Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

CZECH REPUBLIC

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OECD

Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Czech Republic 2012

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FOREWORD

This publication is intended to be a quick reference guide for anyone with a role to play in encouraging quality through the Czech Republic's early childhood education and care (ECEC) curriculum.

There is a growing body of evidence that children starting strong in their learning and well-being will have better outcomes when they grow older. Such evidence has driven policy makers to design an early intervention and re-think their education spending patterns to gain "value for money". At the same time, research emphasises that the benefits from early interventions are conditional on the level of "quality" of ECEC that children experience.

What does "quality" mean? *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care* has identified five policy levers that can encourage quality in ECEC, having positive effects on early child development and learning.

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five policy levers, the Czech Republic has selected **Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards** for its current policy focus.

This policy profile for the Czech Republic would not have been possible without the support of the national authority and the stakeholders involved. The OECD Secretariat would like to thank the national co-ordinators, Irena Borkovcová, Helena Cizkova, Michaela Sojdrova, Alena Spejchalova, Tichá Jiřina and Jindřich Fryč, for their work in providing information. We would also like to thank all those who gave their time to respond to our many questions, provide comments on preliminary drafts and validate the information for accuracy. We would also like to thank consultants Janice Heejin Kim and Matias Egeland who worked on sections of the preliminary drafts as part of the OECD team on ECEC.

The online version of the quality toolbox can be found at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood/toolbox**. The online toolbox has additional information, such as a country materials page where actual documents from OECD countries are presented, including curricula, regulatory frameworks and data systems information. All information related to the OECD Network on ECEC is available at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood**.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A common curriculum framework helps ensure an even level of quality across different providers, supports staff to provide stimulating environments for children and supports parents to better engage.

ECEC is receiving increased policy interest in the Czech Republic, as improving quality in the ECEC sector is a subject of growing importance. The Czech Republic considers improving quality through curriculum as a priority, as it can ensure even quality across different settings. It can also help staff clarify their pedagogical aims, focus on the most important aspects of child development and respond adequately to children's needs. It can also ensure continuity between ECEC and primary schooling. Additionally, the framework helps parents learn about child development and encourages them to ensure a good home learning environment. It can also act as a bridge between staff and parents for information sharing about what children do in centres and facilitate needs-based interventions.

Research-based curriculum design can ensure a good mix of short- and long-term benefits and of cognitive/social benefits. There is a need to consolidate the "added value" of different approaches.

Research indicates that brain sensitivity to language, numeracy, social skills and emotional control peaks before the age of four, which suggests that ECEC matters greatly for children's development of key skills and abilities. Combining child- and staff-initiated contents and activities maximises cognitive learning and social outcomes: child-initiated activities can have long-term benefits, while staff-initiated learning has positive (short-term) effects. There is a need to think beyond curriculum dichotomies (*e.g.*, academic-oriented vs. comprehensive approaches, staff-initiated instruction vs. child-initiated activities, etc.) and consolidate the "added value" of individual approaches.

The Czech Republic could share the good examples that distinguish its curriculum, such as setting out learning competencies; covering academic and socio-emotional aspects; recognising the importance of parental participation; and emphasising the relevance of leadership and management.

The Czech Republic's *Framework Education Programme for Pre-school Education* (FEP PE) is overall a well-described, comprehensive document that addresses aspects of early learning based on the country's values and beliefs. It is very much focused on early learning as well as teaching children knowledge and competencies. The framework covers both academic aspects but also reflects on socio-emotional learning areas. It includes expected inputs from staff and management and sets out learning competencies for child development. It also addresses what is required to accommodate parents and highlights the importance of strong leadership and management for curriculum implementation.

International comparative data suggests potential areas of reflection for the Czech Republic, such as age coverage of the curriculum and curriculum alignment; reflecting upon the content in response to societal changes and taking age-appropriateness into account; and improving staff communication skills.

Capitalising upon its strengths, the Czech Republic could further enhance quality through its curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) reflecting on the age coverage of the framework; 2) improving alignment with primary schooling; 3) reflecting upon content areas to respond to societal changes, such as revisited attention to health and well-being, the use of ICT in ECEC, and improved attention to cultural diversity and age-appropriateness; and 4) further improve communication skills of staff for effective implementation and dissemination of the curriculum.

The Czech Republic has undertaken measures to tackle challenges in enhancing quality through curriculum by, among others, clarifying the tasks of preschools; aiming at aligning home learning and ECEC learning; including examples of activities and practices for staff; and implementing self-assessment practices.

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC curriculum are: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment. The Czech Republic has made several efforts in tackling these challenges by, for example, explaining the expected tasks and purposes of preschools; encouraging family engagement and participation in ECEC to improve the alignment between learning at home and in the preschool; including example activities, actions and practices for staff in the framework; and implementing self-assessment practices used for improving staff quality.

To further their efforts, the Czech Republic could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand, Norway and Scotland (United Kingdom), such as developing age-appropriate content based on children's needs; having a common framework covering the whole ECEC age range; improving working conditions or providing practical tools to stimulate effective implementation; and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum framework.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the policy profile

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has becoming a growing policy priority in many countries. A growing body of research recognises that it makes a wide range of benefits, including social and economic benefits, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning, more equitable outcomes and reduction of poverty, and increased intergenerational social mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the "quality" of ECEC.

