and uptake of sufficient pre-service and in-service training and support

- A workforce with appropriate qualifications and standards
- Availability of and participation in relevant and adequate pre-service and in-service training and support for pedagogues
- Evidence of practices for internal and self-reflection and adaptation to strengthen capacity of pedagogues for improved delivery of the curriculum
- Indications of systematic planning of pedagogical interventions which acknowledge the different paces at which children may reach milestones in early years



Quality assurance: A coherent monitoring and quality assurance system, with defined regulations and standards

- Defined standards and regulations which include regular monitoring of pedagogical quality, competence development and professional staff
- Evidence of established processes and tools for monitoring and evaluation
- Use of regular monitoring of children's individual learning progress in ECEC settings







Short list selection

The long list was presented for further consideration and discussion, after which the following five countries were selected for final inclusion in the Good Practice Report. Below is a list of each country and rationale for final selection:

Country		Brief Rationale
-	Estonia	Selected because of its good performance in achieving learning outcomes, its approach to curricular standards, tracking of children's learning outcomes, self-assessment and inspection.
+	England	Selected because it sets clear standards and Early Learning Goals while non-statutory guidance allows practitioners to maintain professional discretion in implementation.
=	Denmark	Selected because it is a more decentralised system (similar to Lower Saxony) in the Nordic tradition where each setting is building its own curriculum while the state sets the overall standards and provides quality assurance for curriculum implementation.
	Czech Republic	Selected because of its interesting approaches to implementing curricular standards, monitoring the quality of pedagogy through self-assessment and providing pedagogical inspection to validate self-assessment.
X	Scotland	Selected because of its strong system of planning for learning and tracking learning progress in combination with pedagogical self- evaluation.

Data collection and analysis

During the initial review, as well as during the in-depth research phase, the team used several studies, academic literature, government reports and industry publications to identify elements of good practice for further consideration. The secondary data were analysed using content analysis, with key themes and patterns identified across the various sources. The final list of documents reviewed and analysed can be found in the Bibliography section of this report.

Following the short list selection, semi-structured interviews and group discussions were undertaken with relevant representatives in each of the short-listed countries. The study utilised purposive sampling to identify participants who had direct experience within the ECEC sector of the selected countries, and could provide insights into good practices. These interviews served to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the outcome-orientation of ECEC systems in practice and to enlist participants' expertise in identifying additional documents and exemplars of good practice that might not be readily accessible in English or through published sources. The interview questions sought to cover all areas of interest (enabling environment, curriculum and pedagogy, workforce development, and quality assurance), with a particular focus on systems for continuous reflection on children's development and learning outcomes, systematic planning of pedagogical interventions, and the development and evaluation of learning environments. The interviews were conducted via video conference. The final list of participants was as follows:







Country	Participant Designation
Czech Republic	Early Childhood Development Specialist, UNICEF
	Representative, Department of Preschool and Primary Education, MoEYS
	Specialist in the Curriculum Unit, MoEYS
Denmark	Representative, Centre for Day Care and School Development, Ministry of Children and Education
England	Representative, Early Years Safeguarding, Health and Wellbeing, Department for Education
	Representative, EYFS Policy Team, Department for Education
	Representative, Early Years Outcomes and Intervention Research, Department for Education
	Former Regional Director / Adviser for Early Years, Department for Education - National Strategies, Former HMI - Associate Inspector, Former Ofsted Inspector
	Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood, University of East London
	Professor of Early Childhood, University of East London
Estonia	Representative, Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education and Research
	Representative, General Education Policy Department, Ministry of Education and Research
	Former Representative, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and Lecturer of Early Years Education, Institute of Education Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tartu
Scotland	HM Inspector, Education Scotland
	Representative, Early Learning and Childcare, Education Scotland







Findings

This section presents detailed analyses of key components of ECEC provision across five European countries: the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, and Scotland. Each country profile begins with an overview of its enabling environment (i.e. governance structures, policy frameworks, leadership capacity, and coordination mechanisms) which provides an introduction into, and an overview of the ECEC system in each country, to serve as context for the following sections. The profiles then move on to key aspects of curriculum and pedagogy, workforce culture, and/or quality assurance mechanisms which have been identified as good practice that can lead to improved learning outcomes in ECEC, and support an outcome-oriented pedagogy.



Czech Republic

Enabling environment

In the Czech Republic, responsibility for ECEC is divided between two ministries:

- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports administers pre-primary education across all formal provision types based on the Education Act (561/2004)
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs regulates children's groups (dětské skupiny) under the Act on Children's Group

At the local level, municipalities (either individually or in groups) are the primary founders and operators of nursery schools and basic schools that include preparatory classes. Private and denominational providers represent only a small percentage of the ECEC sector. Municipalities are legally obligated to ensure nursery school placement for children aged three and above when parents express interest.

The Czech ECEC system operates under several key legislative instruments:

- The Education Act (561/2004) governs formal pre-primary education
- The Act on Children's Group regulates more flexible care arrangements
- The Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary Education serves as the binding national curriculum document for nursery schools and preparatory classes; based on this framework, individual schools develop their own specific school education programs, thus maintaining consistent quality standards across the system.

ECEC operates through three primary channels: children's groups (*dětské skupiny*), nursery schools (*mateřské školy*), and preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*):

Children's groups provide flexible, non-formal care for children from six months until compulsory schooling age; in practice, such groups are mainly attended by children under the age of three. However, as they represent a relatively new format, system capacity is still limited, and as of 2022 only 6.8% of Czech children aged 0-3 were enrolled in ECEC (UNICEF & European Commission, 2023). These groups emphasise childcare rather than structured education and fall under







the regulatory authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as stipulated by the Act on Children's Group. While the law establishes that these groups should focus on education and care, no centralised education programme exists for these settings.

Nursery schools serve children aged three to six, offering more formalised pre-primary education that follows a national curriculum. Pre-primary education is mandatory for children in their final pre-primary year, which can be completed either in nursery schools or preparatory classes.

Preparatory classes are established within basic schools (*základní školy*) and designed specifically for children who are delaying compulsory school attendance or who would benefit from additional support before transitioning to primary education. These classes focus on addressing developmental needs to prepare children for school entry. In the context of transition to primary education, the Czech authorities are actively addressing significant challenges related to school readiness and deferrals. The European Commission's latest Education and Training Monitor country report (2024) notes that the substantial number of children whose primary school entry is deferred creates strain on the educational system. Responding to this challenge, the Ministry of Education developed policy proposals in 2024 aimed at reducing the incidence of deferrals while also reconceptualising how "school maturity" is understood and assessed. This represents a major policy focus as the authorities work to ensure more children are adequately prepared for primary education entry, reducing the need for deferrals and supporting smoother transitions from ECEC to formal schooling.

It should be noted that this case study focuses on nursery schools and preparatory classes, as these represent the formal pre-primary education provision that follows the national curriculum framework.

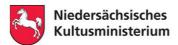
Evidence of good practice: The Czech Republic's enabling environment creates favourable conditions for outcome-oriented ECEC through several key structural elements. The Framework Education Programme provides consistent national standards while allowing individual settings to develop their own school education programs. This balance enables outcome-oriented approaches that can be tailored to local contexts while maintaining alignment with national quality expectations. Finally, by making the final year of pre-school education compulsory, the Czech system creates universal access to structured learning experiences before primary school, specifically designed to support transition readiness outcomes.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports published the Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary Education in 2004. An updated version was published in 2025. This curriculum framework is binding for pre-school education institutions in the Czech Republic, with all pre-school institutions required to follow the framework's principles, requirements, and educational content when developing their own School Educational Programmes.

The framework outlines a set of key competences and educational areas, and defines specific sets of expected learning outcomes for each of these.







The eight key competences that form the foundation for the child's personal development are:

- 1. Learning competence
- 2. Communication competence
- 3. Citizenship and sustainability competence
- 4. Personal and social competence
- 5. Entrepreneurship and working competence
- 6. Problem-solving competence
- 7. Cultural competence
- 8. Digital competence

Additionally, the framework emphasises the development of "basic literacy":

- 1. Reading literacy
- 2. Mathematical literacy

The educational content is organised into four interconnected areas that correspond to the biological, psychological, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of child development:

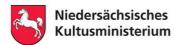
- 1. A child and their body (biological area)
- 2. A child and their psyche (psychological area)
- 3. A child and others (socio-cultural area)
- 4. A child and the world (environmental area)

The framework specifies concrete expected learning outcomes across all domains. Examples include:

- "The child understands read text and follows storylines with concentration" (reading literacy);
- "The child can determine the number of specific objects from 1 to 6, counting them one by one" (mathematical literacy); and
- "The child accepts compromises and resolves conflicts by agreement" (socio-emotional skills).

Teachers are expected to continuously monitor, record, and evaluate the individual progress of children through pedagogical diagnostics, using the results to plan further educational activities and provide feedback to children and their legal guardians.

Evidence of good practice: Evidence suggests that curriculum frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritise children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).







The Czech approach effectively combines both elements by establishing key competences that foster holistic development whilst providing specific expected learning outcomes that guide educators in supporting children's acquisition of essential skills.

The Framework Educational Programme for Pre-School Education does not mandate a single pedagogical approach, instead establishing guiding principles while promoting flexibility in implementation. It advocates for a constructivist approach where children build knowledge through their own experiences, with spontaneous learning through play forming a cornerstone of educational practice. Teachers are positioned as guides who facilitate learning through both directly guided and indirectly guided activities, employing experiential, cooperative, situational, and social learning strategies. The framework recommends a balance of individual, group, and collective organisational formats, with emphasis on cooperative group learning. While providing this pedagogical direction, the framework deliberately creates space for kindergartens to develop diverse approaches tailored to their specific contexts, allowing institutions to adapt education to regional and local conditions while maintaining alignment with the framework's core principles.

Evidence of good practice: In terms of pedagogical approaches, there is limited consensus as to which model has the best chance of influencing process quality, as children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding issues such as inconsistent quality and equity concerns. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a).

The Czech Framework Educational Programme exemplifies this balanced approach by establishing constructivist principles and play-based learning as foundational whilst encouraging kindergartens to develop context-specific implementations, thereby fostering both consistency and responsiveness.

Guidance on curriculum implementation

The Czech Republic offers structured guidance for practical curriculum implementation in ECEC through the <u>National Pedagogical Institute's</u> comprehensive resources. The Institute provides targeted implementation support across multiple priority areas, including, but not limited to:

- 1. Educational diagnostics
- 2. Literacy development
- 3. Digital competence
- 4. Language development
- 5. Assessment practices
- 6. Support for foreign children

The materials demonstrate a practical approach to curriculum application through methodological manuals, webinars, demonstration videos, and thematic activity suggestions. ECEC staff are provided with specific tools and strategies for implementation, including portfolio assessment methods, formative assessment techniques, and literacy integration approaches that connect curriculum objectives with classroom practice.







Evidence of good practice: A range of international literature highlights the importance of ensuring robust policies and associated mechanisms are in place to allow for the effective implementation of the process of curriculum implementation, in addition to wider the development of wider "practical support materials" (OECD, 2021a), providing details, and clear guidelines for the various stakeholders involved in the process of ECEC curriculum implementation (ibid.).

The National Pedagogical Institute's comprehensive suite of implementation resources addresses this need by offering concrete tools that bridge the gap between curriculum intentions and classroom practice. By providing specific guidance across multiple priority areas, these resources enhance practitioners' capacity to translate curricular aims into effective pedagogical interactions, thereby supporting improved outcomes for children.

ECEC - primary curriculum alignment

Additionally, there is evidence of intentional alignment between the Czech ECEC (2025) and primary education curricula. Despite organising educational content differently—with preschool using four holistic, child-centred areas (biological, psychological, socio-cultural, and environmental) and primary education employing nine more subject-specific areas—the frameworks demonstrate deliberate continuity. This is evident through explicit statements acknowledging their interconnected relationship, shared competence frameworks that show clear developmental progression, compatible educational philosophies emphasising individualisation and active learning, and specific transition provisions. The pre-school curriculum dedicates an entire section to ensuring continuity with primary education and provides a clear profile of child capabilities at the end of pre-school to guide primary teachers. It also specifies that the expected learning outcomes in preschool provide first-grade teachers with a clear understanding of what children have been guided to achieve before entering primary school. While structural differences exist to accommodate age-appropriate pedagogical approaches, the underlying content maintains coherence, creating an educational journey that supports children's transition between educational levels.

Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that well-aligned curriculum frameworks significantly facilitate successful transitions between educational phases. The thoughtful coordination of curricular content and pedagogical approaches across ECEC and primary settings has been identified as a crucial element in creating coherent educational journeys for young learners (OECD, 2017). When children experience consistent educational philosophies, complementary learning objectives, and harmonised teaching practices, they develop stronger engagement with learning environments and demonstrate improved educational outcomes over time (ibid.).

The Czech Republic exemplifies effective practice in this domain through its deliberate structural connections between pre-school and primary frameworks, developmental progression within shared competence structures, and specific transition provisions. By establishing clear continuity whilst respecting age-appropriate pedagogical distinctions, the Czech approach provides children with the foundation necessary to navigate this significant educational transition with confidence, potentially contributing to enhanced long-term educational success and wellbeing.







Family engagement

The Framework Educational Programme for Pre-School Education also explicitly establishes "cooperation with the family" as one of its key conditions for implementation, stating that kindergartens should approach families with understanding and respect, allow legal representatives to participate in education and programs, create a system for sharing information about children's progress, and inform guardians about smooth transition to primary school.

Supplementary guidance materials published by the National Pedagogical Institute further reinforce this family engagement approach through practical resources like the "Supporting the child in the home environment (handbook for parents)" and multiple mini-methodologies designed to help teachers engage with parents on developing literacy in reading, mathematics, science, and digital skills. The collection of short videos demonstrating everyday activities (baking, reading, gardening) that parents can do with their children represents a particularly accessible way to involve families in supporting their children's development. This multi-faceted approach indicates that family participation is considered integral to successful early childhood education in the Czech system.

Evidence of good practice: A range of evidence suggests that strengthened parental engagement in their children's education in ECEC contexts can serve to enhance outcomes in both reading and numeracy, as well as impacting positively on wider factors, such as socio-emotional engagement, and exhibited behaviour (Sim, Bélanger, Stancel-Piątak, & Karoly, 2019; OECD, 2020) – selected evidence suggests this to be particularly applicable in relation to provision for learners with a lower socio-economic status (Ibid). Within this context, Framework documents which facilitate engagement with parents in ECEC provision, as well as maximising continuity of provision between home-based and setting-based learning and support, can serve as a key tool in strengthening outcomes (OECD, 2021a) – this can include explicit guidance, or structured approaches, to communicating effectively with parents and other relevant stakeholders (ibid.).

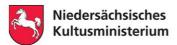
The Czech approach therefore demonstrates good practice through its explicit requirement for family cooperation and comprehensive resources designed to facilitate meaningful parental engagement in children's learning across multiple domains.

Workforce culture

Pedagogy which acknowledges the different developmental paces

The Czech approach to early childhood education strongly emphasises the principle of developmental appropriateness, recognising that children develop at varying rates. This understanding is embedded in the Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education, which requires teachers to consider both age appropriateness and individual appropriateness when planning educational activities. The framework acknowledges that unevenness in development is typical for pre-school children and cannot be determined solely by chronological age.

The planning of pedagogical interventions in Czech kindergartens is systematically linked to ongoing diagnostic activities. As outlined in the Methodological Manual on Pedagogical Diagnostics (2022),







teachers are encouraged to use both static and dynamic diagnostic approaches to establish each child's current developmental level and potential for growth. This comprehensive assessment forms the foundation for tailored educational planning:

- 1. Individual Starting Points: Teachers identify each child's current abilities, knowledge, strengths, and areas needing support through ongoing observation and documentation in diagnostic portfolios.
- 2. Differentiated Objectives: Based on diagnostic findings, teachers set differentiated short-term and longer-term goals that acknowledge the varying developmental trajectories of children in the group.

Progressive Planning: Rather than expecting all children to reach the same milestones simultaneously, educational planning follows a continuous, integrated process where activities are designed to meet children at their current level and support progression at an appropriate pace.

Evidence of good practice: Literature suggests that in order to be effective, ECEC curricula need to address specific, age-related, developmental needs of children (OECD, 2021a). The Czech approach exemplifies good practice in this area through its comprehensive approach to diagnostic-based planning that recognises and responds to developmental variation. By embedding the principle of developmental appropriateness within the curriculum framework and providing detailed methodological guidance for implementation, the Czech system enables educators to tailor pedagogical interventions to children's individual developmental trajectories. This responsive approach supports more effective learning by meeting children where they are developmentally rather than imposing standardised expectations based solely on chronological age.

