Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM

Challenge 1: Defining goals and content

Defining goals and content is a challenge in many OECD countries due to the different visions of stakeholders on what the curriculum should aim at and include. Policy makers, researchers, ECEC professionals and parents consider that different subjects are important, and each has their own cultural values and ideas about early development.

Determining the degree of detail poses another challenge. Some staff members need and/or prefer the curriculum to include specific pedagogical guidance and a more detailed curriculum, while others are capable of effectively implementing a non-prescriptive curriculum with flexibility for interpretation and adaption to local and culturally specific needs and the individual child.

Furthermore, aligning the curriculum goals and contents with the future needs of society at large can be challenging, especially with changes, such as increasing migration and advances in information and knowledge economies.

Setting out clear curriculum goals and guiding principles

- In **Australia**, the Council of Australian Governments developed the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) Belonging, Being, and Becoming* in July 2009. It aims to assist educators in providing young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning. In this way, the EYLF contributes to realising the Council of Australian Governments’ goal of: “All children having the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation”. The EYLF describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years. It has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development. Broadly, the framework is set up in line with the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians, which states that all young Australians should become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

- In **Scotland**, the *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland’s Children and Families* has been developed. The document reflects the principles and philosophy which underpin the *Curriculum for Excellence* for ages three to eighteen. *Pre-Birth to Three* emphasises the importance of family and community engagement. Both curricula emphasise four key capacities: to become successful learners, confident individuals,
responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. *Curriculum for Excellence* includes experiences that are planned for children and young people through their education. These experiences are grouped into four categories: curriculum areas and subjects; interdisciplinary learning; ethos and life of the school; and opportunities for personal achievement.

- **The *Te Whāriki curriculum*** for birth until school entry in **New Zealand** emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. Human relationships and positive well-being form the base principles of the curriculum as well as empowerment, holistic development and the family and community. The early childhood curriculum takes up a model of learning that weaves together intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of discrete skills. The framework consists of four parts: 1) the principles of the curriculum; 2) its five strands; 3) goals for the early childhood years; and 4) examples of the links between early childhood education and the school years and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework for schools. The strands and goals are linked to each other and focus on well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. The content is age-appropriate for three different age groups within ECEC, namely infants (birth to eighteen months), toddlers (one to three years) and young children (two-and-a-half years to school entry age). The views on development for each of these age groups have been clarified in the curriculum.

- **Prince Edward Island (Canada)** introduced in September 2011 a new Early Learning Framework focusing on children from birth to school entry. It lays out a clear vision of the child as a competent contributor to their own learning; includes a set of values and guiding principles which recognise the family as having the most important role in the overall development and well-being of the child; and sets out clear learning objectives and goals, while being respectful of the diversity of the province’s communities and understanding that the early childhood educator is key in this relationship. The Framework supports Prince Edward Island’s move to a Social-Ecological Early Learning System, provides educators with strategies and reflections to guide their practice, and is based on three learning principles: relationships, environment and experiences.

- **Korea**’s new *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5* focuses on five objectives: 1) developing basic physical abilities and establishing healthy and safe daily routines; 2) learning how to communicate in daily life and developing good practices in terms of language use; 3) developing self-respect and learning how to live with others; 4) developing interest in aesthetics, enjoying arts and learning how to express yourself creatively; and 5) exploring the world with curiosity and enhancing children’s abilities to solve problems by applying math and science in daily life. These five objectives are reflected in five curriculum areas: physical activities and health, communication, social relationships, arts and inquiry of nature. These five areas are broken down into 20 categories, 62 sub-categories and 136 detailed described contents/objectives, which children at age five should learn and develop. For instance, the area of communication includes four learning areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Speaking includes speaking in words and sentences, describing your feelings, and ideas and experiences.

- **Aistear** is the curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years in **Ireland**. The framework describes the types of learning that are important for children during this period in their lives, and as such, sets out broad learning goals for all children. *Aistear*
does this using four broad and interconnected themes: well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. Each theme identifies important dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, and knowledge and understanding.

