



# High Five Quality Scan

TOOL FOR REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

based on the  
European Quality Framework for  
Early Childhood Education and Care



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# INTRODUCTION

The High Five Quality Scan is based on the European Quality Framework, formally known as the 'Proposal for Key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care' (hereinafter EQF), established by a working group within the EU Education Commission.<sup>2</sup> Crucial to this scan are the five key themes of the EQF:

- 1) access;
- 2) workforce;
- 3) curriculum;
- 4) evaluation and monitoring;
- 5) governance and funding.

The High Five Quality Scan offers childcare centres, nurseries, after-school care, and integrated childcare centres the ability to evaluate and improve their internal quality on these five principles. This explicitly sets the link to the national pedagogical frameworks and curricula, and the organization's own pedagogical policy. A reflective method where the involvement of all participants is crucial.

As a subsequent step, it is possible to use the training package, '5 Steps to Quality', which is used in various European countries.<sup>3</sup>

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1 EQF = European Quality Framework

2 The full text can be downloaded from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/eccec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/eccec-quality-framework_en.pdf).

3 '5 Steps to Quality' was developed by ISSA, VBJK and MUTANT in collaboration with experts from VCOK, Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting, the Netherlands Youth Institute (Nji), the Landelijk Pedagogenplatform, ZAAK! and Fontys, and is distributed in the Netherlands by Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting.

# EUROPEAN QUALITY FRAMEWORK (EQF)

On the one hand, the EQF bases its statements- on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (right to protection, right to participation, and right to good facilities) and, on the other hand, international scientific research. This scan contains a summary of the EQF<sup>4</sup> in which the underlying vision and the five key themes of the EQF are central (see annex 1). It is important to read this summary in advance.

Why is the EQF authoritative?

- The EQF addresses the most relevant issues in the current ECEC<sup>5</sup> policy and subsequently formulates concrete recommendations;
- The EQF assumes fundamental principles and places ECEC in a broader social context
- The EQF was drawn up by a working group of experts from almost all EU Member States;
- There is consensus on the EQF content among the represented EU Member States;
- Each principle in the EQF is substantiated with scientific research results;
- The EQF content is reinforced through illustrative policy and practical examples.

## High Five Quality Scan Characteristics

By using the High Five Quality Scan, a childcare centre, nursery, after-school care, or integrated centres can:

- strengthen the quality of its own policy and practice, and broaden its vision of quality;
- set a link between its own pedagogical policy and the national pedagogical frameworks/ curricula and the national and municipal government policies;
- stimulate professional development through joint reflection and an inquisitive, research attitude;
- promote the importance of good early childhood services (policy advocacy).

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<sup>4</sup> See the accompanying annex 1 PDF document '5 Steps to Quality – short text EQF' (ISSA/VBJK/MUTANT)

The High Five Quality Scan assumes:

- a holistic view: all aspects of quality and all developmental areas of the child are covered;
- a learning organization and learning teams use self-reflection and all professionals have a research attitude.
- a democratic process of evaluation in which all tiers of the organization participate.

## High Five Quality Scan Use

### In advance

It is important to review annex 1 (the EQF summary).

The scan follows the five key themes of the EQF: 1) access, 2) workforce, 3) curriculum, 4) evaluation and monitoring, 5) governance and funding. For each theme, an organization gives itself a score on a 3-point scale:

- A) Currently in good order for ....;
- B) Points to pay attention to ....;
- C) Additional steps should be taken to .....

Each theme is assessed to see if it applies to: children, parents (families), professionals, organization, government policy.

To enable as many stakeholders as possible to participate, the scan may be used with the following steps:

- Pedagogical staff (group representatives) fill it in;
- Managers (group representatives) fill it in;
- Parents fill it in;
- After which the quality assurance staff processes the information (similarities-differences) creating an overview of the situation in terms of all theme's;
- Then a discussion with all representatives follows in order to create a joint proposal for the continuation.

## Subsequent steps

The scan provides insight into the themes showing where action should be taken and by whom: children, parents (family), professionals, organization, external partners, government.

Potential subsequent steps:

- The completed sections of the scan contain concrete action points; the organization can start themselves immediately.  
*and/or*
- One or more themes require more in-depth insight to choose the best subsequent actions; the organization is assisted through training or an advisory process.

Subsequently, it is possible to use the training package '5 Steps to Quality', which is used in the Netherlands and various other European countries<sup>5</sup>. For each theme, it deals with reflection questions, cases, and positions to further deepen the theme and customise actions to undertake.