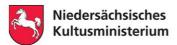
Quality assurance

Quality assurance system and monitoring pedagogical quality

The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) serves as the primary external evaluator for pedagogical quality in pre-schools throughout the Czech Republic. The CSI implements a comprehensive assessment framework guided by the "Criteria for Evaluation of the Conditions, Course and Results of Education." This evaluation framework encompasses six key domains:

- 1. School Concept and Framework
- 2. School Educational Leadership
- 3. Teaching Staff
- 4. Education
- 5. Educational Outcomes
- 6. Support of Children in Education (Equal Opportunities)

The evaluation criteria under these areas are reviewed annually and submitted to the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports for approval by July 15th for the upcoming school year. Once approved, the criteria are published on the Inspectorate's website, ensuring transparency in the evaluation process.







The CSI conducts inspections according to established legal regulations, internal protocols, and methodologies. Pre-schools are visited within variable inspection cycles of three, five, seven, or nine years, though this scheduling remains flexible based on specific circumstances or emerging needs. During a typical inspection, a team of inspectors spends several days at the kindergarten conducting a range of evaluative activities, including:

- Classroom observations to assess pedagogical practices
- Interviews with school management and staff
- Administration of surveys and questionnaires
- Review of school documentation
- Assessment of fiscal management
- Evaluation of safety measures and school meal provision

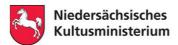
Beyond these scheduled inspections, the CSI also conducts targeted evaluations in response to complaints, initiatives, or petitions that fall within its jurisdiction. When investigating complaints, the Inspectorate examines specific claims, provides findings to the school's statutory authority, and monitors the implementation of any resulting corrective measures.

Pre-school leadership is also responsible for ensuring educational quality in nursery settings, including the performance of staff. This accountability is established by the Education Act and further governed by the Labour Code, which outlines managerial duties to supervise, direct, and evaluate staff performance. The CSI criteria specifically address leadership responsibilities in teacher evaluation: "The school management carries out a systematic evaluation of teachers' work and provides them regularly with useful feedback on their work. Based on the evaluation and in cooperation with the teachers, the school management plans their further professional development." During inspections, school heads must demonstrate their approach to employee evaluation.

While teacher evaluation processes are not prescribed by law, common practices typically include:

- Observation of classroom instruction
- Teacher interviews
- Review of lesson preparation
- Assessment of children's learning outcomes
- Evaluation of participation in professional development
- Analysis of administrative responsibilities
- Occasional surveys among children or families

These evaluations generally occur annually and are documented confidentially. The outcomes may influence teachers' remuneration, professional development recommendations, or, in exceptional cases, employment status. Meanwhile, pre-school heads themselves are evaluated by the organising bodies responsible for their institutions.







Evidence of good practice: Research on effective quality assurance in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) emphasises the importance of comprehensive monitoring systems that evaluate both structural quality (like staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements) and process quality (such as staff-child interactions and pedagogical approaches). These systems should be designed to provide actionable feedback, support professional development, maintain transparency through publicly available results, and align monitoring tools with curriculum frameworks to avoid narrowing educational focus (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022; OECD, 2021a; OECD, 2018).

The Czech Republic exemplifies these best practices through its CSI system, which implements a holistic evaluation framework addressing both structural and process elements, ensures transparency by publishing criteria online, and integrates monitoring with professional development by requiring school management to provide teachers with feedback and plan their professional growth based on evaluations.

Monitoring children's learning progress

The 2025 Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary Education establishes clear expectations for monitoring children's development and learning. According to these provisions, teachers must implement continuous and systematic assessment of each child's progress using appropriate pedagogical diagnostic methods and tools. This assessment framework serves multiple purposes:

- To document individual children's development and learning journeys
- To provide evidence of educational outcomes related to learning domains and key competencies
- To inform personalised educational planning
- To facilitate communication with parents and guardians
- To support children's self-esteem through recognition of progress

The framework specifically requires that information about each child's progress be documented in a diagnostic portfolio. This documentation process is designed to be collaborative, involving not only teachers but also the children themselves and their legal representatives where appropriate. The resulting portfolios serve as comprehensive records that provide feedback on children's developmental progress to all stakeholders, including teachers, children, parents, the Czech School Inspectorate, and other educational partners.

Teachers are expected to use the information collected through monitoring activities for several practical purposes:

- Planning appropriate educational offerings that respond to observed needs
- Communicating effectively with families about their children's development
- Supporting children's self-esteem by acknowledging and celebrating progress







The framework emphasises that effective evaluation of learning outcomes requires close collaboration among all teachers within a setting. This collaborative approach ensures consistency in monitoring practices and allows for more comprehensive understanding of each child's developmental journey.

Teachers also have access to methodological support for implementing effective child monitoring practices. The "Methodology for Supporting Individualisation in Kindergarten Conditions" (VÚP 2007) offers detailed recommendations on data collection, assessment criteria, and practical resources. Its annexes contain various observation sheets and recording templates for tracking children's development and learning.

Additionally, the National Pedagogical Institute has recently published a "Methodological Manual on Pedagogical Diagnostics in Kindergarten" (2022), which explains that pedagogical diagnostics aims to "assess and evaluate the child's development as a basis for supporting his/her further development" and provides "a holistic view of the child." It is about understanding how each child develops across all aspects of learning and development. The document describes diagnostics as a continuous, integrated process that teachers use daily, not just a specialised procedure for identifying problems. The manual also distinguishes between "static diagnostics" (assessing current abilities) and "dynamic diagnostics" (monitoring learning processes and potential). It emphasises that diagnostic practices should monitor multiple developmental areas: physical development and health, motor skills, cognitive functions, mental working capacity, and social-emotional development. The manual also provides guidance on maintaining diagnostic portfolios as tools for documenting children's progress and communicating with families.

The National Pedagogical Institute further enhances this support through its website, which provides extensive guidance on monitoring children's progress. The institute offers a comprehensive collection of resources specifically designed for early childhood educators, including, but not limited to:

- Webinars focused on pedagogical diagnostics and assessment techniques appropriate for preschool children
- Publications and videos demonstrating diagnostic methods and activities showcasing various forms of assessment and self-assessment
- "How to Keep a Portfolio with Children in Kindergarten" guidance on setting up, maintaining, and utilising portfolios as diagnostic tools
- "Methodology to Support the Individualisation of Learning in the Kindergarten Context" detailed information on monitoring and evaluating preschool children's development and learning
- The "Ten Principles of Formative Assessment in Kindergarten," which outlines essential aspects for implementation
- Guidance on providing comprehensible feedback to young children

These resources are designed to help educators implement assessment practices that align with the specificities of preschool education while fostering children's developmental progress.

Child progress monitoring in Czech ECEC also connects with broader quality assurance mechanisms. The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) includes "Educational Outcomes" as one of the six key areas in its evaluation criteria for nursery schools. This creates a link between internal monitoring of individual children's progress and external evaluation of institutional quality.







Evidence of good practice: International literature indicates that developmental monitoring helps identify children's specific learning needs, allowing educators to provide targeted support that enhances development (OECD, 2015). When implemented thoughtfully, these monitoring practices also contribute to improving overall service quality and staff performance while generating valuable data to inform policy decisions (Litjens, 2013). Research consistently demonstrates that non-formal monitoring methods such as portfolio development and narrative documentation positively impact children's developmental outcomes (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels S., Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Son, 2003; Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004; Grisham-Brown, 2008). For monitoring to be beneficial, literature suggests several key principles should guide implementation: tools must be developmentally appropriate, the assessment experience should feel natural for children, and monitoring should be conducted continuously rather than at isolated intervals (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010). Additionally, effective monitoring practices should involve diverse stakeholders, particularly families, with explicit attention to cultural and linguistic considerations (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022).

The Czech Republic exemplifies these research-supported practices through its comprehensive approach to child monitoring. By mandating continuous and systematic assessment using appropriate pedagogical diagnostic methods, the Czech framework prioritises the authentic, ongoing observational tools that research favours. The requirement for diagnostic portfolios implements precisely the type of narrative documentation that captures the full spectrum of children's development across physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains. Particularly noteworthy is how the Czech approach embeds monitoring within daily teaching practices while ensuring it remains developmentally appropriate and engaging for children. The framework's collaborative design, involving teachers, children, and families in the documentation process, reflects best practices in recognising diverse stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, by connecting individual monitoring to broader quality assurance through the Czech School Inspectorate, the system effectively serves multiple beneficiaries: children receive personalised support, educators gain insights to improve practice, and policymakers access valuable data for systemic improvement—fulfilling the multiple purposes that effective monitoring should serve according to the research literature.









Enabling environment

Denmark operates a distinctly decentralised ECEC system characterised by significant municipal autonomy. Under the Act on Day Care Facilities, municipalities hold the legal obligation to ensure ECEC provision for all children from 26 weeks of age until they begin primary school.

Top-level curriculum requirements, binding for all ECEC settings, are established by the Ministry of Children and Education with input from working groups comprising experts, stakeholders, and practitioners. The current requirements, known as the "strengthened pedagogical curriculum," came into effect on July 1, 2018.

The Act on Day Care Facilities mandates that all ECEC settings develop their own pedagogical curriculum that describes how the learning environment is established and documents children's learning and development from birth to age six. Implementation approaches are determined by individual settings, with evaluations required every two years and results published publicly.

The Danish ECEC landscape consists of several setting types: daycare centres that can be established either as age-integrated institutions (*aldersintegrerende institutioner*) for children up to age six or as separate settings for children under age three (nursery or *vuggestue*) and over age three (kindergarten or *børnehave*), complemented by a regulated system of day care in private homes (*dagplejer*).

While municipalities typically facilitate public ECEC provision, they also provide grants covering at least 75% of expenses for placements. Municipalities determine local admission guidelines based on community needs and distribute places in ECEC institutions. Parents dissatisfied with municipal decisions can appeal within a four-week timeframe. When establishing guidelines, municipalities may consider factors such as children's composition, sibling relationships, geographical location, and special needs requirements.

Parents can select from all ECEC setting types without restrictions and may express preferences for specific day care institutions, though placement is not guaranteed. Municipalities must consider parental wishes when possible. For private day care institutions, parents must apply directly to the institution, as municipalities do not allocate these placements. Private institutions establish their own admission guidelines and typically operate waiting lists, but can only decline applications when no vacancies exist.

Evidence of good practice: Denmark's enabling environment creates distinctive conditions for outcome-oriented ECEC through several interconnected features. The strengthened pedagogical curriculum provides binding national standards while empowering individual settings to develop context-specific implementation. This approach enables the development of outcome-oriented practices that respond to local needs while maintaining systemic alignment. Additionally, the biennial evaluation requirement with public reporting creates a structured reflection cycle that supports continuous improvement in outcome-oriented practices while maintaining transparency.







Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development

Denmark's approach to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is guided by a comprehensive framework known as "The Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum," which was established following legislative changes to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care in 2018.

The framework is organised around six curriculum themes, each with defined content descriptions and two broad pedagogical objectives:

- 1. Comprehensive Personal Development Supporting children's potential, self-exploration, and developing confidence while experiencing interactions in secure environments
- 2. Social Development Promoting wellbeing, participation in communities, empathy, and viewing differences as resources for democratic formation
- 3. Communication and Language Enabling children to develop language for understanding themselves and others, and express thoughts and needs (including early literacy skills through storytelling, exposure to books, and communication practices)
- 4. Body, Senses and Motion Supporting bodily exploration and experiencing joy of movement in various situations
- Nature, Outdoor Life and Natural Phenomena Providing experiences with nature to develop curiosity and early understanding of sustainability (incorporating early mathematical awareness through categorising, organising surroundings with concepts like many/few, large/small, etc.)
- 6. Culture, Aesthetics and Community Engaging children in equal communities to experience cultural backgrounds and providing varied cultural experiences

The objectives are deliberately broad, focusing on establishing environments conducive to learning rather than specifying skill-specific targets for individual children. ECEC leaders are responsible for establishing evaluation cultures that continuously reflect on how the pedagogical learning environment supports children's wellbeing, learning, development, and formation.

The framework requires ECEC settings to develop their own written pedagogical curricula that addresses all themes while adapting to local conditions and the specific composition of children in their setting. While previously these curricula had to be official documents published on each setting's website, as of 2025, settings are no longer required to make their curricula available to the public.

Evidence of good practice: Evidence suggests that curriculum frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritise children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).







Denmark exemplifies an approach that only prioritises broad developmental goals through its Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum. While skill-specific targets are not defined, the framework's six curriculum themes provides comprehensive coverage of socio-emotional, literacy and numeracy competences, which are embedded within broader thematic areas.

Danish ECEC settings have considerable autonomy in choosing their pedagogical methods. The framework recognises that learning occurs through a variety of contexts including play, adult-led activities, spontaneous activities, child-initiated activities, and daily routines. When selecting methods, practitioners are expected to account for children's differences such as age, personality, and individual perspectives. Relationships between children and ECEC staff are considered fundamental, with practitioners serving as language role models who engage in meaningful conversations with children. Child perspectives and participation in decision-making processes are valued, and vulnerable children are supported within inclusive environments rather than through separate interventions.

Evidence of good practice: In terms of pedagogical approaches, there is limited consensus in international literature as to which model has the best chance of influencing process quality, as children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding issues such as inconsistent quality and equity concerns. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a).

Denmark's ECEC system demonstrates effective balance between structure and flexibility in pedagogical approaches. The framework provides pedagogical direction without prescribing specific methods, enabling responsiveness to local community values and needs. This balanced approach aligns with evidence suggesting that frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies while allowing for contextual adaptation can effectively support process quality (OECD, 2021a).

ECEC – primary curriculum alignment

The "kindergarten class" (børnehaveklasse) in Denmark serves as an important transitional year between ECEC and primary school. Despite its name, this is not part of the ECEC system but actually constitutes the first year of the Danish public school system (folkeskole). It is mandatory for children who are approximately 6 years old and functions as a formal introduction to school life while maintaining some pedagogical elements familiar to children from their ECEC experience.

The pedagogical curriculum framework for ECEC and the curriculum for the kindergarten class exhibit deliberate structural alignment. The six curriculum themes in ECEC closely correspond to the competence areas established for the kindergarten class. This parallel structure was intentionally designed to create continuity in children's learning experiences as they move through the educational system.

Adjustments were made to the kindergarten class curriculum in 2015 to further strengthened this alignment, not only with ECEC but also with subsequent primary education. These adjustments







emphasised clearer connections between goals, activities, and evaluation processes, as well as between knowledge, skills, and competencies.

However, although structurally aligned, there are notable differences in how learning is conceptualised and evaluated between the two settings. The ECEC framework deliberately avoids setting specific skill-based targets for individual children, instead focusing on establishing quality pedagogical environments that support children's holistic development. In contrast, the kindergarten class curriculum includes defined learning goals within each objective theme, representing standards for outcomes in children's learning and development. This represents a gradual shift toward more structured learning expectations as children enter the formal education system.

Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that well-aligned curriculum frameworks significantly facilitate successful transitions between educational phases. The thoughtful coordination of curricular content and pedagogical approaches across ECEC and primary settings has been identified as a crucial element in creating coherent educational journeys for young learners (OECD, 2017). When children experience consistent educational philosophies, complementary learning objectives, and harmonised teaching practices, they develop stronger engagement with learning environments and demonstrate improved educational outcomes over time (ibid.).

Denmark's deliberate structural correspondence between ECEC's six curriculum themes and the kindergarten class competence areas creates continuity while acknowledging developmental progression. The gradual shift from environment-focused objectives in ECEC to more defined learning goals in the kindergarten class establishes a thoughtful transition that maintains consistent educational philosophies while introducing more structured expectations. This approach reflects research showing that thoughtfully coordinated curricular content across ECEC and primary settings creates coherent educational journeys that strengthen children's engagement and improve educational outcomes (OECD, 2017).

Family engagement

Denmark's curriculum framework recognises that parents are the most influential adults in children's lives and that effective collaboration between ECEC settings and families creates continuity and coherence in children's experiences.

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care formally establishes parent councils in ECEC centres and municipal family daycare settings. These councils have specific rights and responsibilities that extend beyond advisory roles. Parent councils are entitled to lay down principles for the ECEC centre's work, for cooperation between the centre and families, and for how the centre allocates its budget within the framework prescribed by the municipal council. The legislation explicitly requires that parent councils be involved in the preparation, evaluation, and follow-up of the pedagogical curriculum. Additionally, they participate in efforts to ensure positive transitions for children—from home to ECEC, between different ECEC settings, and from ECEC to school. Parent councils also have the right to make nominations and participate in the appointment of ECEC leaders and staff, reflecting the significant role parents play in Danish ECEC governance.