- **Italy** developed the national Guidelines for the Curriculum (*Indicazioni per il Curricolo*) in September 2007. It is a framework of indications for Infant School (three to six years) and the first cycle of compulsory education (six to fourteen years). It contains the goals, content, pedagogical approaches and instructional practices as well as learning and well-being standards. The guidelines also indicate that education services should promote the development of identity, autonomy, competences, learning, well-being and citizenship of all children.

- The *Course of Study for Kindergartens* (curriculum) in **Japan** consists of three parts. The first part explains and formulates the curriculum, while the second part addresses the aims and content. The curriculum focuses on nurturing emotions, motivation and attitudes as a foundation for development. The goals and curriculum content are centred on five areas: health (mental and physical well-being), human relationships, environment, language and expression (feelings). These five areas are integrated into the curriculum and delivered in a comprehensive manner through specific activities. The third part of the curriculum describes points that kindergartens should take into consideration in the development of lesson plans. For day care centres, there is the *National Curriculum of Day Care Centres*, which is divided into seven chapters: general provisions, child development, nursery education content, planning and evaluating care, health and safety, supporting parents and staff training. The curriculum is centred on the same five areas as the kindergarten Course of Study.

- **Manitoba** (Canada) launched *Early Returns: Manitoba’s Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools* in 2011. This is the curriculum framework of Manitoba that supports staff at preschool centres and nursery schools to develop, describe and enhance their curriculum. It helps staff design play-based, developmentally-appropriate interactions, relationships, environments and experiences to allow all children to develop to their fullest potential.

- In **Germany**, an important aspect of the curricula of all Länder is the emphasis on the development of individual competences, including social skills. Socialisation forms an important focus of the curricula, which is intended to stimulate democratic development and young children’s early social and personal development. This is complemented by the learning competences young children should develop. The curricula include the goals a child should reach at a certain age and explains how staff can support children in reaching these goals. Additionally, curricula across Germany include aspects regarding stimulation of inter-cultural knowledge and acceptance and explain the expected roles of ECEC staff and parents with regard to the early education of their children.

- In **Czech Republic**, in 2004, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports published the Framework Educational Programme (FEP) for the ECEC sector, which corresponds to new studies of the development of preschool-aged children. The FEP covers five areas: 1) the child and his/her body; 2) the child and his/her psyche (language and speech, cognitive abilities); 3) the child and the other; 4) the child and society; and 5) the child and the world. The FEP determines a suitable educational offering for each of these areas (teaching and learning methods), a list of expected outcomes, and a list of
dangers (risks) that threaten successfulness in teaching and learning. On the basis of the FEP, each school develops its own educational programme in accordance with its special conditions (an obligation since September 2007).

- The parliament of the **French Community of Belgium** adopted core skills and competencies for children ages two-and-a-half to six. All curricula must be developed based on these new standards and approved by the government of the French Community. Additionally, all new programmes developed by education providers and their representative bodies must be approved by the Ministry of Education after being subjected to a Commission of representatives from various education networks and inspectors. The ECEC sector for zero-to-three-year-olds does not have nationally set skills and competencies in place, but all providers for this age group are required by law to comply with the Code of Quality for Care, which spells out principles concerning the development and well-being of the child. Each care provider has to develop a plan which indicates how they will adhere to the code, and this plan has to be approved by the **Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance** (ONE – Department for Birth and Childhood).

- **Slovak Republic** merged three curricula from 1948 for three-to-four-year-olds, four-to-five-year-olds, and five-to-six-year-olds into one curriculum for three-to-six-year-olds in 2008. The new curriculum has undergone some changes since 1948 and now includes the content of education and care, which consists of four main topics: I am, people, nature and culture. Within each of the four themes, cognitive, motor and social-emotional skills are set out. Additionally, performance standards are defined, which should be achieved before entering primary school.

- **Turkey** established its preschool curriculum in 2002 but revised it in 2006 by adding instructions and guidance on implementation of content and assessing child development. The aims and goals of the curriculum have been revised and further clarified, with the goal to improve school readiness. In addition, family participation has been included in the curriculum framework, aiming to improve children’s development.