### Recommended steps per EQF theme

1. Read summary EQF (Annex 1)

2. Set a link to pedagogical frameworks and curricula in your country, region, city: which frameworks and curricula do you apply in your organization or use as a source of inspiration?

3. Do the reflection exercise before the scan: Read the EFQ statements (two per theme) and discuss the position(s) and reflection questions.

4. Fill the scan in (five indicators per theme) by means of a 3-point scale:

- A) Currently in good order for ....;
- B) Points to pay attention to ....;
- C) Additional steps should be taken to .....

<sup>5</sup> '5 Steps to Quality' was developed by ISSA, VBJK and MUTANT in collaboration with experts from VCOK, Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting, the Netherlands Youth Institute (Nji), the Landelijk Pedagogenplatform, ZAAK! and Fontys, and is distributed in the Netherlands by Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting.

**5. Articulate (summarise) per theme the results of the Quality Scan 3-point scale:**

- 1) access;
- 2) workforce;
- 3) curriculum;
- 4) evaluation and monitoring;
- 5) governance and funding.

**6. Determine together which topics you will focus on in the coming period to achieve a better result.**

**A diagram of the five theme's of the European Quality Framework<sup>6</sup>:**



6 Proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care (ECEC). Nora Milotay European Commission DG Education and Culture; May 2015

# 1. ACCESS

**EQF Statement 1:** *Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.*

**EQF Statement 2:** *Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.*

## **Position:**

*In a high-quality childcare centre, nursery, and after-school care, you can see a representation of the families in the neighbourhood amongst the children.*

## **Questions for reflection:**

- What does the population of parents look like at your centre?
- Are there groups that don't use your centre?
- Respect for diversity is a child's right (Article 2, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Do you build respect for diversity, and if so, how do you do that?

## Quality scan 1. Access

| Indicators    | A <sup>7</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|---|
| Availability  |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>spreading across all districts/ neighbourhoods, city/countryside, accessible for all children, preventing segregation</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| Affordability |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>free or income-related contribution</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |
| Accessibility |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no exclusion through barriers such as language, procedures, waiting lists, target group policy</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>                        |

7 A: Currently in good order for ....; B: Points to pay attention to ....; C: Additional steps should be taken to .....

| Indicators        | A <sup>8</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|-------------------|----------------|---|---|---|
| Usefulness        |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respond to the real needs of families, for example flexible opening hours</li> <li>• participation/voice</li> <li>• specific attention for the participation of vulnerable groups, participation of fathers, blended families</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| Comprehensibility |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity through multiple means of communication, personal dialogue and structural consultation,</li> <li>• attention to different styles of upbringing,</li> <li>• collaboration with external partners</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>                     |

**Possible improvements concerning:**

- Children
- Parents (family)
- Professionals
- Organization
- External partners
- Government

## 2. WORKFORCE

**EQF Statement 3:** *Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.*

**EQF Statement 4:** *Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.*

### **Position:**

*In a learning organization, learning is not only an individual experience, it is also a team experience so that the strengths of the team are realised.*

### **Questions for reflection:**

- How are you trained in your organization?
- Do you work continuously on improving professionalism, and if so, how?

## Quality scan 2. Workforce

| Indicators  | A <sup>8</sup> | B | C | Prompt   |
|---|----------------|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Continuous professional development (postgraduate and further training) with the child and his/her family as a starting point</b></p> |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competences such as an research attitude and leadership</li> <li>• linking theory and practice</li> <li>• team reflection, collegial learning, shared learning with external colleagues (context care and education)</li> <li>• professional development as part of a broader training policy</li> <li>• staff committed (various functions) to participating in postgraduate and further education</li> <li>• financial incentives for individual professionals or for the centre</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <p><b>Supportive working conditions</b></p>   |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child-free hours (focus on preparation-planning-contacting parents-documentation-reflection-free periods-team meetings)</li> <li>• sufficient material to create a stimulating environment</li> <li>• presence of a pedagogical coach</li> <li>• supervision for coaches and management</li> <li>• support for exchange of good practices, practical research</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>  |

8 A: Currently in good order for ....; B: Points to pay attention to ....; C: Additional steps should be taken to .....

| Indicators                    | A <sup>9</sup> | B | C | Prompt   |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Team composition</b>       |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity and balanced ratio, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ different educational levels (e.g. % Higher Education Education)</li> <li>◦ male/female ratio</li> <li>◦ age distribution</li> <li>◦ different (cultural) backgrounds</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>                  |
| <b>Competent organization</b> |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the entire organization learns together: cohesion between management, governance, personal development, team development, professional leadership</li> <li>• space for continued professionalism (post-graduate and further education)</li> <li>• link between training, supervision of trainees</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Structural conditions</b>  |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• group size and child-teacher ratio</li> <li>• remuneration</li> <li>• good/attractive working conditions</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |

**Possible improvements concerning:**

- Children
- Parents (family)
- Professionals
- Organization
- External partners
- Government

### 3. CURRICULUM/PEDAGOGICAL POLICY

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

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

**Position:**

*In preschool facilities it is important to set and maintain a link between care, upbringing and the socialisation of young children.*

**Questions for reflection:**

- What pedagogical goals are important to your organization?
- How do you see that working in daily practice?
- How do you work with children to strengthen their own identity?
- How do you work with children to promote their sense of belonging?
- How do you involve the community in the neighbourhood of the childcare centre?

## Quality scan 3. Curriculum / pedagogical policy

| Indicators                                      | A <sup>9</sup> | B | C | Prompt   |
|---|----------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Holistic view</b>                            |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge and application of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child</li> <li>• cohesion between the different developmental areas</li> <li>• attention for the well-being of children and the strengthening of all aspects of their identity</li> <li>• attention for the family context and the environment of the child</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Importance of play as a form of learning</b> |                |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policy aimed at constructivist learning and discovery</li> <li>• policy aimed at creative forms of learning: music, movement/dance, sensory-motoric materials, pretend play</li> <li>• policy aimed at contact with nature and the environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |

<sup>9</sup> A: Currently in good order for ....; B: Points to pay attention to ....; C: Additional steps should be taken to .....

| Indicators  | A <sup>10</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Relationship between care, education and socialisation</b> |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policy aimed at equal relationship between the three areas</li> <li>• policy aimed at developmental areas: cognitive and emotional development, social, intercultural and personal development; providing space to learn the meaning of the world around oneself, one's own identity, a sense of belonging, making choices, contact with (diverse) peers, discovering the wider environment outside the family etc.</li> <li>• balance between pedagogical staff initiative and children's initiative</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Democratic participation</b>                               |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage the contribution of children, parents and other relatives, encourage colleagues (to take initiatives, have opinions, share in decision-making)</li> <li>• specific attention to the participation of vulnerable groups</li> <li>• balance between activities initiated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ adults and children</li> <li>◦ professionals and families</li> <li>◦ colleagues in a team</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |

| Indicators  | A° | B | C | Prompt  |
|---|----|---|---|---|
| <b>Focus on communication, interaction and dialogue</b> |    |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on children, parents, colleagues</li> <li>• interaction where all children, parents and colleagues feel they belong and their voice counts</li> <li>• attention for vulnerable groups and individuals</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Space for practical research</b>                     |    |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time, resources, support</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>  |

**Possible improvements concerning:**

- Children
- Parents (family)
- Professionals
- Organization
- External partners
- Government

## 4. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

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

**EQF Statement 8:** *Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.*

**Position:**

*Comparing children with the norm is not good for their self-esteem.*

**Questions for reflection:**

- What and why do we want to evaluate / monitor?

**Position:**

*With evaluation and monitoring, not everything is directly child-related. A three-level approach is important: executive, tactical, and strategic.*

**Questions for reflection:**

- What do you evaluate? (access, workforce, curriculum and collaboration with parents, organizations, government)
- For what purpose?
- With what result?

## Quality scan 4. Monitoring and evaluating

| Indicators  | A <sup>10</sup> | B | C | Prompt   |
|---|-----------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Access</b><br>(in the best interest of the child)    |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• neighbourhood               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ inventory of groups (social, economic, cultural, religious)</li> <li>◦ inventory of these groups among our customers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• national and local government</li> <li>• frequency: for example, once or twice a year</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Workforce</b><br>(in the best interest of the child) |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional development (various functions)</li> <li>• working conditions</li> <li>• team composition</li> <li>• competent organization</li> <li>• structural conditions</li> <li>• frequency: for example, weekly/monthly/annually</li> <li>• balance in bottom up, top down: participation</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>          |

<sup>10</sup> A: Currently in good order for ....; B: Points to pay attention to ....; C: Additional steps should be taken to .....