ECEC settings are required to document how they cooperate with parents on children's learning in their pedagogical curriculum. This cooperation extends beyond formal meetings to include everyday interactions where staff and parents exchange observations and insights about children's development. ECEC professionals use various forums—from parent-teacher consultations to pick-







up conversations and community events—to engage parents in discussions about their children's learning.

The framework promotes a reciprocal relationship where parents are encouraged to support their children's learning at home through activities like reading, conversation, and shared experiences, while ECEC staff provide guidance and incorporate parents' knowledge about their children into their pedagogical approach. Settings are expected to adapt their parent engagement strategies to accommodate diverse family backgrounds and circumstances, ensuring inclusive participation.

Evidence of good practice: A range of evidence suggests that strengthened parental engagement in their children's education in ECEC contexts can serve to enhance outcomes in both reading and numeracy, as well as impacting positively on wider factors, such as socio-emotional engagement, and exhibited behaviour (Sim, Bélanger, Stancel-Piątak, & Karoly, 2019; OECD, 2020) – selected evidence suggests this to be particularly applicable in relation to provision for learners from lower socio-economic groups (Ibid). Within this context, Framework documents which facilitate engagement with parents in ECEC provision, as well as maximising continuity of provision between home-based and setting-based learning and support, can serve as a key tool in strengthening outcomes (OECD, 2021a) – this can include explicit guidance, or structured approaches, to communicating effectively with parents and other relevant stakeholders (ibid.).

Denmark's approach to family engagement demonstrates good practice through its formalised, substantive parent participation. The legislative establishment of parent councils creates meaningful family involvement in ECEC governance. The requirement for settings to document cooperation with parents on children's learning ensures systematic engagement across diverse family circumstances. This comprehensive approach aligns with evidence that strengthened parental engagement enhances outcomes in reading, numeracy and socioemotional development (Sim, Bélanger, Stancel-Piątak, & Karoly, 2019; OECD, 2020), while maximising continuity between home-based and setting-based learning (OECD, 2021a).

Workforce culture

Qualifications, standards and pre-service training

In Denmark, the Pedagogue/Social Educator qualification serves as the core professional credential. This qualification is obtained through a 3.5-year university college programme leading to a Bachelor's degree in Social Education (210 ECTS credits, EQF level 6). The programme follows a distinctive structure comprising a common foundation focusing on basic professional competences (70 ECTS credits, including one practicum period) followed by a specialisation component (140 ECTS credits), where students can choose to specialise in early childhood pedagogy.

The admission process offers multiple entry pathways through a quota system, accommodating both traditional academic qualifications and experiential backgrounds. Quota 1 admits candidates with the highest upper secondary grades, while Quota 2 provides entry based on competence assessment for those with varied prior experiences. This reflects Denmark's commitment to inclusive professional recruitment, recognising both academic achievements and practical aptitude.







The curriculum for the Pedagogue qualification is governed by the 2017 ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) which specifies competence goals addressing various dimensions of professional practice. For those specialising in early childhood pedagogy, these competences focus on creating optimal pedagogical environments for children's stimulation and safety based on professional foundations. The curriculum emphasises personal educational formation (*Dannelse*) alongside academic knowledge, recognising that competent pedagogy requires personal qualities, engagement, and values. Students develop competencies in relational work, focusing on how to create connections with individual children and groups, support children's interactions with each other, and enhance children's communicative abilities. The training emphasises systematic knowledge-based reflection as students learn to plan, implement, document and evaluate activities and learning processes that support children's wellbeing, learning, and intellectual development. Training involves diverse teaching formats—class teaching, lectures, discussions, group work, and project-based learning—designed to develop both theoretical understanding and practical capabilities.

Workplace-based learning constitutes a substantial component of the professional preparation, accounting for over one-third of the total course duration (75 ECTS credits). The practicum comprises four periods of varying duration, with two six-month placements providing sustained professional immersion. Each practicum period addresses specific competence areas—for instance, the second practicum focuses on professional relationships and communication with children aged 0-5 years, while the third emphasises systematic reflection and innovation in pedagogical practice.

The practicum involves collaboration between university colleges and ECEC centres, with both institutions sharing responsibility for supporting student development. ECEC centres must prepare educational plans aligned with competence goals and provide regular supervision, while university colleges offer preparation, formal training during study days, and post-practicum reflection. This arrangement acknowledges that learning in workplace settings complements college-based instruction, with each environment offering distinctive learning opportunities.

An alternative qualification route exists through the Pedagogical Assistant program, a post-secondary vocational qualification (EQF level 4). This 2-year course provides a foundation for those working as qualified co-workers in ECEC settings, addressing practical pedagogical competences across five designated areas. While Pedagogical Assistants constitute only about 6% of the ECEC workforce, this qualification offers an important stepping stone within the professional development continuum.

No standardised national qualifications exist for centre leaders, with the majority of leadership positions filled by experienced pedagogues. In recent years, however, collaborative efforts involving federal government agencies, local municipal authorities, and professional organisations have financed diploma programs in leadership studies across the public sector, with the aim of enhancing the overall quality of welfare institutions.







Evidence of good practice: There is evidence to suggest that qualifications (i.e. the level of education achieved, such as diploma, degree, or relevant professional qualifications), lead to enhanced learning outcomes (Manning, Wong, Fleming, & Garvis, 2019), though this is not reflected in all relevant studies, suggesting that content and delivery of training play a key role, rather than simply the academic level attained (OECD, 2021a). Nonetheless, a range of international studies suggest that higher qualified ECEC practitioners provide enhanced opportunities for learners (Barros, et al., 2017; Bjørnestad, Broekhuizen, Os, & Baustad, 2019; Castle, et al., 2015) with studies in both home-based (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Schaack, Le, & Setodji, 2017) and pre-primary settings (Cadima, Aguiar, & Barata, 2018; Raikes, Koziol, Davis, & Burton, 2020; Slot, Bleses, Justice, Markussen-Brown, & Højen, 2018) suggesting that quality instruction is more likely to be delivered by better qualified practitioners.]

Denmark's qualification framework represents good practice through its combination of academic rigour and practical application. The bachelor-level pedagogue qualification aligns with evidence suggesting that higher qualified practitioners provide enhanced learning opportunities (Barros, et al., 2017; Bjørnestad, Broekhuizen, Os, & Baustad, 2019; Castle, et al., 2015). The curriculum's emphasis on both theoretical understanding and practical capabilities, with over one-third dedicated to workplace-based learning, reflects research indicating that content and delivery of training are crucial factors in practitioner effectiveness (OECD, 2021a). The multiple entry pathways accommodate both academic achievement and practical aptitude, supporting inclusive professional recruitment while maintaining quality standards.

Continuous professional development

The Danish national framework for continuing professional development (CPD) offers recognised courses and qualifications, without mandating specific annual time allocations. The primary responsibility for staff professional development lies with the centre leader. Professional development needs can be addressed during mandatory yearly evaluation meetings (referred to as "MUS-samtaler"). Centre leaders, working together with their team, often develop comprehensive competence enhancement plans covering all staff members. Additionally, professional development opportunities are sometimes offered by local government authorities, either for the entire early childhood education and care (ECEC) team, specific groups within the team, or individual staff members who require strengthening in particular areas such as language instruction or inclusive practices.

CPD is systematically incorporated into institutional practices through mandated annual development conversations (*MUS-samtaler*) between leaders and individual staff members. These structured dialogues help identify specific development needs and opportunities. Many centres implement comprehensive competence development strategies encompassing all staff members, creating coherent institutional approaches to professional learning. Additionally, municipal authorities frequently supplement centre-based initiatives by organising targeted professional development opportunities, which may address entire staff teams, specific staff groups, or individual practitioners requiring focused competence building in areas such as language development or inclusive practices.







Professional development opportunities range from short-term courses to substantial long-term qualifications. Short-term courses typically last one to seven weeks and focus on enhancing everyday work competencies in areas such as outdoor life, music, storytelling, movement, language development, and children's environmental assessment. These are primarily provided by university colleges, local authorities, and private organisations.

More substantial professional development is available through diploma study programs, which serve dual purposes: enhancing pedagogical work and creating new career opportunities. These programs typically require two to three years of part-time study (60 ECTS credits), building on relevant qualifications and work experience. Around 30 different pedagogical diploma courses exist, addressing diverse aspects of professional practice. These diploma qualifications are particularly important for centre leaders, who increasingly pursue leadership-focused diplomas such as the Diploma in Leadership or the public Diploma in Leadership Education.

For those seeking advanced qualifications, two Master's degree pathways are available. Most Pedagogues pursuing Master's studies opt for Continuing Higher Education, which comprises one year of full-time study (60 ECTS credits) typically pursued part-time while maintaining employment. Alternatively, the more intensive Candidate degree in Ordinary Higher Education (120 ECTS credits) offers a two-year full-time program. Both pathways emphasise research-based learning while incorporating practitioners' workplace experiences, with the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University serving as a principal provider.

CPD in Denmark offers diverse content areas that support pedagogues in enhancing their professional practice with children. Short-term courses focus on developing practical competencies directly applicable to daily work, including language development methodologies, and approaches to children's environmental assessment. The "professional beacon" initiative represents an innovative approach where specially trained staff serve as resource persons who lead and inspire colleagues in implementing the strengthened pedagogical curriculum. This distributed leadership approach supports organisational capacity building, with designated staff receiving salary supplements for these enhanced responsibilities.

The system emphasises a responsive approach to professional development, with specific training needs identified through structured annual development conversations between leaders and staff members, ensuring that competence building aligns with both individual growth needs and institutional priorities for enhancing children's learning environments and experiences. As such, CPD may include specific observational methodologies or remedial intervention techniques depending on the needs identified by staff during annual development conversations.







Evidence of good practice: A weight of evidence has consistently demonstrated the key role played in ongoing professional development, to continually upskill practitioners (Hamre, Partee, & Mulcahy, 2017), highlighting the importance of such provision in strengthening the capacity of pedagogues (OECD, 2021a). This includes both structured, and more informal, professional development, including mentoring, collaboration, and structured training, with a range of data suggesting that these can directly facilitate enhanced outcomes for learners (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert, Dederer, & Fukkink, 2020; Markussen-Brown, 2017; C.D., M., H.J., & Van Ijzendoorn, 2016). This relates to both pedagogy, and the nature of engagements with learners (Early, Maxwell, Ponder, & Pan, 2017; Landry, et al., 2014; Williford, et al., 2017), with a number of studies also suggesting professional development can strengthen workforce management, by minimising turnover and attrition (Davis, Barrueco, & Perry, 2020; Wolf, et al., 2018).

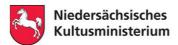
Denmark's approach to continuing professional development represents good practice through its integration into institutional structures and diverse development pathways. The systematic incorporation of CPD through mandated annual development conversations and comprehensive competence enhancement plans aligns with evidence demonstrating the key role of ongoing professional development in strengthening pedagogue capacity (OECD, 2021a). The range of professional development opportunities—from short-term courses to substantial qualifications—addresses research showing that both structured training and informal professional development can directly facilitate enhanced outcomes for learners (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert, Dederer, & Fukkink, 2020; Markussen-Brown, 2017; C.D., M., H.J., & Van Ijzendoorn, 2016). The "professional beacon" initiative exemplifies innovative approaches to distributed leadership that can strengthen workforce management by minimising turnover and attrition (Davis, Barrueco, & Perry, 2020; Wolf, et al., 2018).

Internal evaluation and self-assessment

Denmark's strengthened pedagogical curriculum framework places significant emphasis on establishing an evaluation culture that fosters continuous improvement in pedagogical practice. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care explicitly mandates that ECEC leaders are responsible for "establishing an evaluation culture in the ECEC setting to develop and qualify the pedagogical learning environment." This legislative requirement serves as the foundation for Denmark's systematic approach to self-evaluation in ECEC settings and establishes clear parameters:

- Evaluations of the pedagogical curriculum must occur at least once every two years
- The focus must be on the relationship between pedagogical learning environments and children's development, rather than on individual children's performance
- Evaluation results must be made publicly available to ensure transparency
- Regular pedagogical documentation must be incorporated into the evaluation process

To support ECEC settings in implementing effective self-evaluation processes, Denmark has developed specific guidance materials. A key resource is the Self-Assessment Tool (*Redskab til selvevaluering*), which provides ECEC staff and leaders with a structured framework for analysing and evaluating pedagogical practice in relation to the strengthened pedagogical curriculum. The tool includes reflection guestions, assessment components, and decision guidance for each area,







and features an Action Plan form to document agreed-upon development initiatives. It is designed to help ECEC practitioners identify areas where their current practice is effective and where development is needed. It also guides practitioners to determine appropriate next steps based on their reflections and assessments.

The Danish approach emphasises documentation as a tool for professional reflection rather than administrative compliance. ECEC leaders are responsible for "ensuring regular documentation of the relationship between the pedagogical learning environment and children's wellbeing, learning, development and formation." As stated in the strengthened pedagogical curriculum framework, documentation can take various forms including "storytelling, photos, observations, video footage, screenings, relationship matrices, interviews with children and drawings." The framework specifies that these materials should support "analyses of, and systematic reflections on, the relationship between the learning environment and children's learning, wellbeing and development."

Denmark's approach acknowledges potential tensions between documentation requirements and practical implementation. The framework explicitly states that "the evaluation culture must reflect a balance between resources spent on documenting and evaluating on the one hand, and the outcome for ECEC staff on the other hand." It cautions that if documentation becomes "meaningless" or evaluations "futile," this will negatively impact future implementation.

The Danish ECEC self-evaluation approach positions reflection as a professional development strategy. The documents state that "the requirement for establishing an evaluation culture in ECEC settings should lead to the staff develop a reflective approach to organising and evaluating the pedagogical practice." This reflective approach is intended to help staff:

- Become aware of their own practice
- Think critically about their practice
- Identify possibilities for change where needed
- Ultimately develop and qualify their pedagogical practice

In addition to the Self-Assessment Tool, Denmark also provides complementary resources through the official Danish learning portal (*EMU Dagtilbud*). These include:

 Thematic materials that "delve into knowledge about a theme and inspire dialogue and concrete action," with specific themes including evaluative pedagogical practice and interaction and relationships

An implementation tool containing "five approaches on changing and cementing a strong pedagogical learning environment"







Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that internal quality assurance and self-evaluation approaches vary significantly depending on the regional and national context: they can be mandated by policy or legislation, or adopted as voluntary practices (European Commission, 2022). A common self-evaluation mechanism entails staff members assessing their own performance and practices, thus creating opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and improvement. Research indicates that practitioner self-evaluation significantly contributes to practitioner skill enhancement (OECD, 2015). This process helps staff identify particularly effective aspects of their practice while encouraging deeper reflection on their work (Cubey & Dalli, 1996). Studies have shown that self-evaluation leads to greater awareness of ongoing activities and pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). In outcome-oriented ECEC provision, self-evaluation can be particularly valuable as it enables practitioners to critically examine the relationship between their pedagogical approaches and children's developmental progress, allowing for targeted adjustments to practice that can enhance specific learning outcomes. Research also suggests that systematic documentation and analysis of educational practices through self-assessment promotes professionalism among early childhood practitioners (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, & Musatti, 2012).

Denmark's approach to internal evaluation represents good practice through its legislative foundation, structured support tools, and emphasis on professional reflection rather than compliance. The requirement for regular evaluation focused on pedagogical environments rather than individual children creates systematic improvement cycles while maintaining developmentally appropriate practice. The Self-Assessment Tool provides a structured framework that supports practitioners in identifying strengths and development needs, aligning with research showing that self-evaluation significantly contributes to practitioner skill enhancement (OECD, 2015) and leads to greater awareness of pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). Furthermore, the emphasis on balancing documentation requirements with practical implementation acknowledges potential tensions while ensuring the process remains meaningful.









Enabling environment

England maintains a centralised ECEC system, with the Department for Education (DfE) serving as the single ministerial authority responsible for all ECEC services. While regulation and funding occur at the national level, local authorities retain significant responsibilities for implementation and quality assurance.