- **Sweden** has revised its preschool curriculum, which was set to enter into force in July 2011. The pedagogical tasks of the preschool have been strengthened in the revised curriculum by clarifying the goals for language and communication, mathematics, natural science and technology. Furthermore, a new section for follow up, evaluation and development and a new section for the responsibility of the head of the preschool have been added. The responsibilities of preschool staff have also been clarified with new and revised guidelines. Philosophically, the curriculum builds on the idea of the child as competent learner, active thinker and involved doer. A strong orientation towards democratic values, continuous learning and development, connecting to the child’s experience, development in groups, and the pedagogical importance of both care and play underpin curriculum development and enactment in ECEC programmes.

- Kindergartens in **Norway** aim at safeguarding the children’s need for care and play and promote learning and formation as a basis for all-around development. In order to make it easier for kindergartens to plan a varied and comprehensive pedagogical programme, the content of kindergartens is divided into seven learning areas for children’s experience, exploration and learning: 1) communication, language and text; 2) body, movement and health; 3) art, culture and creativity; 4) nature, environment and technology; 5) ethics, religion and philosophy; 6) local community and society; and 7) numbers, spaces and shapes. Each learning area covers a wide range of learning, and
they rarely appear in isolation. The staff groups are free to choose methods in order to foster children’s curiosity, creativity and thirst for knowledge. The plan indicates goals for what children shall experience. Assessment practices regarding the plan focus on staff pedagogical approaches – not individual performance of the child.

- **Slovenia** set out clear goals and principles in its National Curriculum for Preschool Institutions (1999) while emphasising the importance of democracy, multiculturalism and pluralism. The curriculum sets out six areas of activities: movement, language, art, nature, society and mathematics. Additionally, examples of activities for different age groups are given, and the roles of staff are defined. It is regarded as an open framework aiming at ensuring equal opportunities for all children, respecting individual differences, and stimulating early learning and personal development. Developing standards or attainment targets are not defined. The Ministry of Education and Sport developed supplements to the national curriculum, such as the *Supplement to the Curriculum for Educational work with Roma children*, which give guidance and advice on specific pedagogical approaches to foster the development of Roma children and communication and partnership relations with parents of Roma children. The *Supplement to the Curriculum for Preschool Institutions in Nationally Mixed Areas* includes examples of learning activities for children living in nationally mixed areas, e.g. Hungarian and Italian. The *Recommendations for adjusted programmes and additional help for preschool children with special needs* emphasises certain principles of working with special educational needs children.

- **England** (United Kingdom) specifies, in the *Practice Guide* for the *Early Years Foundation Stage*, expected goals for different age groups of children. The goals are made age-appropriate to fit the development stage of young children. Goals are established for birth to 11 months; 8 to 20 months; 16 to 26 months; 22 to 36 months; 30 to 50 months; 40 to 60+ months. They are grouped into six categories: dispositions and attitudes; self-confidence and self-esteem; making relationships; behaviour and self-control; self-care; and sense of community. The *Early Years Foundation Stage* is currently being revised based on the recommendations which were a result of the review that has been conducted on the Foundation Stage. Based on the results of this review, the areas of learning are being changed and the number of early learning goals reduced to meet the needs of staff and other stakeholders regarding implementation.

- The main goals of preschool education in **Poland** are defined by the Core Curriculum, which was last revised in 2008. The overall aims of education are to be implemented through educational activities in 15 specified areas. A detailed list of learning outcomes, which children should gain by the end of preschool, are set for each area. The curriculum does not include specific teaching methods, but it emphasises play-based learning and outdoor activities. According to the revised curriculum, children are being prepared to read and write (reading and writing readiness); however, at least one-fifth of the time in preschool should be devoted to play and another one-fifth of the time to outdoor activities. Additionally, more attention has been put on continuity between primary and preschool education levels.

