



Quality targets in services for young children: Summary

This BRIEFing NOTE summarizes a paper developed by the European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women (Childcare Network) (1996). This paper, together with two others that were part of the Network's work on child care quality have been re-published (with permission by the European Commission) by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto, available online at www.childcarecanada.org and in print. In addition, *Children in Europe* has revisited the work of the Childcare Network in its September 2004 issue.

The EC Childcare Network's work on child care quality was developed within the framework of a Recommendation on Child Care by the Council of Ministers of the European Parliament. It recommended that Member States develop child care services, emphasizing that, by so doing, *"it is essential to promote the well-being of children and families, ensuring that their various needs are met"*.

Specific objectives for the development of services for young children proposed by the Recommendation:

- affordability
- access to services in all areas, both urban and rural
- access to services for children with special needs
- combining safe and secure care with a pedagogical approach
- close and responsive relations between services and parents and local communities
- diversity and flexibility of services
- increased choice for parents
- coherence between different services.

Taken together, these objectives form the basis for the definition of a good quality service system; fully achieved,

they would ensure equal access to good quality services. Specific conditions are needed to enable the achievement of these objectives, including:

- a policy framework for service provision
- coordination of responsibility for services
- a curricular framework
- appropriate staffing and staff conditions (including training and pay)
- appropriate physical environments
- infrastructure for planning, monitoring, support, training, research and development
- adequate financing of services and infrastructure.

The purpose of *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* was to propose criteria for assessing progress towards achieving the Recommendation's specific objectives and establishing the conditions that would enable their achievement. The Childcare Network called these criteria 'Quality Targets', proposing targets that they believed could be realised – either completely or partially, depending upon the Member Countries' varying stages of child care development - throughout the European Union within ten years – by the year 2006.

A number of assumptions underlay the Network's approach to quality:

- quality is a relative concept, based on values and beliefs;
- defining quality is a process and this process is important in its own right, providing opportunities to share, discuss and understand values, ideas, knowledge and experience;
- the process should be participatory and democratic, involving different groups including

- children, parents and families and professionals working in services;
- the needs, perspectives and values of these groups may sometimes differ;
- defining quality should be seen as a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular review and never reaching a final, 'objective' statement.

POLICY FRAMEWORK TARGETS

TARGET 1: Governments should draw on professional and public opinion to provide a published and coherent statement of intent for care and education services to young children 0-6, in the public and in the private sector, at national and at regional/local level. This policy should set out principles, specify objectives and define priorities, and explain how such initiatives will be coordinated between relevant departments.

TARGET 2: At national level one department should be nominated to take responsibility for implementing the policy whether it does so directly or through an agency; at a regional/local level there should be a similar designation of responsibility, whether services are directly administered by the regional/local authority or whether contracted out to other providers.

TARGET 3: Governments should draw up a programme to implement the policy which outlines strategies for implementation, sets targets, and specifies resources. At a regional/local level, the department or agency responsible should similarly draw up a programme for implementing policy and developing practice.

TARGET 4: Legislative frameworks should be created to ensure that the targets are fully met within specified time limits and reviewed regularly, and which should outline the competencies of regional and/or local government in fulfilling the targets.

TARGET 5: The government department or agency responsible at national level should set up an infrastructure, with parallel structures at local level, for planning, monitoring, review, support, training, research and service development.

TARGET 6: The planning and monitoring system should include measures of supply, demand and need covering all

services for young children at national, regional and/or local level.

FINANCIAL TARGETS

TARGET 7: Public expenditure on services for young children (in this case defined as children aged 5 years and under) should be not less than 1% of GDP in order to meet targets set for services, both for children under three and over three.

TARGET 8: A proportion of this budget should be allocated to develop the infrastructure for services. This should include at least 5% spent on support and advisory services including continuous or in-service training and at least 1% for research and monitoring.

TARGET 9: There should be a capital spending programme for building and renovations linked to the environmental and health targets.

TARGET 10: Where parents pay for publicly funded services, the charges should not exceed, and may well be less than, 15% of net monthly household income. The charges should take into account per capita income, family size and other relevant circumstances.

TARGETS FOR LEVELS AND TYPES OF SERVICES

TARGET 11: Publicly funded services should offer full time equivalent places for:

- at least 90% of children aged 3-6 years; and
- at least 15% of children under three years.

TARGET 12: Services should offer flexibility of hours and attendance including coverage for working hours and a working year if parents require it.

TARGET 13: There should be a range of services offering parents choice.

TARGET 14: All services should positively assert the value of diversity and make provision both for children and adults which acknowledges and supports diversity of language, ethnicity, religion, gender and disability, and challenges stereotypes.

TARGET 15: All children with disabilities should have right of access to the same services as other children with appropriate staffing assistance and specialist help.

EDUCATION TARGETS

TARGET 16: All collective services for young children 0-6 whether in the public or private sector should have coherent values and objectives including a stated and explicit educational philosophy.