| Indicators   | A <sup>11</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|--|-----------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Curriculum<br/>(in the best interest<br/>of the child):</b> |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ systematic observation and documentation of the individual child's progress in information processing, participation, creativity, and problem-solving skills, social skills and respect for diversity</li> <li>◦ a system of observation and documentation of the progress of social interactions between children (paying attention to respect for diversity)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• frequency: for example, weekly/monthly/annually</li> <li>• balance in bottom up, top down: children's participation</li> <li>• balance between formal-informal evaluation</li> <li>• with attention to diverse groups and contexts</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |
| <b>Collaboration with<br/>parents (families)</b>               |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• balance in bottom up, top down: participation of families</li> <li>• balance between formal-informal evaluation with attention to diverse groups</li> <li>• frequency: for example, weekly/monthly/annually</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |

| Indicators  | A <sup>11</sup> | B | C | Prompt   |
|---|-----------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Collaboration with external partners, government</b> |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation of all stakeholders</li> <li>• balance between formal-informal evaluation</li> <li>• frequency: for example, weekly/monthly/annually</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |

**Possible improvement points**

- Access
- Workforce
- Curriculum/pedagogical policy
- Collaborating partner organizations and government

## 5. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

**EQF Statement 9:** *Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organizations.*

**EQF Statement 10:** *Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidized or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.*

### **Position:**

*Children's wellbeing and the stimulation of their development are not only offered in ECEC.*

### **Questions for reflection:**

- Who do you engage in the development of your policy?
- What role do children, parents and staff play?

## Quality scan 5. Governance and funding

| Indicators  | A <sup>12</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Role and responsibility of the various professionals within your organization: executive, staff, management</b></p> |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• know what your professional role is and what you can mean to others:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ the child, the group</li> <li>◦ parents and other relatives</li> <li>◦ colleagues: practitioners, the team, other staff and management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• make visible (practice) and express (policy) your role and responsibilities</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Collaboration with external partner organizations and government</b></p>  |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vision development together with education, health care, social work</li> <li>• know what your professional role is and what you can do as a partner in the childcare chain:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ integrated childcare centres and pre- and early school education policy,</li> <li>◦ collaboration with primary schools,</li> <li>◦ childcare/help, neighbourhood team, health clinics, family doctor,</li> <li>◦ police</li> <li>◦ municipality</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |

<sup>12</sup> A: Currently in good order for ....; B: Points to pay attention to ....; C: Additional steps should be taken to .....

| Indicators  | A <sup>12</sup> | B | C | Prompt  |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Financial monitoring</b>                           |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does the financial situation allow sufficient room to realise our (pedagogical) quality goals?</li> <li>• does the relationship between spending on various policy areas conform with the goals that we want to reach internally?</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p>   |
| <b>Collaboration and/or integration of facilities</b> |                 |   |   | <p>For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrated offer of various services with attention for vulnerable groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ preschool facilities</li> <li>◦ after-school care together with child care organizations</li> <li>◦ the young child and child health care</li> <li>◦ continuous line</li> <li>◦ child care and appropriate education transition</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Describe situation</b></p> |

**Possible improvement points concerning**

- Access
- Workforce
- Curriculum/pedagogical policy
- Collaborating partner organizations and government

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**EQF Themes**                      **Results 3-point scale**

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**ACCESSIBILITY**

A: In good order

B: Points to pay attention to

C: Additional steps to take

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**WORKFORCE**

A: In good order

B: Points to pay attention to

C: Additional steps to take

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**CURRICULUM**

A: In good order

B: Points to pay attention to

C: Additional steps to take

**EVALUATION  
AND MONITORING**

A: In good order

B: Points to pay attention to

C: Additional steps to take

**GOVERNANCE  
AND FUNDING**

A: In good order

B: Points to pay attention to

C: Additional steps to take

## ANNEX 1

**EQF p. 7:** *“Childhood is a time to be, to seek, and to make meaning of the world. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present.”*

This text is a brief summary of the “Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care” (EQF), composed by a working group within the EU Commission, DG Education and Culture. The full text, containing all research evidence and inspiring practices, can be downloaded at EQF.

### Why is the EQF relevant?

- The EQF talks about the most relevant themes in current EU policies on ECEC in a comprehensive way, and formulates clear recommendations on each topic.
- The EQF assumes fundamental principles and places ECEC in a broader social context
- The EQF was made by a working group of experts, government officials, and policy advisers from almost every member state.
- Within that working group, there is a consensus about the content of the EQF.
- Each principle in the EQF is substantiated with results of scientific research.
- The content of the EQF is reinforced with illustrative inspiring policy and practical examples.

### Connection with national or regional educational frames, directives and curricula.

- This framework must be connected to the existing educational frameworks and curricula in the own professional context. Throughout the training it becomes clear where and how this can happen.