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1 Core Curriculum for Preschool Education for Kindergartens and Pre-school Classes in Primary Schools and Other Forms of Pre-school Education and Care; the Regulation of 23 December 2008 by the Minister of National Education (Dz.U.2009.4.17).
In **Estonia**, the renewed national curriculum for preschool child care institutions was approved by the Government of the Republic in 2008 and was based on the preschool education framework curriculum that was enforced in 1999. A difference between the old and new curricula relates to the determination of the concept of learning. The addition of the concept of learning emphasises change, and the focus is now on the child instead of the teacher: a child is an active participant in education and schooling activities, whereas a teacher is the creator of an environment that supports the child’s development. In the work of the preschool institution, co-operation between teachers and staff and inclusion of parents is of high importance, helping create a growing and learning environment supportive of children’s development. The national curriculum presents the objectives and principles of education presents the objectives and principles of education and schooling activities and the presumed general skills (play, cognitive and learning, and social and self-management skills) and development results of children in seven fields of education and schooling activities: me and the environment; language and speech; Estonian as a second language (starting with three-year-olds, study is for all children whose home language is other than Estonian in all groups with Estonian or other language of instruction); mathematics; art; music; and movement.

Developing standards or attainment targets

- In the **Netherlands**, the University of Amsterdam has developed learning goals for young children. Based on this work, the National Expert Centre on Curriculum Development (SLO) is now in the process of developing competence levels and descriptors for the end of preschool (ages four/five) and the end of the second year of preschool, i.e. the first year of compulsory schooling (ages five/six). Currently, goals exist for language, which includes three specific pillars: oral language skills, reading literacy, and language awareness and communication. Other planned pillars include maths and socio-emotional development. These three pillars will be supplemented with suggested pedagogical activities.

- **New Zealand**’s *Te Whāriki* curriculum developed dispositions, also named learning outcomes, for each of its five strands: well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. These dispositions are encouraged rather than taught. For each strand, knowledge, skills and attitudes are described, and examples of experiences are given, which help to meet these outcomes. Since the curriculum emphasises social relationships and personal well-being, outcomes are formulated in terms of relationships and well-being. Examples of outcomes include: confidence and ability to express emotional needs, knowledge about how to keep themselves healthy, and a sense of responsibility for their own well-being and that of others.

- For nursery education, developmental objectives have been developed in **Flanders** (Belgium) by the Ministry of Education. They are laid down in the Flemish Government Decree of 27 May 1997 and have been applicable from the school year 1998/99. They are the minimum objectives with regard to knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes, which the authorities consider to be desirable for children ages two-and-a-half to six.

- **Scotland** (United Kingdom) clearly prescribes in their *Curriculum for Excellence* what children should know and experience at different educational levels. The outcomes and experiences are designed based on eight different subject areas, including expressive arts, health and well-being, languages, mathematics, religious and moral education, sciences, social studies and technologies. Taken as a whole, the experiences and
outcomes differ per age group and embody the attributes and capabilities each child should achieve.

- **England (United Kingdom)** covers six areas within the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS): personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development and creative development. Each area is described in terms of what children should know and be able to do by the end of the EYFS – before attending primary schooling. The areas of learning are currently being revised for implementation in September 2012.

- The Ministry of Education in **Portugal** is setting *Learning Outcomes* for pre-school education (three-to-six-year-olds). Learning outcomes are acknowledged as the evidence of child performance, and they are defined in terms of child outcomes. They can be used as tools supporting teachers in their everyday work. The *Framework Law of Preschool* states the general objectives of preschool.

- The *Early Years Learning Framework* of **Australia** is outcome-based. The goals are designed to capture the integrated and complex learning of all children and include the following five goals and outcomes: 1) children should have a strong sense of identity; 2) children are connected with and contribute to their world; 3) children have a strong sense of well-being; 4) children are confident and involved learners; and 5) children are effective communicators.

- **Singapore** set out expected child outcomes by the end of their ECEC experiences. For example, the *Nurturing Early Learners: A framework for a kindergarten curriculum in Singapore* broadly spells out what children should be able to do by the end of their education in kindergarten: 1) having a sense of what is right and what is wrong; 2) be willing to share and take turns with others; 3) be able to relate to others; 4) be curious and willing to explore; 5) be able to listen and speak with understanding; 6) be comfortable and happy with themselves; 7) have developed physical co-ordination and healthy living habits; and 8) love their families, friends, teachers and school.