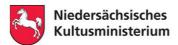
Although education becomes compulsory only at primary school entry (age five), the Education Act 2002 extended the national curriculum to include children from age three through the reception year. This legislation was later replaced by the Children's Act 2006, which established the framework for ECEC service provision, regulation, and inspection. The "early years" phase includes "reception year," which is compulsory and situated within primary schools.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework, established under the Childcare Act 2006 and first implemented in 2008, supports quality ECEC delivery across all registered settings. This framework outlines the values and goals of the ECEC system and defines standards that providers must meet regarding children's learning and development from birth to the compulsory schooling age of five. It also establishes requirements for ECEC in terms of learning and development areas, early learning goals, and assessment protocols, while also setting statutory safeguarding and welfare standards. These requirements apply universally to all providers on the Early Years Register, and providers registered with early years childminder agencies. Additionally, all providers are required to register with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

The English ECEC landscape encompasses diverse provision types:

- Private, voluntary and independent settings and childminders deliver both governmentfunded and parent-paid provision. This category includes day nurseries, independent nursery schools, nursery classes in independent schools, childminders, playgroups, and children's or family centres.
- Maintained settings provide government-funded ECEC for children aged two to four years.
 These include state nursery and reception classes within state primary schools, as well as
 maintained nursery schools. The latter typically operate in areas of greater socioeconomic
 disadvantage to support ECEC access in these communities.

Current ECEC entitlements cover children aged two to four years at the pre-primary level. Part-time ECEC provision is free for disadvantaged two-year-olds and all children from age three. Children may attend a primary school reception class full-time beginning in the academic year following their fourth birthday.







Evidence of good practice: England's enabling environment creates robust conditions for outcome-oriented ECEC through several distinctive features. The centralised system under the Department for Education provides clear lines of accountability and coherent policy direction for ECEC, creating a strong foundation for implementing consistent outcome-oriented approaches across diverse settings. The EYFS establishes a comprehensive national framework that applies to all providers, ensuring that outcome expectations and quality standards are consistent regardless of setting type, ownership, or funding model. However, while the EYFS sets clear national standards, local authorities and individual settings maintain significant autonomy in implementation, allowing outcome-oriented practices to be adapted to local contexts. Finally, the inclusion of the reception year within the EYFS creates continuity between early years and primary education, supporting smooth transitions and alignment of outcome expectations.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework is the statutory curriculum framework for early childhood education and care in England. The framework is organised into seven areas of learning and development, consisting of three prime areas considered fundamental for children's healthy development:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development

These are complemented by four specific areas that strengthen and apply the prime areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

For each area, the framework provides educational programs that outline what children should learn. In reception year (age 4-5), children's development is measured against 17 Early Learning Goals, which define the expected levels of development by the end of the EYFS. For example, in literacy, children are expected to demonstrate comprehension by retelling stories using newly acquired vocabulary, read simple texts by blending sounds, and write recognisable letters and basic sentences. In mathematics, children should develop a deep understanding of numbers to 10 (including their composition), recognise quantities without counting (subitise) up to 5, and explore patterns within numbers such as odds, evens, and doubles. In the area of socioemotional development, the 'self-regulation' goal expects children to understand their own feelings and those of others, set and work toward simple goals, and maintain focus during activities, while the 'building relationships' goal requires children to work cooperatively with peers, form positive attachments to adults, and demonstrate sensitivity to others' needs.

The framework emphasises that play is essential for children's development and learning can occur through adult-guided activities and child-led play. It acknowledges that children develop at different







rates and highlights three characteristics of effective teaching and learning: playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically.

The framework emphasises that practitioners should consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each child when planning their learning experiences and should not use the ELGs as a curriculum checklist. The framework explicitly states that ELGs "should not be used as a curriculum or in any way to limit the wide variety of rich experiences that are crucial to child development."

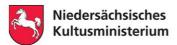
Evidence of good practice: Evidence suggests that curriculum frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritise children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).

England's approach aligns with research on effective curriculum frameworks by establishing clear developmental goals through the ELGs while maintaining flexibility in implementation. The EYFS successfully balances specific skill targets in literacy, numeracy and socioemotional development with the recognition that these should not restrict rich developmental experiences, providing both structure and adaptability.

The EYFS framework takes a flexible approach to pedagogy, offering guidance rather than prescribing specific teaching methods. Central to its philosophy is the balance between structured learning and exploratory play, with practitioners encouraged to implement a mix of adult-directed and child-initiated activities. The framework respects children's individual learning journeys, emphasising the importance of tailoring educational experiences to each child's specific interests, needs, and developmental stage. To support implementation, supplementary non-statutory guidance is available to practitioners, providing practical examples of effective practice and helping educators understand developmental progression through the early years. This adaptable approach ensures that while the framework establishes consistent standards, it remains responsive to the diverse needs of young learners and allows for professional judgment in its application.

Evidence of good practice: In terms of pedagogical approaches, there is limited consensus as to which model has the best chance of influencing process quality, as children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding issues such as inconsistent quality and equity concerns. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a).

The EYFS exemplifies effective balance by providing clear educational programmes without prescribing specific teaching methods. This approach allows practitioners to exercise professional judgment while maintaining consistent expectations, demonstrating the balanced framework recommended by research that establishes preferred strategies while enabling contextual adaptation (OECD, 2021a).







Guidance on curriculum implementation

To support practical application of the EYFS, the Department for Education has published "Development Matters," a non-statutory curriculum guidance document that helps providers design effective early years curricula. This resource provides suggestions and examples of how the principles can be implemented in practice, but the EYFS explicitly states that "this guidance is non-statutory, so Ofsted, CMAs, and inspectorates of independent schools will not take this into account when carrying out inspections or quality assurance visits"

<u>Guidance</u> is also provided on how to undertake the assessments mandated by the EYFS:

- "Early years foundation stage profile handbook" provides guidance for teachers and other early years practitioners to complete the EYFS profile assessment
- "Reception baseline assessment: assessment and reporting arrangements (ARA)" –
 provides guidance to staff responsible for administering the reception baseline assessment
 (RBA)

Additionally, the Department for Education has created the "<u>Help for early years providers</u>" website, where it publishes resources, activities and support articles for ECEC practitioners working with children aged 0-5 years. This includes:

- Resources and advice to help improve practice in the early years, curriculum planning and guidance on working with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Resources, advice and activity examples focused on each of the 7 areas of learning.
- Resources to help practitioners support children's health, safety and learning.

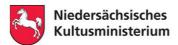
Evidence of good practice: A range of international literature highlights the importance of ensuring robust policies and associated mechanisms are in place to allow for the effective implementation of the process of curriculum implementation, in addition to wider the development of wider "practical support materials" (OECD, 2021a), providing details, and clear guidelines for the various stakeholders involved in the process of ECEC curriculum implementation (ibid.).

England demonstrates good practice through non-statutory guidance that supports implementation without constraining professional autonomy. The combination of "Development Matters" and the dedicated provider website creates the comprehensive "practical support materials" that research indicates are essential for effective curriculum implementation (OECD, 2021a), offering clear guidelines while preserving practitioner discretion.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance system and monitoring pedagogical quality

England requires monitoring of early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality through its Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and independent school inspectorates evaluate provision quality based on EYFS requirements. Quality assessment includes EYFS Profile outcomes and Ofsted inspection results.







As an independent non-ministerial government department, Ofsted operates autonomously from the Department for Education, reporting directly to a multi-party parliamentary select committee. Its independence allows it to conduct impartial evaluations. Under the Childcare Act 2006, all childcare providers, including childminder agencies, must register with Ofsted.

The inspection system operates on a regular schedule where settings receive visits at least once every six years, with new providers typically inspected within their first 30 months. This schedule adjusts based on risk assessment and performance outcomes. Settings judged as "inadequate" face reinspection within 6 months, while those "requiring improvement" are revisited within 12 months.

Inspectors make graded judgments in four key areas using a four-point scale (Outstanding/Grade 1, Good/Grade 2, Requires Improvement/Grade 3, or Inadequate/Grade 4):

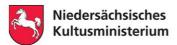
- 1. Quality of education
- 2. Behaviour and attitudes
- 3. Personal development
- 4. Leadership and management

Ofsted's inspection process places significant emphasis on evaluating pedagogical quality. Inspectors evaluate teaching practice by observing staff-child interactions, assessing how well practitioners communicate and model language, present information clearly, and promote appropriate discussion. They examine whether practitioners effectively check children's understanding, identify misconceptions, and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. The assessment considers how practitioners support children's language development, introduce new vocabulary, and read in ways that excite and engage children. Inspectors also evaluate whether teaching approaches help children remember what they have been taught and integrate new knowledge into larger concepts. This pedagogical assessment forms a central component of the "Quality of Education" judgment.

Inspectors gather evidence through multiple methods: conducting joint observations with staff, directly observing children's activities, taking learning walks through the setting, holding discussions with leaders and managers, reviewing key documents, consulting with parents, and interviewing staff members.

This evaluation system feeds into a risk-based monitoring approach where concerning settings receive more frequent inspections and additional monitoring visits as needed. Quality assurance mechanisms include internal review of inspection reports before sharing with providers, who may comment on draft versions. A formal complaints procedure exists for challenging inspection findings. All inspection reports are publicly accessible on the government website

When improvements are needed, clear follow-up processes are implemented. Inadequate settings must develop action plans, progress is monitored, and enforcement actions can be taken if necessary. Reinspection verifies whether required improvements have been made.







Evidence of good practice: Research on effective quality assurance in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) emphasises the importance of comprehensive monitoring systems that evaluate both structural quality (like staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements) and process quality (such as staff-child interactions and pedagogical approaches). These systems should be designed to provide actionable feedback, support professional development, maintain transparency through publicly available results, and align monitoring tools with curriculum frameworks to avoid narrowing educational focus (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022; OECD, 2021a; OECD, 2018).

Ofsted's independent, comprehensive monitoring system exemplifies research-based practice by evaluating both structural requirements and process quality. The risk-based approach, public reporting, and clear improvement pathways align with evidence on effective quality assurance systems (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022), providing consistent standards while generating actionable feedback.

Monitoring children's learning progress

The EYFS framework sets clear expectations for monitoring children's development and learning through a structured assessment approach that balances formal checkpoints with ongoing observation.

The framework establishes ongoing assessment (described as "formative assessment") as "an integral part of the learning and development process" that involves practitioners "understanding children's interests and what they know and can do, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge." This continuous monitoring happens through practitioners' day-to-day observations and interactions with children, along with information shared by parents and carers.

Beyond this ongoing monitoring, the EYFS mandates three formal assessment points:

- 1. Progress check at age two: Practitioners must review children's progress between ages two and three and provide parents/carers with a written summary of development in the prime areas, highlighting strengths, areas for additional support, and any concerns about developmental delays.
- Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA): This assessment must be conducted within the first six weeks of a child starting reception year, serving as the starting point for measuring school progress.
- 3. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP): Completed in the final term of the reception year, this assessment evaluates each child against the Early Learning Goals, determining whether they are meeting expected levels of development or are "emerging" (not yet reaching expected levels). The assessment consists of staff observations, interactions with children and discussions with parents, and its results are made available to Year 1 teachers and the child's parents, with the aim of supporting the child's transition to primary school.







The framework does not mandate specific interventions, retention, or remediation programs for children assessed as "emerging" in some or all areas. Instead, it emphasises that the purpose of the EYFSP is to provide a holistic picture of a child's development to inform discussions between reception and Year 1 teachers about each child's learning needs. As stated on page 21, paragraph 2.16, reception teachers "may choose to provide a short commentary on each child's skills and abilities in relation to the three key characteristics of effective teaching and learning" to "help inform a discussion between reception and year 1 teachers about each child's stage of development and learning needs and assist with the planning of activities in year 1." This approach recognises that children develop at different rates and that the transition to Year 1 should accommodate these differences rather than being contingent on meeting all expected levels. The assessment is designed to inform appropriate support and planning for the child's continuing journey rather than to serve as a gateway or barrier to progression.

The framework explicitly states that assessment "should not involve long breaks from interaction with children or require excessive paperwork" (page 19), emphasising that professional judgment based on knowledge of the child is sufficient without extensive documentation. It also requires practitioners to keep parents informed about their child's progress and to address any learning and development needs in partnership with parents and relevant professionals.

The EYFS's structural organisation places equal importance on socioemotional, physical, linguistic, and cognitive development. Among the 17 Early Learning Goals that define expected standards by the end of reception, only five focus specifically on traditional academic skills (reading, writing, and mathematics), while the others address broader developmental domains.

While providing this structured assessment framework, the EYFS allows flexibility in how settings implement ongoing monitoring practices, focusing on the outcomes and purposes of assessment rather than prescribing specific monitoring methods or tools.

The Development Matters guidance complements these requirements by emphasising a holistic, observation-based approach to monitoring children's progress. The guidance encourages practitioners to use their professional knowledge to make informed decisions about children's learning needs, and includes "observation checkpoints" at key developmental stages that help practitioners identify children who may be at risk of falling behind, enabling timely intervention.

Following the reforms in the EYFS Framework introduced in 2021, which aimed "to reduce unnecessary assessment paperwork for practitioners and teachers so they can spend more valuable classroom time supporting children through rich curriculum activities," a 2023 government report found significant positive outcomes. The majority of early years leaders and staff reported spending less time on assessments and paperwork, with over two-thirds noting a reduction in time spent on assessments across all setting types. This freed-up time was primarily redirected to spending more time with children (reported by 81-89% of leaders) and having better quality interactions (70-84%). Other benefits included more time for curriculum planning, high-quality teaching preparation, and reduced stress levels among staff. The reform shifted practice away from extensive tracking and "tick list" approaches toward recording meaningful "wow moments" and trusting practitioners' professional judgment. Staff reported this change particularly benefited children's language development and allowed for quicker identification of children needing additional support. However, some settings still maintained extensive paperwork requirements, especially for children with SEND or due to leadership preferences, indicating varying levels of implementation across the sector.







Evidence of good practice: International literature indicates that developmental monitoring helps identify children's specific learning needs, allowing educators to provide targeted support that enhances development (OECD, 2015). When implemented thoughtfully, these monitoring practices also contribute to improving overall service quality and staff performance while generating valuable data to inform policy decisions (Litjens, 2013). Research consistently demonstrates that non-formal monitoring methods such as portfolio development and narrative documentation positively impact children's developmental outcomes (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels S., Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Son, 2003; Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004; Grisham-Brown, 2008). For monitoring to be beneficial, literature suggests several key principles should guide implementation: tools must be developmentally appropriate, the assessment experience should feel natural for children, and monitoring should be conducted continuously rather than at isolated intervals (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010). Additionally, effective monitoring practices should involve diverse stakeholders, particularly families, with explicit attention to cultural and linguistic considerations (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022).

England's monitoring approach aligns with research-supported practices by emphasising observation-based assessment rather than formal testing. The 2021 reforms reducing paperwork while emphasising professional judgment align with research on effective nonformal monitoring methods (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels et al., 2003), allowing practitioners to focus on meaningful interactions while still systematically tracking children's development.









Enabling environment

Estonia has developed a clearly structured governance system for early childhood education and care (ECEC) with well-defined responsibilities at different administrative levels. The Ministry oversees key functions including national curriculum development, educational standards, development planning, and supervision.

At the local level, municipalities and towns bear the primary responsibility for ensuring access to education from preschool through upper secondary levels, enforcing compulsory school attendance, and maintaining preschool institutions and schools.

The Estonian ECEC system operates under a split model where:

- The Ministry of Education and Research oversees preschool institutions (koolieelsed lasteasutused), governed by specific legislative frameworks such as the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, the National Curriculum for Preschool Child Care Institutions, and the Private School Act.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs manages childcare services (*lapsehoiuteenused*) for children up to primary school age, governed by the Social Welfare Act

Notably, childcare services under the Social Affairs Ministry are not required to follow a curriculum and have fewer staff qualification requirements. These centres typically operate in areas with insufficient kindergarten places. However, there are ongoing plans to consolidate oversight under the Education Ministry, which would harmonise standards across all ECEC settings.

Since 2014, Estonian policy guarantees that local governments must provide ECEC opportunities for all children aged 1.5 to 7 years residing in their catchment area, including those with special educational needs. Preschool institutions (*koolieelsed lasteasutused*) consist of:

- · Crèches (lastesõim) for children up to three years
- Preschools (lasteaed) for children up to seven years
- Specialised preschools for children with special educational needs up to seven years

Estonian ECEC institutions deliver integrated programs combining education and care services (ISCED levels 010-020). While attendance is not mandatory, participation rates are high, with 91.9% of children aged 3-7 engaged in ECEC programs as of 2022 (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024). Parents contribute to enrolment fees and meal costs, with fees varying by child age and institutional administration costs, but capped at 20% of the minimum wage.

Public provision dominates the sector, with municipal preschool institutions comprising 90% of all childcare institutions in the 2018/19 academic year. Local governments tailor services to meet regional family needs, determining operational schedules and hours.