### Starting points of the EQF

- For a better understanding of the EQF, some important fundamental issues are essential. The EU starts off with the assessment that ECEC not only stimulates development opportunities for children, it also contributes to the greater involvement of and a support for parents. Since it has been shown that these positive effects can only be accomplished if the centres offer high quality care and education, the way in which this quality is defined is of the highest importance.

**A shared vision on quality:** The notion of quality is complex and relative. It is constantly in motion, according to the development of new insights or reigning convictions and values. The EQF strives to stimulate thought about quality and keep it in the forefront of professionals and other stakeholders during actual practice.

- The *structural* quality deals with the system and the organization (conditions of recognition, financing, safety prescriptions, etc.)
- The *process* quality deals with the educational practice in an ECEC setting (curriculum, relationships with parents, interactions with children, etc.)
- The *outcome* quality looks at the benefits for (the development of) young children, parents, communities, and society (well-being, involvement, social skills and learning opportunities, etc.)

**A shared child image:** Every child is unique, with its own personality, potential, needs, living conditions, etc. The child is considered to be a competent, active meaning maker and agent, eager to learn, living in the here and now, co-constructing his/her own development. The child also has rights, such as the right to education and care. In this holistic child image, ECEC needs to give each child the opportunity to develop in the best possible way and care and education constitute an undivided unity in that respect.

A shared vision on parents: Parents are the first educators and they need to be actively involved in the practice of ECEC. It is also important to take into account and respect the diversity of families and their different convictions and views on education. In other words, while ECEC needs to add to and support the education at home, it should never replace or compensate it.

## Content of the EQF

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 Accessibility             | 1. Available and affordable for everyone             |
|                             | 2. Participation, social cohesion and diversity      |
| 2 Workforce                 | 3. Training and permanent learning                   |
|                             | 4. Supporting working conditions                     |
| 3 Curriculum                | 5. Holistic development of the child                 |
|                             | 6. Collaboration and reflection                      |
| 4 Monitoring and evaluation | 7. Information to support the improvement of quality |
|                             | 8. In the child's best interest                      |
| 5 Governance and funding    | 9. Responsibility and collaboration                  |
|                             | 10. Right to access                                  |

## How to read this document

This version of the EQF serves as a tool for the training. In this text the essence of the EQF is explained, consisting of five main themes, each with two statements. It is important to consider the cohesion between the themes, because only this comprehensive approach can guarantee the continuation of quality. For example, working towards accessibility is ineffective when there is no sufficient structural policy supporting it. Also, a rich curriculum does not mean much, if the trainers or child caregivers don't get the necessary training, education, and coaching to work with it constructively. Depending on the target group or the context (in policy or practice), one of the themes can be given more or less attention.

## Theme 1: Accessibility

Given the positive effects of ECEC on all the children, and in particular those from vulnerable groups, everyone should have access to ECEC centres. Access barriers, whether by law or in practice, need to be tackled. These barriers are either apparent and formal, or informal. For some families the costs can be too high (especially with privately financed systems), sometimes there are long waiting lists or certain groups are given priority, such as working parents. In addition, different opinions on education, e.g. 'a child is better off at home with mom', insufficient knowledge of ECEC, or lack of confidence in ECEC, can be a threshold. On a very practical level, a service can be too far away, or the opening hours can be incompatible with the working situation of the parents. In addition, there is often a shortage of places available (contrary to compulsory school), especially in times of economic decline and budget cuts. All of these are practical barriers to access.

### **Statement 1: Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.**

*The potential benefits of high quality universal provision are particularly significant for children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups. ECEC provision should be made available from birth to the age at which children start compulsory primary school. To respond to parental circumstances and encourage all families to use ECEC services, provision needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the program.*

Accessibility refers to different aspects:

- **Available:** Too often, most centres continue to be located in the more affluent neighbourhoods, so that poor families cannot easily reach them. Without making a plea for targeted centres for families 'at risk', qualitative ECEC should be offered in all neighbourhoods, and policies should be rights-based, rather than based on certain needs or risks.
- **Affordable:** Free access or income-related fees usually exist within systems with public financing, with centres which are available to everyone. This is preferable. More specific centres aiming at families 'in need' can create an extra barrier because parents have to reveal need that may have been kept private or feel stigmatized.
- **Accessible:** Centres should open their doors to everyone. Barriers such as language, procedures, waiting lists, or rules of primacy can be very excluding. Careful planning with attention to families in precarious situations is necessary (e.g. in enrolment policy): getting to know the existing barriers, outreach work, knowledge of families in the community, etc.
- **Useful:** Families should see ECEC as helpful, supportive, and responding to their actual needs. This can relate to very practical issues: opening hours or open dialogue with the local community, for example.