- The Infant Curriculum (part of the Primary School Curriculum [1999]) in **Ireland** sets out content objectives to guide children’s learning in the first two years of primary school, at which stage children are between ages four and seven. The content objectives focus on skills, attitudes and values, concepts, and knowledge and understanding.

- **Prince Edward Island**’s (Canada) Early Learning Framework includes learning goals, which focus on learning dispositions and attitudes rather than discrete skills. There are four broad learning goals: 1) well being; 2) exploration and discovery; 3) expression and communication; and 4) social and personal responsibility, each with clearly stated objectives for children from birth to school entry. This approach is more in line with the 21st Century Education principles of the province.

*Reviewing or analysing the curriculum to improve relevance*

- In **Korea**, the country has revised the *National Kindergarten Curriculum* seven times on a regular basis since the first edition in 1969: every revision was based on latest research findings. For each revision, the Ministry of Education commissioned a committee of experts and teachers to implement research in the revision of the
Based on research undertaken in 2010, the National Kindergarten Curriculum placed greater emphasis on creativity and character education. The Standard Childcare Curriculum for zero-to-four-year-olds was implemented for the first time in 2007, and a revision was undertaken in 2010 to improve the quality of child care services, diversify operation hours of child care in accordance with family needs, and strengthen the link between child care and elementary schooling. Revisions are based on latest research findings so as to meet changing family and societal needs; and the revised curriculum will be implemented in 2012. Additionally, in September 2011, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health and Welfare developed and launched the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5* (*Nuri* means “world”), a common curriculum to improve the relevance of both care and education.

- **ECEC staff in Scotland (United Kingdom)** found their previous curricula for ages three to five and five to fourteen too descriptive, leaving insufficient room for local adaptation. Therefore, the curricula were revised, which resulted in a curriculum for children ages three to eighteen with less descriptive outcomes and practices.

- Some ECEC workers in **England (United Kingdom)** found the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) too prescriptive, leaving insufficient room for innovation. Therefore, a review of the EYFS was conducted in 2010-11 to consider how the framework could be simplified, clarified and made less prescriptive. The review also recommended revising the EYFS to improve its accessibility to parents, and to promote action to respond to children progressing slower than expected.

- In **Turkey**, when the curriculum was being revised in 2006, the General Directorate of Preschool Education reported all the feedback it received from experts and teachers. The current preschool practices in Turkey and the revisions that were previously made in the primary education curriculum were reviewed. Other countries were analysed as well. Based on these analyses and reviews, further revisions were made to the framework.

- **Sweden** has reviewed and revised its preschool curriculum to increase and update their ECEC curriculum of 1998. The revised curriculum will come into force July 2011. The pedagogical tasks of the preschool have been strengthened in the revised curriculum by clarifying the goals for language and communication, mathematics, natural science and technology. Furthermore, a new section for follow up, evaluation and development and a new section for the responsibility of the head of the preschool have been added.

- **Ireland** has prioritised a review of the Infant Curriculum (for ages four to five), in light of the development of the common curriculum framework (for ages zero to five), which has been criticised for its over-crowded, play-free nature. Based on the review, the content will be adapted.

- In **Japan**, councils, composed of external experts, are set up to review standards of kindergarten education and nursery care as a way to link research to curriculum reform. Based on the reviews, curriculum is adapted when needed. The *National Curriculum of Day Care Centres* was established in 1965 and was last revised in 2008. The revised version provided clarification on minimum standards as issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and a generalisation of content (chapters 7 to 13).
The 1979 Educational Programme for the Education and Care of Pre-school Children in Slovenia has been revised after analyses of the current situation, world trends on preschool education and recommendations from international organisations and the Council of Europe. The previous curriculum was found to be very strict. The new curriculum of 1999/2000 emphasised the relevance of using various methods and approaches in preschool, leading to more flexibility, and pointed out that the diversity of the age group should be taken into account.