TARGET 17: The educational philosophy should be drawn up and developed by parents, staff and other interested groups.

TARGET 18: The educational philosophy should be broad and include and promote inter alia:

- the child's autonomy and concept of self
- convivial social relationships between children, and children and adults
- a zest for learning
- linguistic and oral skills including linguistic diversity
- mathematical, biological, scientific, technical and environmental concepts
- musical expression and aesthetic skills
- drama, puppetry and mime
- muscular coordination and bodily control
- health, hygiene, food and nutrition
- awareness of the local community.

TARGET 19: The way in which the educational philosophy is put into practice should be stated and explicit. Services should have a programme of organisation covering all their activities including pedagogical approach, deployment of staff, grouping of children, training profiles for staff, use of space, and the way in which financial resources are used to implement the programme.

TARGET 20: The education and learning environment should reflect and value each child's family, home, language, cultural heritage, beliefs, religion and gender.

TARGETS FOR STAFF-CHILD RATIOS

TARGET 21: Staff ratios for collective care should reflect the objectives of the service and their wider context and be

directly related to group age and group size. They should usually be more than but should not be less than:

- 1 adult : 4 places for children under 12 months
- 1 adult : 6 places for children aged 12-23 months
- 1 adult : 8 places for children aged 24-35 months
- 1 adult : 15 places for children aged 36-71 months.

Ratios in family day care should not be less than 1 adult : 4 places for children under compulsory school age, and the ratio should include the family day carer's own children.

TARGET 22: At least one tenth of the working week should be non-contact time allocated to preparation and continuous training.

TARGET 23: Adequate supply cover should always be available to maintain the ratios.

TARGET 24: Administrative, domestic, janitorial work should be allocated staff time or hours in addition to those hours spent with children

TARGETS FOR STAFF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

TARGET 25: All qualified staff employed in services should be paid at not less than a nationally or locally agreed wage rate, which for staff who are fully trained should be comparable to that of teachers.

TARGET 26: A minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a grant eligible basic training of at least three years at a post-18 level, which incorporates both the theory and practice of pedagogy and child development. All training should be modular. All staff in services (both collective and family day care) who are not trained to this level should have right of access to such training including on an in-service basis.

TARGET 27: All staff in services working with children (in both collective and family day care) should have the right to continuous in-service training.

TARGET 28: All staff whether in the public or the private sector shall have the right to trade union affiliation.

TARGET 29: 20% of staff employed in collective services should be men.

ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH TARGETS

TARGET 30: All services, whether in the private or the public sector, should meet national and local health and safety requirements.

TARGET 31: The planning of the environment and its spatial organisation, including the layout of the buildings, the furnishings and equipment should reflect the educational philosophy of the service and take account of the views of parents, staff and other interested parties.

TARGET 32: There should normally be sufficient space, inside and out, to enable children to play, sleep and use bathroom facilities, and to meet the needs of parents and staff. This should normally mean:

- internal space of at least 6 sq metres for each child under three years and of at least 4 sq metres for each child 3-6 years (excluding storage and corridor or through-way space)
- direct access to external space of at least 6 sq metres per child
- an additional 5% of internal space for adult use.

TARGET 33: Food preparation facilities should be available on the premises and nutritional and culturally appropriate food should be provided.

TARGETS FOR PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

TARGET 34: Parents are collaborators and participants in early years services. As such they have a right to give and receive information and the right to express their views both formally and informally. The decision-making processes of the services should be fully participative, involving parents, all staff, and, where possible, children.

TARGET 35: Services should have formal and informal links with the local community or communities or district.

TARGET 36: Services should adopt employment procedures which emphasize the importance of recruiting employees who reflect the ethnic diversity of the local community.

PERFORMANCE TARGETS

TARGET 37: Services should demonstrate how they are fulfilling their aims and objectives and how they have spent their budget through an annual report or by other means.

TARGET 38: In all services children's progress should be regularly assessed.

TARGET 39: The views of parents and the wider community should be an integral part of the assessment process.

TARGET 40: Staff should regularly assess their performance using both objective methods and self-evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

The targets were the result of ten years' work by the Network, whose members brought a wide range of experience and perspectives to this work. It was a genuine exercise in cross-national exchange of experience and collaboration. The targets reflect a convergence among members of the Network about principles and objectives in services for young children.

This convergence, however, is combined with recognition of diversity at all levels – from individual Member States – and the value of this diversity. The targets do not require standardisation of service systems, philosophies or methods of working, but support for common objectives and principles and a commitment to work for their application to services.

Reaching these targets would not be the end of the search for quality; that is a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular reflection and review. But reaching the targets would go a long way towards assuring equal access to good quality services for all young children in the European Union.

REFERENCES

- Children in Europe*, (2004, September). Edinburgh, Scotland: Children in Scotland.
- Quality in early learning and child care services: Papers from the European Commission Childcare Network (2004)*. Toronto, ON: Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

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