- *Comprehensible*: Families need to feel understood and respected in their views on education and care. These views need to be negotiated and discussed. Structural concertation and interpersonal dialogue is vital here. Delivering good services means that you know and understand the children's background, and that you try to respond to the parents' needs and expectations. This seems more effective in integrated services (with preventive health, childcare, family support) or in services where parents are involved and where the workforce reflects the diversity of the community.

Too often, these criteria still are not or are insufficiently met, due to the shortage of places. Policies can change this by working on these barriers, e.g. priority rules for working parents, 'first come, first served' practices, or high fees.

### **Statement 2: Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.**

*Successful inclusion in ECEC is based on: a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of ECEC which involves local organizations and community groups; approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents; an assurance that all children and families are welcome in an ECEC setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use ECEC services; a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value ECEC services and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected – this training can be supported by parenting programmes which promote ECEC; by close cooperation between the staff in ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector.*

A high quality pedagogical practice respects different views on education and makes all families feel welcome, making it possible for them to trust the services. This includes actively working on diversity and inclusion: on social status, cultural and religious background, gender, disability, etc. respect and trust are mutual concepts that can be supported by interpersonal contact, being interested in one another, and dialogue. Parents need to be involved, and staff should reflect the diversity of the population being served. This way practice is co-constructed together with parents, the team, and the community. Diversity should not only be an item on a checklist, but should really be part of the service's DNA among the management and all professionals. In this practice, the child has a central place. Feeling welcome and being allowed to be who you really are can be reinforced when the parents are also welcomed and considered as equal partners. This, in turn, requires democratic decision making processes, an open minded team willing to reflect on their own practice, and involving parents (including outreach) and co-constructing practice. This kind of welcome is not only needed at the doorstep, but needs to be shaped throughout the service delivery as long as children and parents are using it.

## Theme 2: The ECEC workforce

Qualified staff, good working conditions, and strong leadership are salient factors in the quality of ECEC. Better and higher educated team members on all levels (child caregivers, coaches, team leaders, management, etc.) contribute to the optimum development of children on the cognitive, social, emotional, as well as physical levels.

Education does not only contain initial training, but also continuous professional development and in-service training. However, not all trainings are equally effective. It has become clear that a single day of training for one practitioner isn't really that effective, compared to learning in teams with colleagues in longer training processes. Learning to reflect on one's own practice is key here, individually as well as collectively within the team.

Education and training should also respond to concrete needs and should always connect theory with practice. It should be evident that the child is the central focus.

It is vital that not only the individual professional requires and possesses the necessary competences, but also that the whole system is competent: the team, the pedagogical leadership and management, the administrators, the organization, the policies, etc.

Working conditions such as child/adult ratio, wages, and group size also influence the quality and the possible outcomes for children.

### **Statement 3: Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.**

*Recognising the ECEC workforce as professionals is key. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children's outcomes. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers, etc.) helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.*

A good training results in professionals' ability to engage in warm, supportive, and stimulating interactions with the children, which facilitates their development. Not only is the training or education as such essential, but the content of it and the way it takes places, the used methods, are key. Bridging practice and theory and reflection have proven to be the most successful. Training is never finished: ongoing learning opportunities maintain the level of quality. This can happen in different ways: team reflection, mentoring, pedagogical coaching, action research, projects, professional exchange, etc.

Having the training content adapted for practitioners working with more vulnerable groups can help them to better respond to possible additional needs these families may have. Explicit attention for diversity and inclusion needs to be part of the training in order to be fully integrated in the professional practice. Another way of meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups is to have professionals in the team from diverse backgrounds and to arrange for alternative pathways to obtain the necessary qualifications.

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

*Good working conditions benefit staff and contribute to their retention. Policy measures affect the structural quality of ECEC provision including locally-determined arrangements on the size of a group; children to adult ratios; working hours, and wage levels which can help to make employment in an ECEC context an attractive option. Good working conditions can also reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in ECEC.*

Different factors influence the wellbeing of the staff and the way they relate to and work with the children. For example, a higher number of practitioners per group of children often positively affects the sensitive-responsive work towards both the individual child and the group. We also see other influential factors, such as wages and education level. More specifically, we see considerable differences within split systems<sup>12</sup>: professionals working with the youngest children often have lower wages and education levels than teachers in schools.

Leadership is vital, not only in terms of management, but also in a pedagogical sense and in the valuing of the team. Teams should be well supported by regular team meetings, learning opportunities, pedagogical coaching, child free hours for preparation and reflection, etc.