Supporting local initiatives in setting up their own curriculum

- In the Netherlands, a national curriculum does not exist. Each provider is entitled to design their own curriculum. The national government provides centres with a “list” of recommended and nationally approved curriculum frameworks. The curricula on this list have been piloted and found to be effective in stimulating early development. Centres can either decide to implement a curriculum on this list or design their own. Many ECEC providers in the Netherlands chose the latter and design a framework which includes elements of different curricula that are found most relevant to local circumstances.

- In Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework is designed to guide early childhood educators in developing effective early childhood programmes. It is expected that, following a period of familiarisation, each early childhood service will develop their own strategy to implement the Framework, taking their own unique context into consideration.

- Staff in Scotland (United Kingdom) can set up their own curriculum to meet local or special development needs. The Curriculum for Excellence is less detailed and prescriptive than previous curriculum advice and can therefore be used as a basis for centres in setting up their own curriculum. The Curriculum for Excellence provides professional space for teachers and other staff to use in order to meet the varied needs of all children and young people.

- The objectives for nursery education in Flanders (Belgium) specify the minimum knowledge and skills children should encompass but do not indicate how to acquire them. Schools are free in the design and choice of curriculum. The curriculum is usually developed by the school board or the school’s umbrella educational organisation and is afterwards assessed by the education inspectorate. Additionally, the Minister of Education has to approve the curriculum before schools can use their own curriculum.

- According to the Kindergarten Act in Norway, the owner of a kindergarten may adapt the national Framework Plan for Kindergartens to local conditions. The kindergarten’s co-ordinating committee, consisting of staff, parents and owner, must establish an annual plan for the kindergarten’s pedagogical activities. Staff members are expected to carry out the pedagogical programme in accordance with the national Framework Plan, local adaptation of the Framework Plan, and the annual plan.

- Each ECEC service in New Zealand develops its own curriculum, based on the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, to meet the needs of its children, families, the specific setting and the local community. All curricula should be based on the principles of the early childhood curriculum and be planned in terms of the curriculum’s strands and goals. Te Whāriki is designed to be adapted to local circumstances and children’s special needs. Additionally, each curriculum should include aspects of the Māori
language and culture to stimulate early knowledge and respect for the indigenous culture. Therefore, *Te Whāriki* is bilingual and protects the culture and language of the Māori.

- **In Korea**, each city and provincial education office is given autonomy in implementing the guidelines of the *National Kindergarten Curriculum* according to its own local needs. Based on the guidelines and kindergartens’ needs, individual district education support offices prepare practice-oriented supervisory materials, which kindergartens can use. Each kindergarten then organises and implements the curriculum according to its own circumstances and specific wishes.

- **In Sweden**, centres are free to evolve their own local curricula and pedagogical methods from the principles outlined in the state curriculum (*Lpfö*) established in 1998. The national ECEC curriculum specifies broad goals and guidelines but does not specify the means by which these goals should be achieved.

- **In Germany**, there is no curriculum in place at federal level: each Länder creates its own curriculum framework. Within each Länder, ECEC centres and providers are encouraged to adapt the Länder’s curriculum framework to their own needs and the needs of the children attending their centre. However, if a centre adapts the curriculum framework to its own needs, this curriculum should be based on the Länder framework and explicitly refer to the framework in its curriculum.

- **In Italy**, each individual setting should develop a curriculum based on the objectives defined in the *National Indications for the Curriculum*. Teachers can draw up the curriculum, called the Educational Offer Plan (*POF*), including activities for each subject, the tools to be used, timeline and the assessment procedures. Since ECEC centres can develop their own *POF*, the plan can be in line with the needs of local community regarding time flexibility, immigrant children and parental needs. Each plan must be presented to the parents and community before receiving approval for implementation.

- The early childhood curriculum of **Spain** includes general guidelines. This approach allows staff to adapt the curriculum and work to the characteristics of the environment and community. They can develop and improve the programme to meet the needs of children, adapting to local social and cultural characteristics.

- **In Ireland**, *Aistear* is not prescriptive and does not subscribe to a particular pedagogical approach. It can be adapted at local level to support practice in a range of different types of settings, while at the same time, providing one set of learning goals to guide practitioners and children’s work across all settings.