Evidence of good practice: Estonia's enabling environment creates distinctive conditions for outcome-oriented ECEC through several key features. The well-defined division of authority between national and local levels creates a structured system where curriculum development and educational standards are centrally established while implementation is locally managed, enabling consistent outcome expectations with contextual adaptation. The ongoing movement toward unified oversight of most ECEC provision by the Ministry of Education and Research rather than social welfare authorities reflects a conceptualisation of early childhood services as educational rather than purely care-oriented, supporting stronger outcome orientation. Finally, the availability of services in multiple languages respects Estonia's multicultural context while ensuring all children can access education in an appropriate linguistic environment, supporting stronger developmental outcomes.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development

Estonia's "National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions" establishes a comprehensive framework that balances national standards with institutional autonomy. Established in 2008, it provides a foundation for early childhood education while allowing individual institutions to develop their own curricula based on local needs and children's abilities.

The curriculum is notably holistic, covering multiple developmental domains through seven subject fields:

- 1. Me and the environment;
- 2. Language and speech;
- 3. Estonian as a second language;
- 4. Mathematics;
- 5. Art;
- 6. Music;
- 7. Movement

These are supported by four groups of general skills, the development of which should be "supported through all schooling and education activities by integrating the contents of different subject fields:"

- 1. Play skills
- 2. Cognitive and learning skills
- 3. Social skills; and
- Self-management skills.

The curriculum explicitly defines expected learning outcomes for children aged 6-7, providing clear developmental targets across all subject fields. For instance, in Mathematics, a 6-7-year-old child is expected to count between 1 and 12, understand basic addition and subtraction up to 5, group objects by characteristics, and recognise geometric shapes. Similarly detailed outcomes are specified for other subject areas, creating a structured yet flexible framework.







The assessment of children's development is integrated into everyday activities, with teachers conducting planned observations of children during both directed activities and undirected play. The curriculum emphasises that assessment should focus on valuing achievements and recognising the child's ability to cope, development, positive attitudes, and interests.

The curriculum emphasises child-centred, play-based learning; it explicitly states that "play is the main activity of children of pre-school age" and serves as "the basis for the development of all general skills and the skills and knowledge in different subject fields." This principle is reflected throughout the curriculum's guidance on teaching methods.

The curriculum also encourages an integrated approach to learning where activities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, observing, exploring, comparing, calculating, and various movement, music, and art activities are interconnected. Teachers are directed to consider children's individual development levels, ages, and interests when planning activities.

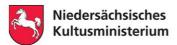
Evidence of good practice: Evidence suggests that curriculum frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritise children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).

Estonia exemplifies good practice in curriculum design through its balanced approach, combining broad developmental goals with clear learning outcomes across subject fields. This balance provides Estonian practitioners with clear guidance for competence development whilst preserving the holistic, child-centred ethos essential for early years education.

While the curriculum establishes these broad pedagogical principles, pre-school institutions have considerable autonomy in selecting specific pedagogical approaches. The curriculum allows for various approaches including the Step-by-Step methodology, Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and active learning methods such as discovery learning. Private institutions may implement alternative pedagogies aligned with their educational philosophy, such as Waldorf or Christian approaches.

Evidence of good practice: In terms of pedagogical approaches, there is limited consensus as to which model has the best chance of influencing process quality, as children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding issues such as inconsistent quality and equity concerns. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a).

Estonia demonstrates an effective balance between prescriptive guidance and pedagogical flexibility, aligning with research showing that ECEC quality benefits from frameworks that endorse preferred strategies whilst allowing local adaptation.







Workforce culture

Qualifications, standards and pre-service training

Since 2015, Estonia has required all Early Childhood Teachers to have at least a Bachelor's level qualification from a university or university college. This raised professional standard has significantly increased the proportion of Early Childhood Teachers with higher education from 20.9% in 1995 to 66% by 2016.

An important document guiding pre-service training is the Teachers' Professional Standard, EQF level 6, issued in 2013. This standard sets out the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for successful professional teaching. The profession of teacher includes several clearly defined tasks and duties:

- planning of learning and teaching activities;
- development of the learning environment;
- supporting learning and development;
- reflection and professional self-development;
- counselling of learners and parents.

Personal qualities needed for the work are also specified, including self-management, cooperativeness, initiative, responsibility, self-confidence, creativity, tolerance, empathy, integrity, and a positive attitude.

Universities are free to design their curricula but must align them with the National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions (2008) and the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act (1999). This ensures that teacher preparation is relevant to the actual educational context in which graduates will work. Teachers are also prepared to provide advice on learning and teaching to parents of children who attend the ECEC centre and to those in the catchment area who request it.

The primary qualification route to become an Early Childhood Teacher is through a three-year Bachelor's degree programme (180 ECTS points) in early childhood education. These programs are offered at Tallinn University (which has been educating early childhood specialists since 1967), Tallinn University Rakvere College (since 2000), and Tartu University and its affiliated Narva College (since 2004). The curriculum provides a research-based preparation that guarantees professional competencies and self-reflection skills necessary for successful teaching. Additionally, students can continue to Master's level studies (an additional 120 ECTS points) to deepen their competencies and knowledge of early childhood education.

Estonia's ECEC system also includes qualified co-workers known as Teachers' Assistants (*Õpetaja abi*) and Childcare Workers/Nurses (*Lapsehoidja*). Unlike Early Childhood Teachers, these staff members follow a one-year vocational education/training course organised by Health Care Colleges in Tallinn and Tartu. They are required to acquire competences in health promotion activities and implementation of the National Curriculum. The qualification is pegged at EQF level 4 (or level 5 for work in Preparatory classes or with children with special needs).

Lead Teachers, who serve as pedagogical leaders and deputy Centre Heads must hold both a higher education degree and a professional qualification in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Management.

The curriculum structure for the Bachelor's programme includes a broad foundation in educational sciences, psychology, and field-based studies. Key competencies emphasised in the Estonian system include foundational knowledge of educational sciences, understanding of child development,







subject didactics, and research methods. Students learn to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical work with children and adults, create favourable learning environments, critically analyse pedagogical processes, and develop skills in self-reflection and professional development.

Workplace-based learning is integral to the pre-service training programme, comprising 10% of the overall study program. Practica in ECEC settings during the Bachelor's programme are organised in five parts, totalling 18 ECTS points. The first practicum introduces students to the teacher role and various ECEC institutions. In the second practicum, students familiarise themselves with documentation, observe and analyse teaching activities, and plan children's play and integrated educational activities. The third practicum focuses on planning and carrying out educational activities while considering children's individual characteristics. The fourth and fifth practica allow students to work more independently, making daily plans, developing integrated projects, and organising group activities. Students also learn to communicate with parents and participate in centre meetings and events.

Students have the option to complete a practicum abroad. Though optional, this international experience allows students to spend at least three months in another country, participating in daily activities of ECEC settings and learning about different approaches and methodologies.

Pre-service training cultivates critical analytical abilities for pedagogical processes and emphasises self-reflection as an essential professional skill. Students develop competencies in observing children's individual developmental patterns, planning appropriate educational activities based on these observations, and implementing teaching strategies that accommodate various learning needs. The training also prepares teachers to communicate effectively with parents, providing guidance on supporting children's development at home. Through extensive practica, students learn to evaluate children's school readiness, implement developmental assessments, and design appropriate interventions when needed. This comprehensive approach to pre-service training equips graduates with the skills necessary to identify and address developmental challenges through evidence-based practices and reflective teaching.

Evidence of good practice: There is evidence to suggest that qualifications (i.e. the level of education achieved, such as diploma, degree, or relevant professional qualifications), lead to enhanced learning outcomes (Manning, Wong, Fleming, & Garvis, 2019), though this is not reflected in all relevant studies, suggesting that content and delivery of training play a key role, rather than simply the academic level attained (OECD, 2021a). Nonetheless, a range of international studies to suggest that higher qualified ECEC practitioners provide enhanced opportunities for learners (Barros, et al., 2017; Bjørnestad, Broekhuizen, Os, & Baustad, 2019; Castle, et al., 2015) with studies in both home-based (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Schaack, Le, & Setodji, 2017) and pre-primary settings (Cadima, Aguiar, & Barata, 2018; Raikes, Koziol, Davis, & Burton, 2020; Slot, Bleses, Justice, Markussen-Brown, & Højen, 2018) suggesting that quality instruction is more likely to be delivered by better qualified practitioners.

Estonia demonstrates exemplary practice in workforce development through its comprehensive qualification requirements and robust pre-service training. Requiring Early Childhood Teachers to hold at least a Bachelor's level qualification aligns with research indicating that higher qualifications lead to enhanced learning outcomes and quality instruction. Estonia's teacher preparation programmes are designed to ensure graduates possess essential competencies in a range of relevant areas, while also integrating workplace-based learning, which ensures theory-practice connections. This structured, comprehensive approach to qualification and training directly supports enhanced opportunities for learners through a well-prepared, highly competent workforce equipped to deliver quality instruction across all developmental domains.







Continuous professional development

According to the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (1999), teachers are required to participate in continuing education. The approach to professional development has evolved from a prescribed system (160 hours every five years) to one where teachers identify their own development needs based on professional standards. The priorities for Early Childhood Teachers' professional development are regularly updated in collaboration with universities and stakeholders. For example, in 2016-2017, priorities included implementation of the national preschool curriculum, child-initiated learning approaches, supporting children with special needs, and teaching Estonian as an additional language.

CPD providers include Tallinn University, Tartu University, and private organisations. The Open University at Tallinn University coordinates continuing education programs that allow teachers to develop themselves professionally, advance their qualifications, or acquire additional specialisations.

Professional development activities may be organised by local governments or by the ECEC settings themselves. Centre Heads are responsible for organising courses for teachers and assistants, and every ECEC institution conducts "development conversations" with staff. Specific forms of CPD are formally recognised for career advancement, such as credit endorsements for specialist posts like Senior Teacher or Master Teacher. According to the Estonian Education Information System, preschool teachers attend an average of 35 hours of CPD per year, with costs covered by the state and employers.

The development of competence centres at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu further supports teacher training and educational sciences. These centres collect and develop knowledge about learning and teaching and disseminate this knowledge to ECEC institutions. Additionally, Estonia has established regional teacher support networks, with 49 kindergartens and schools functioning as methodology or consultation centres across the country.

In-service training in Estonia aligns with the Teacher Professional Standards, which expect teachers to be able to plan learning and teaching activities, develop the learning environment, support learning and development, engage in reflection and professional self-development, and provide counselling to learners and parents. The content of CPD focuses on specific competencies that directly impact child outcomes, including implementation of the national preschool curriculum, child-initiated approaches to learning, identifying and supporting children with special needs, and language development (particularly Estonian as an additional language for children with different home languages). The CPD system incorporates alternative development methods beyond traditional training courses, such as mentorship, supervision, coaching, and network learning, enabling teachers to gain diverse perspectives on addressing developmental challenges.







Evidence of good practice: A weight of evidence has consistently demonstrated the key role played in ongoing professional development, to continually upskill practitioners (Hamre, Partee, & Mulcahy, 2017), highlighting the importance of such provision in strengthening the capacity of pedagogues (OECD, 2021a). This includes both structured, and more informal, professional development, including mentoring, collaboration, and structured training, with a range of data suggesting that these can directly facilitate enhanced outcomes for learners (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert, Dederer, & Fukkink, 2020; Markussen-Brown, 2017; C.D., M., H.J., & Van Ijzendoorn, 2016). This relates to both pedagogy, and the nature of engagements with learners (Early, Maxwell, Ponder, & Pan, 2017; Landry, et al., 2014; Williford, et al., 2017), with a number of studies also suggesting professional development can strengthen workforce management, by minimising turnover and attrition (Davis, Barrueco, & Perry, 2020; Wolf, et al., 2018).

Estonia exemplifies good practice in professional development through its comprehensive, needs-based approach to ongoing teacher learning. Rather than mandating a uniform CPD requirement, Estonia has evolved towards a system where teachers identify their own development needs based on professional standards, aligning with evidence that targeted professional development strengthens pedagogical capacity. With preschool teachers averaging 35 hours of state-funded CPD annually, Estonia demonstrates a substantial commitment to workforce development. The establishment of competence centres at universities and 49 regional methodology centres demonstrates Estonia's systematic investment in professional growth, aligning with evidence that both structured and informal professional development directly impacts learning outcomes (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert, Dederer, & Fukkink, 2020).

Internal evaluation and self-assessment

Estonia implemented a comprehensive internal evaluation system for preschool childcare institutions in 2006 when the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) introduced this obligation as part of a broader quality assurance framework. This initiative was designed with two primary objectives: to support the creation of robust internal quality assurance systems within institutions and to ensure that preschools continuously foster both child development and institutional improvement. The approach reflects Estonia's commitment to evidence-based educational development and represents a shift toward greater institutional autonomy and self-management in the education sector, placing responsibility for quality assurance primarily with the institutions themselves.

The internal evaluation process is designed to be institution-led while following a structured approach. The head of each preschool institution is responsible for establishing the specific evaluation procedure, which must receive prior approval from the board of trustees. Preschools can select their preferred methodologies for conducting internal evaluations, allowing for contextualised approaches that address their unique circumstances. To ensure institutions have access to expertise, the MoER offers support through trained counsellors who can provide guidance on planning and implementing evaluations. Importantly, preschools can apply for state compensation to cover the costs of these external advisory services, removing financial barriers to quality evaluation. The evaluation framework focuses on assessing teaching activities, educational practices, management effectiveness, and organisational development based on performance indicators approved by ministerial order and available through the Estonian Education Information System (EEIS).

Internal evaluation culminates in the production of a comprehensive report at least once every three academic years, identifying institutional strengths, areas for improvement, and key performance







indicators. These reports serve multiple purposes within Estonia's educational accountability system. They are made publicly available through the Estonian Education Information System (EEIS), enabling transparency in educational quality. The educational statistics virtual environment, *HaridusSilm*, also publishes institutional results, allowing preschools to benchmark their performance against similar institutions and track their improvement over time. This comparative dimension is enhanced by the inclusion of various indicators related to teaching processes, educational outcomes, and organisational aspects. Since 2018, regular surveys of satisfaction among educators and children's families have supplemented these indicators, with feedback provided to individual institutions and compared to national averages. This multi-faceted approach ensures that evaluation is not merely a compliance exercise but a tool for meaningful development.

An internal evaluation guide (known as "Sisehindamine kui tõenduspõhine kooliarendus" in Estonian) was developed by the Tallinn University Centre for Educational Innovation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research to provide comprehensive guidance on implementing effective internal evaluation processes. This guide serves as a practical resource for educational institutions, including preschools, and presents internal evaluation as part of a continuous improvement cycle, framing it as an ongoing process rather than a periodic event. It offers detailed guidance on setting learning-driven objectives, developing appropriate performance indicators, systematically collecting and analysing data, and using evidence to inform decision-making. The guide emphasises that internal evaluation should be integrated with development planning, creating a coherent approach where evaluation findings directly inform future institutional priorities.

For ECEC teachers and pedagogues, the guide provides specific frameworks for strengthening reflective practice and professional development. It outlines how educators should participate in collaborative data analysis through working groups that examine performance indicators relevant to teaching practices and child development. Teachers are encouraged to engage in peer learning, lesson observations, and professional discussions that connect data analysis to practical pedagogical improvements. The guide specifically details how teachers should contribute to the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that conclusions represent consensus rather than individual opinions. Development interviews focused on supporting children's learning and engagement are recommended as a structured approach to teacher reflection. Importantly, the document emphasises creating a culture that supports data use for improvement rather than accountability, with school leaders responsible for establishing safe environments for collaborative analysis and professional growth. This approach recognises that meaningful self-evaluation occurs when teachers view the process as valuable for their professional practice rather than as an external imposition, directly linking reflective practices to improved teaching and learning outcomes for Estonia's youngest learners.







Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that internal quality assurance and self-evaluation approaches vary significantly depending on the regional and national context: they can be mandated by policy or legislation, or adopted as voluntary practices (European Commission, 2022). A common self-evaluation mechanism entails staff members assessing their own performance and practices, thus creating opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and improvement. Research indicates that practitioner self-evaluation significantly contributes to practitioner skill enhancement (OECD, 2015). This process helps staff identify particularly effective aspects of their practice while encouraging deeper reflection on their work (Cubey & Dalli, 1996). Studies have shown that self-evaluation leads to greater awareness of ongoing activities and pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). In outcome-oriented ECEC provision, self-evaluation can be particularly valuable as it enables practitioners to critically examine the relationship between their pedagogical approaches and children's developmental progress, allowing for targeted adjustments to practice that can enhance specific learning outcomes. Research also suggests that systematic documentation and analysis of educational practices through self-assessment promotes professionalism among early childhood practitioners (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, & Musatti, 2012).