### Theme 3: Curriculum

In ECEC a well-designed curriculum with an explicit pedagogical approach and goals contributes to higher quality and support for practitioners. While the content of curricula may differ from country to country, some elements seem to recur. Most curricula are based on a holistic vision, focussing not only on the cognitive, but also on the emotional, social, and personal development of the child as an individual. We also see that play and communication are highly valued. The clear differences between curricula in terms of pedagogical approach, goals and vision are mostly to be found in the value of formal learning and to what extent 'school readiness' is an important goal.

<sup>12</sup> These are systems that have a clear division between early years provision (like childcare) and pre-school provision. In these systems we see different regulations on qualifications, wages, curriculum, adult/child ratio, etc. These sectors are also under the competence of separate ministries and administrations.

Strong curricula don't only focus on child development, but also add shared views on pedagogical practice and the involvement of the child and the practitioner. Basic elements for early years curricula include:

- A children's rights approach, in which children are seen as active agents and parents are the first educator
- A broad spectrum of care and education
- A holistic view on child development
- A focus on communication, interaction, dialogue, and learning together
- Valuing reflection on practice
- Cooperation with parents and shared democratic values in the context of diversity

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

*Children's education and care as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development are important. The curriculum should set common goals, values and approaches which reflect society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECEC settings in encouraging children's development towards their full potential. All children are active and capable learners whose diverse competences are supported by the curriculum. At the same time the implementation of the curriculum needs to be planned within an open framework which acknowledges and addresses the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic manner. A well-balanced combination of education and care can promote children's well-being, positive self-image, physical development and their social and cognitive development. Children's experiences and their active participation are valued, and the significance of learning through play is understood and supported.*

It is important to keep a link between the care, the education, and the socialisation of the child. For a while now, caring for children has been so much more than just feeding them and putting them to sleep. It is about intense and responsive interactions between children and adults and about following the rhythm and personal interest of each child. It is exactly through interactions with practitioners and other children that a child can learn and grow. Moments of care are, at the same time, moments of learning. 'Learning' with young children should not be understood as formal learning; it is learning through giving meaning to the surrounding world, developing one's own identity, being allowed to make choices, being with peers and enjoying meaningful time with them, feelings of belonging and exploring the wider world outside one's own family. The more children enjoy warm interactions with others, the more they can go and explore the world in a safe and playful environment, the more they will learn. In this approach, play is not an extra or a luxury, it is a fundamental part of the learning and development process of the young child.

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

*A curriculum is an important instrument to stimulate the creation of a shared understanding and trust between children; and between children, parents and ECEC staff in order to encourage development and learning. At a system or national level a curriculum can guide the work of all ECEC settings and contexts – and at a local or setting level, it can describe the practices and priorities in the context of each centre. An essential factor in developing a collaborative approach to the curriculum is the ability of individual staff to analyse their own practice, identify what has been effective and, in partnership with their colleagues, develop new approaches based on evidence. The quality of ECEC is enhanced when staff discuss the implementation of the curriculum within the context of their centre/setting and take account of the needs of the children, their parents and the team. The curriculum can enhance this approach by promoting children's learning through experimentation and innovation; and encouraging cooperation with parents on how ECEC provision contributes to supporting children's development and learning.*

To stimulate children's overall development, it is important to make links to their personal interests, their experiences, and their own living environment, including their families and background. This needs participation and involvement of the child, the practitioners and the parents. Practitioners have to be able to critically reflect on their work as well as on the practice in the team and the whole organization. Useful methods to do so are: pedagogical documentation, observations and discussion, participating in action research.

This looking back on practice should also be done with parents on a regular basis. This can happen informally (at pick up times, over a cup of coffee) or in a more formal way (a parent's council). Having parents involved offers a win-win situation for all parties. Practitioners get to know more about a child by what parents can tell them, parents feel better connected with the service, the mutual respect and trust increases, which can only serve the child in the end. Investing in reflective professionals and parent participation creates a dynamic in which everyone can continue to learn and to shape the content of the curriculum, in close connexion to the existing context and needs.

Practice can be improved even further by cooperating with other services (preventive health or social services, other services that can be of support to families with children).

## **Theme 4: Monitoring and evaluation**

As stated, quality is a complex concept. It is important to keep in mind what is meant by this and to monitor closely whether all is done to consistently offer high quality services. Relevant questions here are the 'Who? What? Why?' questions. Quality deals with all aspects of ECEC: the service, the staff, the implementation of the curriculum and the opportunities for the development of children.