- Since the standards in the *Course of Study for Kindergartens* in **Japan** provide only a general outline, individual kindergartens are able to take a creative approach to formulating and implementing a curriculum, which meets the specific needs of a child’s mental and physical development, the local area or the kindergarten itself.

- The Ministry of Education in **Mexico** created a framework syllabus to serve as a framework development guide. Each institution can use this guide to develop a curriculum meeting its own needs. This helps providers in developing a qualitative curriculum suitable for the children, parents and community in their region.
In the **United States**, *Early Learning and Development Standards* (ELDSs) are created by individual states. These state-level expectations, guidelines, or developmental milestones reflect state laws and the state’s needs and wishes. Most ECEC providers, some of whom are private, are not required to use ELDSs, but states stimulate awareness on the existence, and encourage the voluntary use, of ELDSs across various settings by disseminating print and electronic copies of the standards.

In the case of **Poland**, institutions offering preschool education are expected to develop their own curriculum based on the Core Curriculum, which presents general goals, learning outcomes and guidelines but does not define specific teaching methods. A centre’s curriculum must define educational goals and the methods used to meet those goals as well as a methodology used to assess the school readiness of a child upon completion of preschool. Teachers can develop their own curriculum individually or as a team or use a curriculum prepared by other authors. The chosen curriculum must be approved by the kindergarten director after consultation with the board of teachers.

**Involving stakeholders in the design process**

In **Australia**, ECEC bodies and child development organisations were involved in the design process to ensure that different views and cultural perspectives were reflected in the curriculum. A country-wide network was in place to provide support and training to early childhood educators, and there was an agreement with universities and further education institutions to introduce the Framework.

The *Curriculum for Excellence* in **Scotland** (United Kingdom) has built upon existing good practice across different sectors of Scottish education and takes account of research and international comparisons. It recognises the professionalism of staff in the development process. From the National Debate on Education in 2002 through to the drafting and preparation of the experiences and outcomes for publication, teachers were asked to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the process. One of the main responsibilities of development teams was to ensure that they drew on the expertise and advice of a wide range of staff in early years centres, schools, universities and colleges across all settings where learning takes place. They did this at meetings, events, seminars and focus groups, picking up ideas and case studies of good practice; and they maintained contact with subject networks and other specialist forums. *Learning and Teaching Scotland*, a non-departmental public body, published the proposed experiences and outcomes in draft format to give practitioners and wider stakeholders the opportunity to comment. There was further engagement during the refinement process leading to publication.

**Korea** involves various stakeholders when revising a curriculum to reflect different perspectives and needs. Typically, a curriculum development/revision team consists of 20 to 30 experts including representatives of academic associations. They undertake research in order to set directions, goals and content areas in collaboration with 150 to 200 people in consultation/working groups (professors, researchers, superintendents, practitioners in ECEC, elementary school curriculum experts, etc). As part of the process, national surveys for teachers and parents were undertaken to have an idea about their opinions and needs. After holding a series of seminars and public hearings, the curriculum framework and specifics have been finalised. It usually takes three years to revise a national curriculum and carry out piloting before implementing the revised version. For the *Nuri Curriculum* for five-year-olds, stakeholders from both early
childhood education and child care sectors, as well as ministry officials, formed a task force team and collaborated on the design and content of the curriculum.

- **Finland** set up a steering group and working committee of policy makers and representatives of the ECEC sector to discuss and define the contents of an ECEC curriculum. A number of ECEC experts were also invited to contribute to the work and asked to comment on the draft guidelines.

- The **National Agency for Education** in **Sweden** was commissioned by the national government to draft a proposal for a revision of the current curriculum. Thereafter, the Ministry of Education established and consulted a reference-group with representatives from universities (researchers), municipalities (e.g., head of preschool), trade unions and other stakeholders in the field. Researchers were also consulted and asked to give comments, which were incorporated in the revised proposal.

- A steering committee, which oversees all the changes in the curriculum, has been established in **Luxembourg**. The committee brings together different relevant stakeholders and their representatives and provides opportunities to share views, best practices and experiences. These opinions and views are noted and taken into account when changes in the curriculum are made.