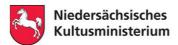
Estonia's internal evaluation system demonstrates good practice through its balanced approach to institutional autonomy and structured guidance. The system places responsibility with institutions while providing ministerial frameworks, trained counsellors, and comprehensive implementation guides. This approach aligns with research showing that practitioner self-evaluation significantly enhances skills (OECD, 2015) and increases awareness of pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). The emphasis on creating a culture that values data for improvement rather than accountability reflects evidence that effective self-evaluation occurs when practitioners view the process as valuable for professional growth rather than external imposition.

Quality assurance

Monitoring children's learning progress

In Estonian preschools, teachers hold primary responsibility for observing and documenting children's developmental progress. While the National Curriculum for Pre-School Child Care Institutions and associated guidance does provide expected developmental outcomes by age group and in different areas (such as language and speech, mathematics, art, etc.), these serve as general references or informal benchmarks rather than rigid targets. Teachers are encouraged to use these as guideposts to understand typical development, but the emphasis remains on observing each child's individual progress relative to their own starting point. The curriculum establishes that assessment should focus on the child's achievements rather than deficiencies, taking a positive, strength-based approach. Assessment is viewed as an ongoing process where children's activities and outcomes are observed, recorded, documented, and monitored in their natural learning environment.

According to guidance published by the National Centre for Examinations and Qualifications, "Assessing and supporting child development," the Estonian approach emphasises multiple methods of gathering information about children's development. Teachers collect data through systematic observation, analysis of children's work, conversations with children and parents, and the monitoring of play activities. This multifaceted approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of each child's progress across various developmental domains: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.







The guidance document explains that when assessing children's development, teachers are encouraged to involve multiple stakeholders. Information is collected from different sources including parents, other teachers, specialists, and the children themselves. This environmental assessment model ensures a more accurate and holistic picture of the child's development than relying on a single assessor.

For children demonstrating developmental differences, the system provides additional layers of support. When a teacher identifies that a child's development has not progressed in an age-appropriate manner, the parent is informed of the need for further specialist assessment. This may involve referral to a psychologist, speech therapist, special needs teacher, or social worker. The information collected by teachers is shared with specialists via the parent to maintain a coherent understanding of the child's needs.

For children with identified special needs, an Individual Development Plan is developed, as detailed in the guidance materials. This document determines individualised objectives and content, adaptations of teaching materials, and appropriate assessment methods. The IDP is created collaboratively by a team including teachers, specialists, parents, and management representatives, tailored to the child's specific developmental needs.

As children approach school age, a "readiness for school" card is developed for each child by preschool teachers, and shared with the child's parents and his or her future primary school before compulsory attendance begins. This document provides a description of the child's achievements in general skills development according to the national curriculum. It includes information on motor skills, self-service abilities, interests and motivation, play and social skills, emotional state and behaviour, speech development, and prior knowledge. The card helps primary school teachers plan appropriate curricula based on each child's individual development and characteristics.

In addition to traditional observation methods, Estonia has recently developed an innovative electronic assessment instrument for monitoring five-year-old children's development. As documented by Meesak et al. (2024), this tablet-based e-assessment tool was created by the Estonian Education and Youth Board in collaboration with Tallinn University researchers to provide teachers with a standardised, engaging, and efficient method to assess children's skills across multiple developmental domains. The instrument focuses on four key areas: cognitive processes (attention, working memory, thinking), language skills (vocabulary, emerging reading and writing, text comprehension), mathematical skills (numbers, calculation, counting), and learning skills (interest, perceived ability, valuation of solutions).

The e-instrument utilises a storytelling approach where children engage with interactive tasks guided by audio instructions, allowing teachers to observe rather than directly test children's abilities. In their validation study, Meesak et al. (2024) found positive correlations between children's direct assessment results and teachers' evaluations, confirming the instrument's validity particularly in academic skills areas. Notably, the research demonstrated that "e-assessment can be used for assessing young children's skills as five-year-olds were successfully able to solve the items on a tablet and their results broadly aligned with teachers' evaluations" (Meesak et al., 2024, p. 1142). This approach complements Estonia's existing assessment practices while providing teachers with additional information about children's development in specific areas where traditional observational methods might have limitations, such as assessing learning skills and advanced topics.







Evidence of good practice: International literature indicates that developmental monitoring helps identify children's specific learning needs, allowing educators to provide targeted support that enhances development (OECD, 2015). When implemented thoughtfully, these monitoring practices also contribute to improving overall service quality and staff performance while generating valuable data to inform policy decisions (Litjens, 2013). Research consistently demonstrates that non-formal monitoring methods such as portfolio development and narrative documentation positively impact children's developmental outcomes (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels S., Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Son, 2003; Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004; Grisham-Brown, 2008). For monitoring to be beneficial, literature suggests several key principles should guide implementation: tools must be developmentally appropriate, the assessment experience should feel natural for children, and monitoring should be conducted continuously rather than at isolated intervals (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010). Additionally, effective monitoring practices should involve diverse stakeholders, particularly families, with explicit attention to cultural and linguistic considerations (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022).

Estonia's approach to monitoring children's learning demonstrates good practice through its emphasis on observation-based, multi-stakeholder assessment focused on individual progress. The system aligns with research supporting non-formal monitoring methods (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels et al., 2003) by emphasising natural observation over formal testing while still providing clear developmental benchmarks. The innovative e-assessment tool complements traditional methods by creating engaging, developmentally appropriate assessment experiences, reflecting guidance that effective monitoring should feel natural for children (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000) while providing structured data about developmental progress.









Enabling environment

Within the United Kingdom, Scotland operates a devolved ECEC system where local authorities hold responsibility for service delivery while following national guidelines and utilising funding from the Scottish Government. This arrangement functions within a "provider-neutral" model, where local authorities ensure provision but do not necessarily deliver all services directly.

At the ministerial level, overall responsibility for Scottish education policy falls under the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. The Minister for Children and Young People oversees early education and childcare services policy development, while the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages is responsible for the curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence).

The legislative foundation for ECEC in Scotland rests primarily on two acts: The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The 1980 Act mandates local authorities to secure provision of school education, including early learning and childcare (ELC), in their areas. Building on these duties, the 2014 Act requires local authorities to provide a specified amount of funded ELC for children in their jurisdiction and establishes a delivery framework.

"Getting it right for every child" (GIRFEC) serves as a key policy framework articulating the government's commitment to providing appropriate support to all children, young people, and their families. This framework provides Scotland with a consistent approach and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding children's wellbeing, with implementation embedded locally across Children's Services Planning Partnerships.

The Scottish approach funds a diverse mix of nurseries operated by public, private, and non-profit providers, alongside registered childminders. This mixed delivery model offers families flexibility and choice in accessing childcare while ensuring all eligible children—three- and four-year-olds, as well as certain two-year-olds—can receive up to 1,140 hours of funded ELC annually.

The National Standard constitutes a core element of Scotland's "Funding Follows the Child" approach to ELC. It establishes consistent criteria that all providers (public, private, and non-profit), including childminders—must meet to deliver funded ELC entitlement. This standard enables parents and carers to use their child's entitlement at any ELC provider that meets the national standard, has available capacity, and enters into a contract with the local authority.

The National Standard defines expectations for children and families regarding their ELC experience, regardless of where they access funded hours. All ELC providers must demonstrate compliance with this standard before accessing funding, with local authorities responsible for assessing and monitoring compliance across all funded providers.

ELC settings, which provide education and care for children up to school age, include family centres, day nurseries, nursery schools and classes, childminders, and playgroups. These settings may be operated by local authorities, private businesses, voluntary sector organisations, or, in the case of childminders, self-employed individuals.







Evidence of good practice: Scotland's enabling environment creates distinctive conditions for outcome-oriented ECEC through several interconnected features. The balanced distribution of responsibilities between national government (responsible for policy and funding) and local authorities (responsible for implementation and monitoring) creates a framework where outcome-oriented approaches can be consistently defined at the national level while being responsively implemented in local contexts. Additionally, the implementation of a single, comprehensive National Standard ensures that outcome expectations remain consistent regardless of provider type, ownership, or geographical location, creating equitable quality expectations while still allowing for contextual adaptation.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development

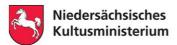
Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) establishes a central framework that allows schools and practitioners to develop localised curricula suited to their specific contexts and learners' needs. The CfE was introduced between 2004 and 2010 and fully implemented in 2011. Unlike statutory curricula in some education systems, the CfE is not mandated by specific legislation but was developed and implemented through broad consensus within the education sector, operating as authoritative guidance rather than legal requirement. Following the 2021 OECD Review of Scottish Education and the 2023 National Discussion on Scottish Education, both of which recommended establishing a systematic curriculum review process, the Scottish Government announced the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) in 2023. Led by Education Scotland since April 2024, the CIC aims to ensure the curriculum remains fit for purpose, reflects contemporary learner needs, and addresses issues such as curriculum overload through planned, proactive reviews rather than reactive changes.

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) aims to develop students into "successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors" - collectively known as the four capacities. The CfE defines curriculum broadly, encompassing all planned learning experiences from early childhood through adolescence and beyond. This learner-centred approach promotes holistic development, emphasising the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes integral to the four capacities.

The CfE is a fully integrated curriculum, covering education for children and young people aged 3-18. The early level spans the period of time from age three until the end of Primary 1, facilitating a smooth transition between early learning and primary education.

The curriculum is organised around eight key areas:

- 1. Expressive arts
- 2. Health and wellbeing
- Languages
- 4. Mathematics
- 5. Religious and moral education
- 6. Sciences
- 7. Social studies
- 8. Technologies







Within these areas, learning is structured around "Experiences and Outcomes," clear statements that guide planning and assessment. Additionally, literacy, numeracy, and certain aspects of health and wellbeing are designated as responsibilities across all teaching staff.

To support consistent assessment, national benchmarks establish clear progression pathways across curriculum areas from early to fourth levels (first to fourth for Modern Languages), clarifying expectations for learner advancement and supporting consistency in practitioners' professional judgment. For example, early literacy benchmarks include:

- Hears and says patterns in words.
- Hears and says the different single sounds made by letters.
- Hears and says blends/sounds made by a combination of letters.
- Knows the difference between a letter, word and numeral.
- Reads from left to right and top to bottom.
- Uses knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read words.
- Uses knowledge of sight vocabulary/tricky words to read familiar words in context.
- Reads aloud familiar texts with attention to simple punctuation.

Evidence of good practice: Evidence suggests that curriculum frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritise children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence exemplifies effective balance between broad developmental goals and specific skill targets. The framework establishes holistic "four capacities" while providing clear progression through detailed experiences, outcomes, and benchmarks. This approach aligns with research showing curriculum frameworks are most effective when combining broad developmental goals with specific targets (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017), providing clear expectations while maintaining focus on the whole child through integrated curriculum areas, including dedicated attention to wellbeing.

The CfE is designed to be flexible rather than prescriptive, allowing for multiple pedagogical approaches while providing a coherent framework. The CfE does not mandate a single pedagogical approach for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Instead, it establishes broad principles and values while intentionally leaving space for practitioners to develop context-appropriate methods. This approach recognises that different settings may require different pedagogical strategies. While not prescribing specific pedagogies, it does however promote child-centred, play-based, and experiential learning approaches, particularly in early years.

Additionally, national practice guidance published by the government emphasises flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptation to local needs rather than prescribing a single pedagogical method. It specifically encourages practitioners to "look outwards" and learn from other curriculum approaches like Te Whāriki, Froebel, Nature Kindergartens, and Reggio Emilia, suggesting an openness to diverse pedagogical influences. Throughout, it balances providing a coherent







framework with professional autonomy, stating the guidance "can be used flexibly dependent on current need" (Realising the Ambition, p. 11).

Evidence of good practice: In terms of pedagogical approaches, there is limited consensus as to which model has the best chance of influencing process quality, as children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding issues such as inconsistent quality and equity concerns. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a).

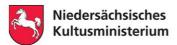
Scotland's CfE demonstrates effective balance between structure and flexibility in pedagogical approaches. While establishing broad principles and values that promote child-centred, play-based learning, it intentionally avoids prescribing specific methods to allow practitioners to develop context-appropriate approaches. This balanced approach aligns with evidence suggesting that frameworks which establish consistent educational principles while enabling contextual adaptation can effectively support process quality (OECD, 2021a), encouraging practitioners to "look outwards" and learn from diverse pedagogical influences while maintaining coherence within the national framework.

Guidance on curriculum implementation

Scotland provides comprehensive guidance on the practical application and adaptation of the Curriculum for Excellence through a structured, multi-layered approach that combines policy frameworks with detailed practice resources. According to Education Scotland's website, guidance materials developed to support CfE implementation include:

- "Resources to support the Refreshed Curriculum for Excellence Narrative" These resources have been designed to support practitioners in engaging with the Refreshed Curriculum for Excellence Narrative, published on 9 September 2019.
- "Principles and practice" The principles and practice documents are essential reading for
 practitioners as they begin, and then develop, their work with the statements of experiences
 and outcomes.
- "Building the Curriculum" This document series provides advice, guidance and policy for different aspects of Curriculum for Excellence including: the curriculum areas assessment; and developing skills for learning, life and work.

Most notably, "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" (2020) represents an evidence-informed practice guide that specifically addresses pedagogy and implementation for early childhood education, updating previous guidance to reflect current research and align with complementary policies like Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). Rather than prescribing rigid methods, these resources emphasise flexibility and professional autonomy, supporting practitioners to make context-specific adaptations while maintaining coherence with national educational objectives.







Education Scotland plays a central role in supporting curriculum development and implementation across Scotland's education system. As the national agency responsible for education improvement, Education Scotland leads the development of curricular resources, provides professional learning opportunities, and supports practitioners in implementing the Curriculum for Excellence. The agency works collaboratively with practitioners, local authorities, in relation to this.

A cornerstone of Education Scotland's curriculum support is the 'Building the Curriculum' series (Education Scotland, 2024), which provides guidance for different aspects of Curriculum for Excellence implementation. This document series aims to offer detailed advice, guidance and policy covering curriculum areas, assessment approaches, and the development of skills for learning, life and work.

Complementing the Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland has developed the Meta-Skills Progression Framework (Skills Development Scotland, n.d.), a collaborative initiative led by Skills Development Scotland with support and endorsement from Education Scotland. This framework provides a structured approach to developing essential life and work skills that underpin successful learning and employment. The Meta-Skills Framework identifies three main categories of meta-skills:

- Self-management;
- · Social intelligence; and
- Innovation.

Within these categories are twelve specific meta-skills including focusing, integrity, adapting, initiative, communicating, feeling, collaborating, leading, curiosity, creativity, sense-making, and critical thinking, each supported by detailed progression pathways that align with the CfE's developmental approach.

The framework is designed to align with existing curriculum structures, providing practitioners with additional tools to support learners' skill development across all areas of learning.

Evidence of good practice: A range of international literature highlights the importance of ensuring robust policies and associated mechanisms are in place to allow for the effective implementation of the process of curriculum implementation, in addition to wider the development of wider "practical support materials" (OECD, 2021a), providing details, and clear guidelines for the various stakeholders involved in the process of ECEC curriculum implementation (ibid.).

Scotland demonstrates good practice through its multi-layered implementation support. The comprehensive guidance documents provide detailed yet flexible implementation advice that empowers practitioners rather than constraining them. This approach aligns with research emphasising the importance of practical support materials that provide clear guidelines while preserving professional autonomy (OECD, 2021a), enabling practitioners to make contextual adaptations while maintaining coherence with national objectives.

ECEC - primary curriculum alignment

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) covers children aged 3 to 18, constituting a fully integrated curriculum. The education and care of children from birth to the start of school is considered early learning and childcare, while primary education starts at age 5. Scotland's efforts in curriculum integration and alignment can be seen at different levels. Firstly, the capacities







that the Curriculum for Excellence aims to develop in children and young people (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors) and subject areas are maintained and addressed throughout all curricular levels. Secondly, and more importantly, the Curriculum for Excellence's early level considers the two years of early learning and childcare before school (3-4 years) to first primary level (5 years) as a unit, establishing the same curriculum organisation, learning experiences and expected outcomes (and associated benchmarks).

Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that well-aligned curriculum frameworks significantly facilitate successful transitions between educational phases. The thoughtful coordination of curricular content and pedagogical approaches across ECEC and primary settings has been identified as a crucial element in creating coherent educational journeys for young learners (OECD, 2017). When children experience consistent educational philosophies, complementary learning objectives, and harmonised teaching practices, they develop stronger engagement with learning environments and demonstrate improved educational outcomes over time (ibid.).

Scotland exemplifies effective curriculum alignment through its fully integrated approach that creates a continuous educational journey. By designating the "early level" to span both pre-school (ages 3-4) and first primary year (age 5), and maintaining consistent curriculum organisation, experiences and outcomes across this transition, Scotland creates structural continuity that supports children's progression. This approach aligns with evidence that coordinated curricular content and pedagogical approaches across ECEC and primary settings create coherent educational journeys that strengthen children's engagement and improve educational outcomes (OECD, 2017).