Monitoring quality can serve many goals and have different forms: checking whether budgets are used adequately, whether regulations are being followed, whether the children's wellbeing and development is being supported and guaranteed. Attention is also needed for pedagogical practice and the interactions with children and parents. Service providers need to keep an eye on their own practice and its strengths and weaknesses; they need to learn from evaluations and continuously work on improvement. Involving staff and parents in evaluations makes them more meaningful and relevant. Does it meet their expectations? How do they view quality?

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

*Systematic monitoring of ECEC allows for the generation of appropriate information and feedback at the relevant local, regional or national level. This information should support open exchange, coherent planning, review, evaluation and the development of ECEC in the pursuit of high quality at all levels in the system. Monitoring and evaluation is more effective when the information collected at a provider level is aligned with the information collected at a municipal, regional and system level.*

To evaluate well, data are needed on what really works, in what context and for whom. This is the only way to get relevant information out of it to serve policy. Monitoring quality is not an ad hoc activity, but a continuous process with all parties involved, top-down as well as bottom-up. Relevant data are: accessibility for diverse groups (or the lack thereof), team composition, level of training, quality of pedagogical practice working conditions, the finance system, and the cost for families.

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

*Monitoring and evaluation processes are conducted to support children, families and communities. All stakeholders, including ECEC staff, should be engaged and empowered during the implementation of any monitoring and evaluation process. While monitoring can focus on the quality of structures, processes or outcomes; a focus on the interest of the child and staff engagement strengthens the importance of looking at the quality of the processes used in ECEC settings.*

To be in synch with the expectations of parents and the experiences of practitioners, it is logical that they get involved in the quality monitoring. The question is also what exactly is or should be monitored. For example, it has been proven that measuring school readiness can have a negative impact on the self-esteem and development of children. Children's progress can be checked in better ways by more informal and indirect instruments, such as observation, documentation, and portfolios, from which you can see how children evolve on different levels and what they

experience. Children should not be compared with each other. What needs to be documented is their personality, their talents, and their growth and development in all senses of the word. No matter what method is used, evaluation or monitoring should focus on the rights, needs, and interests of the children. Parents, researchers, and practitioners have a relevant say in this and can, together with policymakers, continue to work on improving quality.

## Theme 5: Governance and funding

The overwhelming evidence of the multiple benefits of ECEC for children and families should urge governments to invest heavily in this sector. Investment should support ECEC from a very young age, as this period is hugely important for the child's development. Embedded in broader welfare and social policies, high quality ECEC can be empowering and stimulating, especially for vulnerable families (those in poverty, minorities, migrants, etc.). At the same time, it must be clear that ECEC alone will never be able to eradicate inequality; policies on housing, health and employment also have a role to play here. All involved in ECEC need to have a clear view and a shared vision on their own role and responsibilities and they have to be aware that they need to cooperate with partner organizations.

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

*Given the cross-sectoral nature of ECEC provision, government, stakeholders and social partners need to work together to secure the success of ECEC services. Legislation, regulation and guidance can be used to create clear expectations about the importance of collaborative working which supports high quality outcomes for children, families and local communities.*

The wellbeing of children and stimulation of their development is not only a call for ECEC. To generate more opportunities for all children, cooperation, both locally and nationally, is required between several services and sectors working with families and children (social services, schools, youth work, etc.) At the coordinating level, more coherence is needed.

Too many different settings (regulations, wages, qualifications etc.) cause too much fragmentation. More integration of services is called for in order to create more coherent policies for quality improvement and more efficient use of public funds.

**Statement 10: Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.**

*Structural or legislative arrangements support access to ECEC by giving families the right to access affordable ECEC provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of ECEC recognise that providing additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups can be an effective strategy for increasing access, especially for children from migrant, disadvantaged or low-income families. Monitoring the uptake of ECEC ensures that funding is used effectively. In order to make progress towards universal entitlement to provision, measures to emphasise the attractiveness and value of ECEC services need to be in place.*

Vulnerable groups experience way too many barriers in accessing ECEC, and this is even more the case when funding is insufficient. Those who would benefit the most from ECEC have the hardest time getting in. A privatized sector and reliance on private funding stimulates this exclusion even more so. There is a growing consensus on the idea of ‘progressive universalism’: accessible mainstream services for all, with a more targeted approach for certain disadvantaged groups, as a priority, as well as a necessity, if we want to tackle and stop these existing segregating and excluding mechanisms. While this is hard to defend in times of austerity, it is vital for our society and its social justice in the short and long term.



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