- In **Spain**, the Ministry of Education and Science set up a process of public debate on education in September 2004 to discuss challenges in the education system and to agree upon solutions. The debate lasted six months, allowing key stakeholders to express pros and cons on different views and ideas. Autonomous Communities (regional governments) and the organisations representing school councils were also invited to express their views. Individuals and other stakeholder associations could send the Ministry of Education and Science their thoughts and suggested solutions. Based on the agreement, a media campaign was launched to make the approved Organic Law of Education known by the public and those working in the Spanish education system.

- **Norway** established new legislation concerning kindergartens in 2005. Essential intentions of the new kindergarten act were increased quality in kindergartens, children's right to participation and a new and expanded section concerning the content of kindergartens. The new act presupposed a revision of the Framework Plan. The Ministry of Education set up a working group, consisting mostly of researchers and practitioner, to draft a revised plan in accordance with a mandate given by the Ministry. After making some changes, the Ministry put the plan on a public hearing prior to establishing it as regulation. The public hearing included all stakeholders in the ECEC field such as owners, parents, educators, researchers, other ministries, organisations and administrative bodies on various levels. Recently, a new public commission was set up to give advice on what all children should have experienced in kindergarten before they start school. Their report has been put to public hearing and will be considered in a future revision of the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens.

- In **Luxembourg**, the process of developing a new programme, based on a competency-based approach, was a participatory process. In December 2006, a first version of the cross-disciplinary skills that children must master at the end of the four basic education cycles was submitted for review to all staff members of preschool and primary education. Staff were invited to comment on the drafts and discuss whether the competences were defined as realistic. The Minister of Education met staff members
personally at regional review meetings to hear their views and comments; their opinions were taken into account when revising the document.

- **Portugal**’s *Curriculum Guidelines* for three-to-six-year-olds were developed in a process of broad consultation involving preschool teachers and researchers. Official publication of the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education was preceded by a long discussion process involving the preparation of three drafts. The first draft was analysed by institutional partners: the Regional Directorates for Education, the Inspector-General of Education, Initial Teacher Training Schools, Teachers’ Associations, Teachers’ Unions, the Association of Private Education Providers and Parent Associations. A second draft was produced based on comments received from the institutional partners and was distributed among groups of preschool teachers for comments. Teachers were asked to apply the proposed guidelines prior to commenting. Comments from the teachers were incorporated into the final version of the Curriculum Guidelines. Portugal is in the process of developing curriculum guidelines for ages zero to three, in line with the guidelines for ages three to six. Relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, ECEC staff, teacher and parent associations, and researchers are involved in the design process. During a forum in June 2011, debates were organised with stakeholders discussing what should be included in the curriculum guidelines for ages zero to three and how it should be implemented.

- The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of **Slovak Republic** assigned the design of the curriculum to the State Pedagogical Institute, a ministerial institute. The institute subsequently involved ECEC experts in the design process. The State School Inspectorate and universities also played a significant role in the curriculum design. They were widely involved in discussions together with ECEC professionals.

- The *Te Whāriki* curriculum in **New Zealand** has been developed from, and builds on, experience with curriculum development by different early childhood services, together with findings in research, international literature, and the shared knowledge and agreed understandings that have emerged in New Zealand over the past two decades on child development. Feedback on the draft document from different stakeholders, including ECEC staff, local authorities, researchers and parents, has been taken into account when revising the draft version. The curriculum also considered findings from exploratory studies.

- In **Turkey**, the curriculum for preschool education was revised in 2006. The committee, consisting of international and national experts, competent departments of the General Directorate of Preschool Education, headmasters of kindergartens and preschool teachers were all involved in the revision process.

- **Prince Edward Island (Canada)**, in 2011, established a stakeholder group that was the advisory committee overseeing the development of the Early Learning Framework, the new curriculum for early child development from birth until primary schooling.

- In the **United States**, *Early Learning and Development Standards* are created by individual states. The process usually involves input from a variety of stakeholders in the ECEC community.