

# Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care: Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care

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## AVAILABILITY

Report in pdf <sup>[2]</sup>

Summary reprinted from [Start Strong Ireland](#) <sup>[3]</sup>:

In 2011, the European Commission published a key document on early years services which called for Governments to make quality a priority (the Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care). Since then, the European Commission has been working with EU Member States (including Irish Government representatives) to develop a "European Quality Framework" for early care and education. It has been a slow but careful process, and the Commission has now published the report of the working group it established, which proposes a new European benchmark on quality.

Eurochild, of which Start Strong is a member, has actively supported the development of a European Quality Framework.

It is great that the process has got this far, but there is still some way to go before the Framework can be a driving force for better early years provision across Europe. The Working Group's report, which is called a "Proposal", is detailed, but it will remain just a proposal until it gets formally endorsed by the EU Council of Ministers.

## Action statements

The proposed European Quality Framework consists of 10 "action statements", organised under five headings. The statements describe actions that are recognised as strengthening the quality of early care and education provision. The report specifies that the 10 statements should relate to the full age range from birth to compulsory school age:

### Access to ECEC:

- Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.
- Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion, and embraces diversity.

### The ECEC workforce:

- Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.
- Supportive working conditions, including professional leadership, which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

### Curriculum:

- A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.
- A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

### Monitoring and evaluation:

- 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.
- Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

### Governance:

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

The proposed Framework also includes three cross-cutting themes:

- A clear image and voice of the child and childhood should be valued.
- Parents are the most important partners and their participation is essential.
- A shared understanding of quality.

The report sets out the research evidence that underpins each of the statements, and case studies from across Europe in implementing related actions.

A European benchmark?

A limitation of the Framework as presented so far is that it describes actions that are needed to raise quality, but does little to require consistent monitoring of progress in implementation. For example, two of the statements relate to the development of a curriculum, but - as we know from Ireland's experience with Aistear - it is one thing to develop a good curriculum, and quite another thing to get it implemented in all early years services in the country. And it is only when it is actually implemented that children benefit.

Positively, the report does propose a European benchmark on quality, something we have not had before. It proposes the benchmark should be: "by 2020 at least 90% of ECEC provision is of good quality or better as measured by the national or regional criteria" based on the 10 statements in the Framework. And the report proposes that this benchmark could be complemented by other indicators for each of the 10 statements, though it proposes allowing countries to select from the indicators or adjust them.

There is a risk that this approach to indicators leaves too much discretion at national level. If the quality of provision in one country is to be compared with quality in other countries, the indicators must be the same across countries.

An important next step will be a follow-on document promised in the report (p.6) that will analyse different countries' progress according to the Framework.

**Region:** Europe [4]

**Tags:** quality [5]

integration [6]

public management [7]

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