INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON: CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS AND CONTENT

Findings

Overall framework

- Almost all OECD countries have some form of a framework – either in the form of a curriculum or learning standards. The age groups, which curricula are defined by, differ among countries (Figure 1).
- In a “split” system countries where child care and early education are governed and managed by different ministries:
  - The majority of countries and jurisdictions have created a learning framework for children in the older age bracket of ECEC: from around age two-and-a-half or three to compulsory schooling.
  - A few countries have parallel frameworks for child care (from age zero to compulsory schooling) and for early education (from age three to compulsory schooling), such as Japan and Korea.
- Many countries aiming to deliver “integrated” services use a framework that covers age zero or one to compulsory schooling (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Nordic Countries, and Prince Edward Island [Canada]).
- Several countries aim to capture continuous child development in early childhood and beyond. This is reflected in the age coverage of the framework in, for example, Hesse (Germany), where there is a curriculum for children from age zero up to age ten, and in Scotland (United Kingdom), where the Curriculum for Excellence covers ages three to 18 – with age-appropriate content for different age groups.

Content and subjects

- Curriculum descriptions can be, in general, categorised into “input”-based or “outcome”-based approaches. Most ECEC curriculum frameworks include “input from staff”, i.e., specific requirements as to what is expected of ECEC staff (Figure 2). “Values and principles” are also frequently included, while “child outcomes” and “input of the centres” are used by a fewer number of countries than others. Nordic countries tend to avoid using the term “child outcomes”, while Anglo-Saxon countries favour the approach.
• Most OECD countries place a high importance on “literacy”, “numeracy”, “physical education”, “science” and “arts” in their curriculum. “Music”, “play” and “practical skills” are also popular content areas of the frameworks/guidelines. While several countries allocate time specific to “play” in their curriculum, some indicate that “play” is embedded into other content areas in order to stimulate learning such areas through play (Figure 3).

• Few countries have included newly emerging subject matters, which respond to changing needs in present-day society, such as ICT (e.g., Spain), learning foreign languages (e.g., Slovak Republic) and learning approaches (e.g., Korea).

For more detail, see the Survey Response Tables on “Framework for Standards/Curriculum” and “Curriculum Contents” (Excel files) in the online Quality Toolbox at www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood/toolbox.

Figure 1. Coverage of ECEC curriculum frameworks or guidelines by age group
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Germany (Baden-Württemberg)</th>
<th>Germany (Bavaria)</th>
<th>Germany (Berlin)</th>
<th>Germany (Brandenburg)</th>
<th>Germany (Bremen)</th>
<th>Germany (Hamburg)</th>
<th>Germany (Hesse)</th>
<th>Germany (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)</th>
<th>Germany (Lower Saxony)</th>
<th>Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia)</th>
<th>Germany (Rhineland-Palatinate)</th>
<th>Germany (Saarland)</th>
<th>Germany (Saxony)</th>
<th>Germany (Saxony-Anhalt)</th>
<th>Germany (Silesian-Holstein)</th>
<th>Germany (Thuringia)</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Luxembourg</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.5y</td>
<td>Development goals/competences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Te Whāriki</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland*</td>
<td>Core Curriculum for Preschool Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>The National Education Programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>National Curriculum for Pre-school Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Early Childhood Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Pre-school education programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (England)</td>
<td>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (Scotland)</td>
<td>Pre-birth to three - staff guidelines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Georgia)</td>
<td>Georgia’s Pre-K Content Standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Massachusetts)</td>
<td>Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (North Carolina)</td>
<td>Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies to Guide Their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Oklahoma)</td>
<td>Priority Academic Student Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For Poland, the compulsory school age was lowered from age seven to six in 2009 with a transition period of three years (until 2012), during which time, parents can choose if their child starts school at age six or seven. For Sweden, Läroplan för förskolan is the curriculum for the preschool; Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet regards the curriculum for the preschool class, compulsory school and out-of-school centres.

Figure 2. Approaches of ECEC curriculum

![Bar chart showing approaches of ECEC curriculum](image)

Number of countries or jurisdictions citing the following as content of curriculum framework

- Input from staff
- Values and principles
- Input from centre
- Child outcomes

Note: Respondents may list more than one content category.


Figure 3. Content areas included in ECEC curriculum

![Bar chart showing content areas included in ECEC curriculum](image)

Number of times an element is cited as included in curriculum among respondents

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Physical education
- Science
- Arts
- Music
- Playtime
- Practical skills
- Health and well-being
- External activities
- Social sciences
- Religion
- Ethics and citizenship
- ICT
- Foreign languages
- Learning Approaches

Note: Respondents may list more than one element.


---

1 Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, Bavaria (DEU), British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Hesse (DEU), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

2 Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.
Definitions and methodologies

A curriculum framework (guidelines or standards) is a tool which can guide the content of and approach to children’s care and learning.

Curriculum contents can be organised into subject elements or areas. ECEC elements or subject areas highlight priorities and clarify how care, pedagogies and teachings are organised. In the OECD Network on ECEC’s “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal”, countries were asked to choose from a list of nine ECEC elements or subject areas:

1. Literacy: refers to all subjects related to reading and writing, including language learning and development, and word recognition.
2. Numeracy: refers to all subjects related to numbering and counting, including calculations, number recognition, spaces and shapes.
3. Science: refers to all scientific subjects, such as geography and natural science.
4. Arts: refers to all subjects related to some form of art, including drawing, colouring, painting and handicrafts.
5. Music: refers to all subjects involving music, such as singing, playing musical instruments and dancing to music.
6. Physical education: refers to all instructed subjects that require physical effort or are related to physical well-being, such as gymnastics, sports and classes about food or hygiene.
7. Practical skills: refers to all practices related to practical skills not mentioned in one of the other subjects (e.g., shoe-lacing).
8. Playtime: refers to the time children can play freely, i.e., child-initiated play: the time that a child can decide for him- or herself what he/she wants to do and play with (inside or outside).
9. Activities outside ECEC institutions (external activities): refers to field trips, such as outings to museums, public parks, libraries, concerts, and art and science centres.

There were an additional seven subject areas identified by countries/regions, including religion, ethics and democratic citizenship; health, personal and/or social well-being; social sciences and/or inter-cultural education; ICT; languages (foreign); and learning approaches.

The findings presented here are based on data from the OECD Network on ECEC’s “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal” (2011). For each graph and table, the countries or regions for which data is used are listed.