Family engagement

Scotland demonstrates strong evidence of practice encouraging family participation in children's learning and development through multiple integrated approaches in policy and practice.

The "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" guidance explicitly addresses this in Section 5.4, "Leading through learning together with families," where it recognises parents as their children's first educators and key partners in supporting learning. The document distinguishes between three vital aspects: parental involvement (participating in setting operations and decisions), parental engagement (interacting with children's learning regardless of location), and family learning (encouraging intergenerational learning). This framework acknowledges that effective family engagement requires identifying and addressing potential barriers to participation such as transportation, childcare, and work schedules.

Beyond this foundational guidance, Scotland has established comprehensive implementation supports through the "Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home" guide. The Education Scotland Engaging Parents and Families Toolkit further operationalises these concepts, while national online CPL modules help build practitioner confidence in engaging with families. Scotland's approach is notably holistic, viewing partnership working as extending beyond immediate family to include community services.

Together, these elements create a comprehensive ecosystem that positions families as essential partners in children's educational journeys, with practitioners encouraged to collaborate with parents in planning, documentation, and assessment rather than viewing them as passive recipients of information.







Evidence of good practice: A range of evidence suggests that strengthened parental engagement in their children's education in ECEC contexts can serve to enhance outcomes in both reading and numeracy, as well as impacting positively on wider factors, such as socio-emotional engagement, and exhibited behaviour (Sim, Bélanger, Stancel-Piątak, & Karoly, 2019; OECD, 2020) – selected evidence suggests this to be particularly applicable in relation to provision for learners from lower socio-economic groups (Ibid). Within this context, Framework documents which facilitate engagement with parents in ECEC provision, as well as maximising continuity of provision between home-based and setting-based learning and support, can serve as a key tool in strengthening outcomes (OECD, 2021a) – this can include explicit guidance, or structured approaches, to communicating effectively with parents and other relevant stakeholders (ibid.).

Scotland demonstrates good practice through its comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to family engagement. The explicit framework distinguishing between parental involvement, parental engagement, and family learning—supported by practical implementation tools and professional development—reflects evidence that parental engagement enhances outcomes in both academic and socio-emotional domains (Sim et al., 2019; OECD, 2020). The positioning of families as essential partners rather than passive recipients aligns with research showing the importance of framework documents that facilitate meaningful engagement and continuity between home and setting-based learning (OECD, 2021a).

Workforce culture

Internal evaluation and self-assessment

The Scottish framework, "How good is our early learning and childcare?", published in February 2016, provides guidance for self-evaluation in early learning and childcare settings. The framework serves as a national benchmark against which settings can evaluate their provision, while Education Scotland uses the same indicators when conducting official evaluations of ELC settings. This creates a consistent approach to quality assessment and improvement throughout Scotland.

The framework is built on several core elements that support effective self-evaluation. It promotes a three-part reflective process of "looking inwards" (self-evaluation), "looking outwards" (learning from others), and "looking forwards" (planning improvements), creating a continuous cycle of improvement. At its heart are 15 quality indicators organised into three categories: Leadership and Management, Learning Provision, and Successes and Achievements. Each indicator clearly defines what quality practice looks like. For example, under Quality Indicator 2.3: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, high-quality practice is described as practitioners who "make very good use of high quality observations and interactions to make accurate judgements about the progress being made by babies, toddlers and young children." Similarly, Quality Indicator 3.2: Securing Children's Progress illustrates quality by describing settings where "practitioners set high expectations and aspirations for all children" and where children are "becoming increasingly confident, resilient and independent learners."

Further guidance on self-evaluation is provided in Scotland's national practice guidance "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" (2020), which specifically focuses on critically reflective practice. Section 7.3 addresses self-evaluation as a continuous cycle of reflection and action for improvement. The guidance emphasises that self-evaluation should begin with specific questions about practice, involve collaborative reflection on what is working well, what difference it is making, and what might







be developed further. It highlights the importance of involving not just practitioners but also families, children, and partners in the process, with special attention to meaningfully capturing children's perspectives.

To support this process, Education Scotland's Scanning and Scoping Cycle offers a practical tool that can help practitioners critically reflect on their practice. This tool forms part of the Transforming Learning suite of self-evaluation materials available on the National Improvement Hub. Together, these frameworks and tools create a comprehensive approach to self-evaluation that empowers practitioners to continuously enhance their practice and improve outcomes for children.

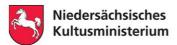
National Standard criteria also specifies that settings must use relevant national frameworks to systematically evaluate their provision and identify areas for improvement. They must develop clear improvement plans based on self-evaluation evidence, inspection findings, research, and national guidance, demonstrating commitment to continuous quality enhancement.

Evidence of good practice: International literature suggests that internal quality assurance and self-evaluation approaches vary significantly depending on the regional and national context: they can be mandated by policy or legislation, or adopted as voluntary practices (European Commission, 2022). A common self-evaluation mechanism entails staff members assessing their own performance and practices, thus creating opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and improvement. Research indicates that practitioner self-evaluation significantly contributes to practitioner skill enhancement (OECD, 2015). This process helps staff identify particularly effective aspects of their practice while encouraging deeper reflection on their work (Cubey & Dalli, 1996). Studies have shown that self-evaluation leads to greater awareness of ongoing activities and pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). In outcome-oriented ECEC provision, self-evaluation can be particularly valuable as it enables practitioners to critically examine the relationship between their pedagogical approaches and children's developmental progress, allowing for targeted adjustments to practice that can enhance specific learning outcomes. Research also suggests that systematic documentation and analysis of educational practices through self-assessment promotes professionalism among early childhood practitioners (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, & Musatti, 2012).

Scotland's self-evaluation framework demonstrates good practice through its explicit focus on pedagogical reflection. The "How good is our early learning and childcare?" framework includes specific quality indicators examining pedagogical practice, while "Realising the Ambition" emphasises critically reflective practice as central to improvement. This approach aligns with research showing self-evaluation significantly enhances practitioners' awareness of pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001) and helps identify effective aspects of practice (Cubey & Dalli, 1996). The system's collaborative reflective cycle—examining what works, what difference it makes, and what could be developed—creates a structured process for translating reflective insights into improved pedagogy, reflecting evidence that systematic pedagogical documentation promotes professional growth and improved practice (Picchio et al., 2012).

Pedagogy which acknowledges the different developmental paces

The CfE is designed with flexibility at its core, recognising that children develop at different rates and reach milestones at different times. This is particularly evident in the Early Level, which spans both pre-school and Primary 1, creating a continuous learning experience from approximately ages 3-6. This structure itself acknowledges that children do not all reach the same point by a specific age.







The curriculum framework uses Experiences and that describe the expectations for learning but intentionally avoid rigid age-related targets. Instead, they provide broad developmental expectations that allow practitioners to respond to individual children's progress and needs. The guidance emphasises personalisation and choice, encouraging practitioners to plan interventions based on observations of each child's development, interests, and learning styles.

The CfE is also supported by practice guidance like "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" which explicitly addresses the need for differentiated approaches. It encourages practitioners to use responsive planning based on observations of children's development across different domains, recognising that a child might progress rapidly in some areas while requiring more time and support in others.

Evidence of good practice: Literature suggests that in order to be effective, ECEC curricula need to address specific, age-related, developmental needs of children (OECD, 2021a). Scotland's curriculum framework demonstrates good practice in responding to developmental variation through its flexible design. The structuring of the Early Level to span both preschool and Primary 1 (ages 3-6) inherently acknowledges children's varied developmental trajectories, while the Experiences and Outcomes avoid rigid age-related targets in favour of broad developmental expectations. The "Realising the Ambition" guidance further strengthens this approach by promoting responsive planning based on observations of individual children's development across different domains, enabling practitioners to personalise learning experiences based on each child's unique developmental pathway rather than standardised age expectations.

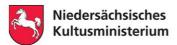
Quality assurance

Quality assurance system and monitoring pedagogical quality

According to the "Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers: Operating Guidance" published by the Scottish Government in 2023, the monitoring and evaluation system operates through multiple layers of oversight, with local authorities serving as the primary guarantors of quality. The framework is built around the National Standard, which sets clear quality criteria that all funded providers must meet, regardless of whether they are in the public, private or non-profit sectors. Both local authorities and the Care Inspectorate are responsible for checking the implementation of these criteria across settings.

The Care Inspectorate inspections are underpinned by the Health and Social Care Standards. Settings must achieve ratings of "good" or better on key quality questions related to:

- Care, play and learning
- Quality of setting
- Leadership
- Staff teams







When providers fall below these standards, a structured improvement process kicks in through "service improvement periods." During these periods, local authorities provide enhanced support while monitoring progress. The process includes:

- Clear communication of which criteria are not being met
- Evidence-based assessment of issues
- Specific improvement actions
- Enhanced support provision
- Regular progress monitoring
- Set review dates

Local authorities can extend improvement periods if services show capacity for sustained improvement but haven not yet reached the required level. If providers fail to improve after both an initial and extended improvement period, a transition phase begins to remove their funded provider status.

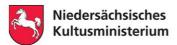
The system includes tools for self-evaluation, with providers expected to use national frameworks like "How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?," which includes an extensive focus on evaluating pedagogical quality.

Additional scrutiny is provided through inspections undertaken by Education Scotland, with findings feeding into overall quality assessment and improvement planning. Education Scotland evaluates settings against quality indicators (QIs) linked to the "How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?" Framework. These quality indicators include a specific focus on evaluating pedagogical quality. Particularly relevant here are indicators like QI 2.3 (Learning, Teaching and Assessment), which examines the quality of adult-child interactions, the effectiveness of play pedagogy, and how well practitioners use assessment to inform next steps in learning. "How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?" also serves as a tool for self-evaluation.

Both Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland inspection and evaluation reports for early learning and childcare settings are published online and are available through official websites, allowing parents, practitioners, and other stakeholders to find specific reports by institution name, location, or date of inspection.

A new, shared inspection framework has been recently developed by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland and is currently being piloted.

Data on services in improvement periods is collected nationally through the Improvement Service to identify patterns and target support effectively. The system is designed to balance maintaining high standards with providing proportionate support for improvement.







Evidence of good practice: Local authorities must notify the Scottish Government about services that continue beyond initial improvement periods, allowing national oversight of quality challenges. This feeds into broader system evaluation and policy development. Research on effective quality assurance in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) emphasises the importance of comprehensive monitoring systems that evaluate both structural quality (like staff-to-child ratios and qualification requirements) and process quality (such as staff-child interactions and pedagogical approaches). These systems should be designed to provide actionable feedback, support professional development, maintain transparency through publicly available results, and align monitoring tools with curriculum frameworks to avoid narrowing educational focus (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022; OECD, 2021a; OECD, 2018).

Scotland's quality assurance system exemplifies good practice through its multi-layered, improvement-focused approach. The National Standard establishes clear quality criteria monitored by both local authorities and national inspectorates, creating consistent expectations while the structured "service improvement periods" provide targeted support for enhancement. This balanced approach aligns with research on effective quality assurance systems (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group, 2022) by evaluating both structural requirements and process quality, particularly through the focused quality indicators examining pedagogical approaches and staff-child interactions.

Monitoring children's learning progress

The CfE emphasises the importance of regular monitoring and assessment of children's individual learning progress in ECEC settings. Assessment is primarily formative, ongoing, and observation-based rather than test-oriented. There are no formal standardised tests that children must pass before transitioning to primary school. Assessment focuses on what children know, understand and are able to do within the experiences and outcomes.

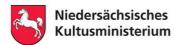
Practitioners assess each learner's progress and achievements in:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Skills
- Attributes and capabilities

There are also three key areas which are covered by all teachers/practitioners:

- Literacy across learning
- Numeracy across learning
- Health and wellbeing across learning

To support practitioners in making consistent judgments about children's progress, Scotland has developed comprehensive benchmarks within the CfE framework. These benchmarks provide clarity on the national standards expected across each curriculum area and level, establishing clear progression pathways particularly across all curriculum domains. Rather than functioning as rigid assessment criteria, the benchmarks serve as reference points that explain what learners should know and be able to demonstrate as they advance through developmental stages. This approach







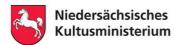
allows practitioners to make informed professional judgments about children's achievements while acknowledging the varied paces at which individual children develop.

Child progress is also evaluated against quality indicators (QIs) linked to the "How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?" Framework, both internally through self-evaluation, and externally through inspections undertaken by Education Scotland. QI 3.2 (Securing Children's Progress), looks specifically at how well a setting's pedagogical approaches support children's development across literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and other areas.

National practice guidance (Realising the Ambition) also includes a section which emphasises that meaningful observation and documentation are central to responsive and intentional planning for children's learning. After gathering observations of children's actions, emotions, and words, practitioners are encouraged to use this information to engage in a planning cycle that addresses "what do we do next?" This responsive and intentional planning process requires reflection on what needs to remain in the environment to reinforce learning and what should change to inspire new development. The guidance explains that by understanding children's interests, curiosities, and developmental stages through careful observation, practitioners can effectively plan appropriate experiences, interactions and spaces that will extend or consolidate learning in meaningful ways. This cyclical approach aims to ensure planning is child-led, connecting new learning opportunities to what children already know and can do.

Evidence of good practice: International literature indicates that developmental monitoring helps identify children's specific learning needs, allowing educators to provide targeted support that enhances development (OECD, 2015). When implemented thoughtfully, these monitoring practices also contribute to improving overall service quality and staff performance while generating valuable data to inform policy decisions (Litjens, 2013). Research consistently demonstrates that non-formal monitoring methods such as portfolio development and narrative documentation positively impact children's developmental outcomes (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels S., Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Son, 2003; Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004; Grisham-Brown, 2008). For monitoring to be beneficial, literature suggests several key principles should guide implementation: tools must be developmentally appropriate, the assessment experience should feel natural for children, and monitoring should be conducted continuously rather than at isolated intervals (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010). Additionally, effective monitoring practices should involve diverse stakeholders, particularly families, with explicit attention to cultural and linguistic considerations (European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022).

Scotland's approach to monitoring children's progress demonstrates good practice through its emphasis on observation-based, formative assessment aligned with developmental benchmarks. The system's focus on documenting children's learning through responsive and intentional planning cycles reflects research supporting non-formal monitoring methods (Bagnato, 2005; Meisels et al., 2003). By establishing clear benchmarks as reference points rather than rigid assessment criteria, Scotland's approach creates the developmentally appropriate, natural assessment environment recommended in literature (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000) while providing a framework for consistent professional judgment about children's progress.







Conclusion

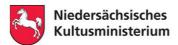
This study of ECEC provision across the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, and Scotland has revealed several promising approaches that may strengthen the establishment and implementation of outcome-oriented pedagogy in Lower Saxony. Across the examined countries, several common themes emerged that appear to contribute to effective outcome-oriented ECEC provision:

Curriculum and pedagogy

Systematic competence development through balanced frameworks and professional autonomy: Effective curricula balance broad developmental goals with specific learning targets. While approaches differ, successful frameworks provide clear direction while allowing appropriate pedagogical flexibility.

- England's EYFS organises learning around three prime areas (communication and language, physical development, personal/social/emotional development) and four specific areas (literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, expressive arts), with 17 Early Learning Goals defining expected development by age five. While providing this structure, the framework emphasises that play is essential and goals should not limit "rich experiences crucial to development."
- Estonia similarly combines structure with flexibility through seven subject fields (including language, mathematics, and art) supported by four general skills groups (play, cognitive, social, and self-management), providing detailed expected outcomes for 6-7 year-olds while maintaining that "play is the main activity."
- The Czech Republic's framework establishes eight key competences and four educational areas with specific expected learning outcomes while promoting constructivist approaches and flexibility in implementation.
- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence develops "four capacities" (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors) through eight curriculum areas with detailed experiences, outcomes, and benchmarks, while deliberately avoiding prescribing specific pedagogical methods.
- Denmark takes a distinctive approach with six curriculum themes (personal development, social development, communication/language, body/senses/motion, nature/outdoor life, and culture/aesthetics/community), each with broad pedagogical objectives focusing on environments conducive to learning rather than individual skill targets.

Despite these variations, all systems allow practitioners to exercise professional judgment in implementation, creating an effective balance between guidance and autonomy.







Guidance on curriculum implementation: Effective systems provide comprehensive resources that translate curriculum frameworks into daily practice without constraining professional autonomy.

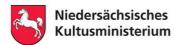
- The Czech Republic exemplifies this through the National Pedagogical Institute's extensive implementation support across priority areas like educational diagnostics, literacy development, and assessment practices, offering methodological manuals, webinars, demonstration videos, and thematic activities.
- England's non-statutory "Development Matters" guidance and dedicated "Help for Early Years Providers" website provide practical examples while emphasising that official inspectors will not penalise alternative approaches.
- Scotland offers multi-layered implementation support through resources including "Building the Curriculum" series, "Realising the Ambition: Being Me," which provides evidence-informed practice guidance specifically for early childhood education, and the Meta-Skills Progression Framework
- Estonia supports implementation through resources published by the National Centre for Examinations and Qualifications
- Denmark's EMU (official learning portal) offers thematic materials on evaluative pedagogical practice, interaction, and relationships.

These varied approaches demonstrate how practical support materials can bridge the gap between curriculum intentions and classroom practice while preserving practitioner discretion to make contextual adaptations.

Curriculum alignment: Successful systems create alignment between ECEC and primary education curricula to support children's smooth progression while respecting age-appropriate pedagogical approaches.

- Scotland demonstrates the most integrated approach through its Curriculum for Excellence, which provides a fully integrated curriculum framework spanning ages 3-18.
 This creates not only continuity between pre-school and the first year of primary (through the shared "early level"), but coherence throughout the entire educational journey with consistent capacities, principles, and subject areas maintained across all levels.
- The Czech Republic shows deliberate alignment despite organising educational content differently—with pre-school using four holistic, child-centred areas and primary education employing nine more subject-specific areas. This alignment is achieved through explicit statements acknowledging their interconnected relationship, shared competence frameworks showing clear developmental progression, and a dedicated curriculum section ensuring continuity with primary education.
- Denmark creates curriculum alignment through parallel structure between ECEC's six curriculum themes and the kindergarten class competence areas, though there's a notable shift from environment-focused objectives in ECEC to more defined learning goals in kindergarten class (first year of primary school).

These approaches create educational journeys that support children's transition between educational levels while acknowledging the need for pedagogical distinction between phases.







Family engagement: All examined countries recognise the critical importance of family participation in children's learning, though with varying approaches to implementation.

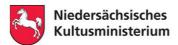
- Denmark establishes the most formalised system through its Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, which establishes parent councils with substantive rights and responsibilities in ECEC centres, including laying down principles for the centre's work, cooperation between centre and families, and budget allocation. Parents are entitled to participate in curriculum preparation, evaluation, and follow-up, and even have input in staff appointments.
- Scotland offers a comprehensive conceptual framework distinguishing between parental involvement (participating in setting operations), parental engagement (interacting with children's learning), and family learning (encouraging intergenerational learning), supported by practical implementation tools and professional development modules.
- The Czech Republic's framework explicitly establishes "cooperation with the family" as a key implementation condition, requiring kindergartens to approach families with understanding, allow participation in education, create information-sharing systems, and inform guardians about transition to primary school.

These varied approaches share a common recognition that effective family engagement views parents as partners with valuable insights, establishes clear communication channels, and provides guidance on supporting children's development at home.

Workforce culture

Pre-service training and qualifications: Systems with robust initial education requirements establish a strong foundation for pedagogical quality.

- Estonia exemplifies comprehensive pre-service preparation through Bachelor's level programs (180 ECTS) guided by the Teachers' Professional Standard. The curriculum develops key competencies including foundational knowledge of educational sciences, child development understanding, subject didactics, and research methods. Students learn to integrate theory into practice, create favourable learning environments, critically analyse pedagogical processes, and develop self-reflection skills. The training emphasises observation of children's developmental patterns, planning appropriate educational activities, and implementing teaching strategies that accommodate various learning needs.
- Denmark's 3.5-year Pedagogue qualification (210 ECTS, EQF level 6) follows a distinctive structure with a common foundation (70 ECTS) focusing on basic professional competences followed by specialisation (140 ECTS). The curriculum emphasises personal educational formation (*Dannelse*) alongside academic knowledge, recognising that competent pedagogy requires personal qualities and values. Students develop competencies in relational work, focusing on creating connections with children, supporting children's interactions, and enhancing children's communicative abilities through diverse teaching formats—class teaching, lectures, discussions, group work, and project-based learning.







Continuing professional development: Ongoing learning opportunities are essential for translating initial qualifications into continuously improving practice.

- Denmark implements a responsive approach through mandatory annual development conversations (MUS-samtaler) that identify specific training needs. Professional development ranges from short-term courses (one to seven weeks) focused on enhancing everyday work competencies to substantial diploma programs (60 ECTS) that serve dual purposes of enhancing pedagogical work and creating new career opportunities. The "professional beacon" initiative represents an innovative distributed leadership approach where specially trained staff lead colleagues in implementing the strengthened pedagogical curriculum.
- Estonia has evolved from prescribed CPD requirements to a needs-based system where
 teachers identify their own development priorities based on professional standards.
 Content focuses on specific competencies that directly impact child outcomes, including
 implementation of the national preschool curriculum, child-initiated learning approaches,
 supporting children with special needs, and language development. The system
 incorporates alternative development methods beyond traditional courses, such as
 mentorship, supervision, coaching, and network learning.

Both countries demonstrate how ongoing professional development directly facilitates enhanced outcomes by improving pedagogical approaches, strengthening interactions with children, and building capacity for reflective practice.

Self-evaluation and reflective practice: The most advanced systems embed self-evaluation and reflective practice deeply into their quality assurance frameworks.

- Denmark establishes this as a legislative requirement, with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care explicitly mandating that ECEC leaders are responsible for "establishing an evaluation culture" focused on qualifying the pedagogical learning environment. This is supported by tools like the Self-Assessment Tool, which provides a structured framework for analysing pedagogical practice, with evaluations required at least every two years and results made publicly available.
- Estonia implemented a comprehensive internal evaluation system requiring preschool
 institutions to produce a report at least once every three years identifying strengths,
 areas for improvement, and key performance indicators. Their internal evaluation guide
 frames this as part of a continuous improvement cycle, with detailed guidance on setting
 learning-driven objectives, developing performance indicators, and systematically
 collecting and analysing data.
- Scotland's "How good is our early learning and childcare?" framework promotes a three-part reflective process of "looking inwards" (self-evaluation), "looking outwards" (learning from others), and "looking forwards" (planning improvements), with 15 quality indicators organised into three categories: Leadership and Management, Learning Provision, and Successes and Achievements.

These systems emphasise that meaningful self-evaluation occurs when practitioners view the process as valuable for professional growth rather than external imposition, creating cultures that support data use for improvement rather than mere accountability.







Pedagogy which acknowledges the different developmental paces: Effective ECEC systems recognise that children develop at varying rates and implement pedagogical approaches that respond to these individual differences.

- The Czech Republic embeds this understanding within its Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education, which explicitly requires teachers to consider both age appropriateness and individual appropriateness when planning activities, acknowledging that unevenness in development is typical for pre-school children. Czech kindergartens systematically link planning to diagnostic activities, with teachers using both static diagnostic approaches (assessing current abilities) and dynamic approaches (monitoring learning processes and potential) to establish each child's developmental level and growth potential. This comprehensive assessment forms the foundation for differentiated objectives and progressive planning that supports each child's unique developmental journey.
- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence similarly demonstrates flexibility by structuring the
 Early Level to span both pre-school and Primary 1 (ages 3-6), inherently acknowledging
 varied developmental trajectories. Its Experiences and Outcomes avoid rigid age-related
 targets in favour of broad developmental expectations, while the "Realising the Ambition"
 guidance promotes responsive planning based on observations of individual children's
 development across different domains. These approaches show how outcome-oriented
 pedagogy can establish clear developmental expectations while respecting and
 responding to each child's unique pace of development.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance system and monitoring pedagogical quality: Comprehensive quality assurance frameworks evaluate both structural requirements and process quality, providing meaningful feedback for improvement while maintaining consistent standards.

- England implements this through the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), an
 independent body that conducts regular inspections of all registered providers, making
 graded judgments in four key areas: quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal
 development, and leadership and management. Ofsted's process places significant
 emphasis on pedagogical quality, evaluating teaching practice through observations
 of staff-child interactions, assessment of language modelling, and examination of how
 practitioners support children's learning.
- Scotland operates a multi-layered monitoring system built around the National Standard, which sets clear quality criteria for all providers. Both the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland conduct inspections using frameworks that include specific focus on pedagogical quality, particularly through quality indicators like "Learning, Teaching and Assessment" that examine interactions, play pedagogy, and assessment practices. When providers fall below standards, a structured improvement process provides enhanced support while monitoring progress.
- The Czech School Inspectorate serves as the primary external evaluator for pedagogical
 quality in Czech pre-schools, implementing a comprehensive assessment framework
 with six key domains, including "Education" and "Educational Outcomes." Inspections
 involve classroom observations, interviews, surveys, and document reviews, with findings
 feeding into improvement planning.

These diverse approaches demonstrate how effective quality assurance systems can maintain consistent standards while generating actionable feedback that drives continuous improvement in pedagogical practice.







Robust monitoring and assessment of child progress: Effective systems prioritise observation-based, continuous assessment focused on children's development to inform planning, provide feedback to parents, and support transition to primary education.

- England's EYFS implements a balanced approach combining ongoing "formative assessment" through daily observations with three formal assessment points: the progress check at age two, Reception Baseline Assessment, and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Following recent reforms, the system emphasises that assessment "should not involve long breaks from interaction with children or require excessive paperwork," focusing on professional judgment rather than extensive documentation.
- The Czech Republic requires teachers to implement continuous and systematic
 assessment using appropriate pedagogical diagnostic methods, documenting individual
 children's progress in diagnostic portfolios that serve as comprehensive records for all
 stakeholders. Their "Methodological Manual on Pedagogical Diagnostics" distinguishes
 between "static diagnostics" (assessing current abilities) and "dynamic diagnostics"
 (monitoring learning processes), emphasising a holistic view of development.
- Estonia's approach emphasises multiple methods of gathering information about children's
 development, involving teachers, parents, specialists, and the children themselves to
 ensure a comprehensive understanding of progress across physical, social, emotional, and
 cognitive domains. For school transition, teachers develop a "readiness for school" card
 describing each child's achievements according to the curriculum. Estonia has also recently
 developed an innovative electronic assessment instrument using a storytelling approach
 where children engage with interactive tasks, complementing traditional observation.
- Scotland emphasises formative, observation-based assessment with no standardised tests before primary school, using benchmarks as reference points for consistent judgment while acknowledging varied developmental paces. Their approach includes responsive and intentional planning based on observations to identify appropriate next steps.

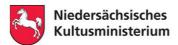
These varied approaches share a commitment to developmental monitoring that feels natural for children, involves diverse stakeholders, and serves as a tool for enhancing pedagogical practice rather than labelling or categorising children.

Implications for Lower Saxony

The following section examines which selected good practices might be instrumental to further develop and enhance outcome-oriented pedagogy in Lower Saxony.

Curriculum and pedagogy

- England's EYFS curriculum model offers valuable insights for balancing flexibility with clear, specific, and well-defined learning expectations. Its organisation into prime and specific areas of learning with corresponding Early Learning Goals offers a strong foundation for outcome-oriented pedagogy.
- Estonia's curriculum framework offers a valuable model for defining expected learning outcomes while maintaining a play-based, holistic approach. The Estonian National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions explicitly articulates expected learning outcomes for children aged 6-7 across subject fields while emphasising that "play is the main activity of children of pre-school age."



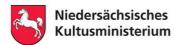




- The Czech Republic's approach to curriculum implementation includes comprehensive resources through the National Pedagogical Institute. Methodological manuals, webinars, and thematic activity suggestions provide practical tools for pedagogues without prescribing rigid methods.
- Scotland's emphasis on planning for learning demonstrates how an outcome-oriented approach can retain child-centred principles. Their cyclical process of "looking inwards, outwards, and forwards" serve to strengthen reflection and planning practices.
- Scotland's integrated curriculum approach also demonstrates effective alignment between ECEC and primary education. Their Curriculum for Excellence spans ages 3-18, with the early level deliberately encompassing both pre-school and the first year of primary education. This integration provides continuity in learning experiences and expectations in the transition between ECEC and primary education. Scotland uses clear progression pathways and benchmarks across curriculum areas, which provide orientation for elementary and primary education practitioners in assuming joint responsibility for a smooth transition.
- Denmark's approach to parental engagement offers valuable insights for strengthening this
 critical dimension of outcome-oriented pedagogy. Their Act on Early Childhood Education
 and Care formally establishes parent councils with substantive rights and responsibilities,
 including laying down principles for ECEC centres' work and contributing to curriculum
 development. This systematic involvement of parents in pedagogical planning could be a
 good basis for assuming joint responsibility between parents and pedagogues to strive for
 children to achieve.

Workforce culture

- Estonia's comprehensive approach to pre-service education is guided by the Teachers' Professional Standard (EQF level 6), which clearly defines the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective teaching. This standard explicitly outlines several professional tasks and duties including planning of learning and teaching activities, development of the learning environment, supporting learning and development, reflection and professional self-development, and counselling of learners and parents. By aligning university curricula with these professional standards and the national curriculum frameworks, Estonia ensures that training directly prepares practitioners to support children's competence development.
- Denmark's system emphasises a responsive approach to professional development, with specific training needs identified through structured annual development conversations (MUS-samtaler) between leaders and individual staff members. These conversations help identify specific development needs and opportunities, ensuring that competence building aligns with both individual growth needs and institutional priorities for enhancing children's learning environments and experiences. Many centres implement comprehensive competence development strategies encompassing all staff members, creating coherent institutional approaches to professional learning.
- Estonia's internal evaluation system offers a powerful model for strengthening reflective
 practice among ECEC staff. Their approach encourages pedagogues to participate in
 collaborative data analysis through working groups that examine performance indicators
 relevant to teaching practices and child development. By emphasising peer learning,
 lesson observations, and professional discussions that connect data analysis to practical
 pedagogical improvements, Estonia has created a culture that supports using evidence for
 improvement rather than compliance.







The Czech Republic's approach to pedagogical planning explicitly acknowledges the different paces at which children develop, embedding this understanding into professional practice. Their Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education emphasises that practitioners must consider both age appropriateness and individual appropriateness when planning educational activities, recognising that unevenness in development is typical for pre-school children and cannot be determined solely by chronological age. Czech practitioners are trained to use both static and dynamic diagnostic approaches to establish each child's current developmental level and potential for growth, creating a foundation for tailored educational planning. The Czech framework's emphasis on progressive planning—where activities meet children at their current level and support progression at an appropriate pace—offers a model for outcome-oriented pedagogy that respects individual differences while supporting every child's competence development.

Quality assurance

- Scotland's comprehensive external evaluation system provides a robust model for assessing pedagogical quality beyond structural compliance. Education Scotland conducts inspections using the "How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?" framework, which includes specific quality indicators focused on pedagogical practice such as "Learning, Teaching and Assessment" (QI 2.3). This indicator examines the quality of adult-child interactions, the effectiveness of play pedagogy, and how well practitioners use assessment to inform next steps in learning. Inspectors gather evidence through multiple methods including joint observations with staff, direct observation of children's activities, learning walks through settings, discussions with leaders and practitioners, and interviews with parents. This multi-faceted approach ensures a thorough assessment of process quality, which research indicates has the most substantial impact on children's development, learning, and well-being. Scotland's model demonstrates how external evaluation can be developmental rather than punitive, with inspectors providing detailed feedback and identifying both strengths and areas for improvement.
- England's structured approach to monitoring children's development offers a balanced model that combines ongoing observation with key assessment points. The EYFS framework establishes "formative assessment" as an integral part of the learning process, where practitioners observe children daily and use these observations to shape teaching and learning experiences. This continuous monitoring is complemented by three formal assessment points: the progress check at age two, Reception Baseline Assessment, and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The EYFS emphasises that assessment should not involve excessive paperwork, focusing instead on meaningful observation and professional judgment. England's 2021 EYFS reforms specifically aimed to reduce unnecessary assessment paperwork so practitioners could spend more time supporting children through rich curriculum activities.







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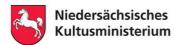
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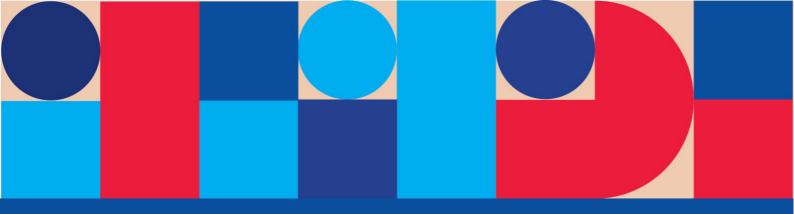
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