Definitions of quality differ across countries and across different stakeholder groups depending on beliefs, values, a country's (or region's) socio-economic context, and the needs of the community of users. While definitions should be interpreted with caution and sensitivity when comparing cross-country practices, the OECD has taken a two-tier approach to define "quality" to proceed policy discussions. Therefore, this policy profiles considers quality in terms of "structural quality"[1] and "process quality"[2], and sets out "child development" or "child outcome" as quality targets.

Based on international literature reviews findings, the OECD has identified five levers as key policies to encourage quality in ECEC:

1) Setting out quality goals and regulations
2) Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
3) Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
4) Engaging families and communities
5) Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five levers, the Czech Republic has selected "designing and implementing curriculum and standards" to be the theme of this policy profile. As reference countries in focus for international comparison, the Czech Republic has selected New Zealand, Norway and Scotland (United Kingdom).

Structure of the report

This report consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1: What does research say?

This chapter aims to help you brief political leaders, stakeholders and the media about the latest research and explain why a framework, such as curriculum or learning standards, matter for better child development. It includes an overview of research findings on why curriculum matters, what the effects of different curricula are on child development and the quality of ECEC provision, which aspects matter in curriculum, policy implications from research and knowledge gaps in current research.

Chapter 2: Where does the Czech Republic stand compared to other countries?

Chapter two provides an international comparative overview of where your country stands with regard to curriculum design. It identifies the strengths and areas for reflection for the Czech Republic in comparison with the selected reference countries. The chapter can provide insight into which aspects of curriculum the Czech Republic might consider taking policy action on, and it can raise awareness about policy issues.

Chapter 3: What are the challenges and strategies?

Chapter three presents the challenges countries have faced in designing, revising and implementing curriculum and gives alternative approaches to overcome these challenges. It provides a quick overview of what New Zealand, Norway and Scotland (United Kingdom) have done to tackle challenges in designing, revising or implementing curriculum.

NOTES

1 Structural quality consists of "inputs to process-characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience". These characteristics are not only part of the ECEC location in which children participate, but they are part of the environment that surrounds the ECEC setting, *e.g.*, the community. They are often aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

2 Process quality consists of what children actually experience in their programmes – that which happens within a setting. These experiences are thought to have an influence on children's well-being and development (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

*Curriculum and standards can reinforce positive impact on children's learning and development. They can: i) ensure even quality across different settings; ii) give guidance to staff on how to enhance children's learning and well-being; and iii) inform parents of their children's learning and development. Countries take different approaches in designing curriculum. There is a need to think beyond curriculum dichotomies (*e.g.*, academic-oriented vs. comprehensive approaches, staff-initiated instruction vs. child-initiated activities, etc.) and consolidate the "added value" of individual approaches.*

What is curriculum?

Curriculum refers to the contents and methods that substantiate children's learning and development. It answers the questions "what to teach?" and "how to teach it?" (NIEER, 2007). It is a complex concept especially in ECEC, containing multiple components, such as ECEC goals, content and pedagogical practices (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

What is at stake?

There is growing consensus on the importance of an explicit curriculum with clear purpose, goals and approaches for zero-to-school-age children (Bertrand, 2007). Most OECD countries now use a curriculum in early childhood services, especially as children grow older, that is to say, that some structuring and orientation of children's experience towards educational aims is generally accepted. Currently, there is little pedagogical direction for younger children, although many neurological developments take place prior to age of three or four (OECD, 2006). Curricula are influenced by many factors, including society's values, content standards, research findings, community expectations, culture and language. Although these factors differ per country, state, region and even programme, high-quality, well-implemented ECEC curricula provide developmentally appropriate support and cognitive challenges that can lead to positive child outcomes (Frede, 1998).

With trends toward decentralisation and diversification of policy and provision, there is more variation in programming and quality at the local level. A common framework can help ensure an even level of quality across different forms of provision and for different groups of children, while allowing for adaptation to local needs and circumstances. A clear view and articulation of goals, whether in the health, nutrition or education field, can help foster programmes that will promote the well-being of young children and respond adequately to children's needs (OECD, 2006).

Well-defined educational projects also serve the interests of young children. In infant-toddler settings with a weak pedagogical framework, young children may miss out on stimulating environments that are of high importance in the early years. At the programme level, guidelines for practice in the form of a pedagogical or curriculum framework help staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, keep progression in mind, provide a structure for the child's day, and focus observation on the most important aspects of child development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004).

Debate remains widespread over the "correct curriculum approach" for the youngest and older children in ECEC. This raises important questions about aspects, such as the scope, relevance, focus and age-appropriateness of content; depth and length of descriptions; and input- or outcome-based descriptions. The learning areas that receive most focus in official curricula – particularly in countries where child assessments are used shortly after entry into primary school – are literacy and numeracy. Countries in the social pedagogy tradition do not exclude emergent literacy and numeracy but seek to maintain an open and holistic curriculum until children enter school and, sometimes, well into the early classes of primary school. On the other hand, countries in which early education has been part of, or closely associated with, primary school tend to privilege readiness for school and a more academic approach to curriculum and methodology.

Why does it matter?

Consistency and adaptation to local needs

A common ECEC curriculum can have multiple benefits. It can ensure more even quality levels across provisions and age groups, contributing to a more equitable system. It can also guide and support staff; facilitate communication between teachers and parents; and ensure continuity between pre-primary and primary school levels. However, a curriculum can remain unchanged for years and lack the necessary innovation to adapt to ever-changing "knowledge" societies. It can equally limit the freedom and creativity of ECEC staff (OECD, 2006).

Because ECEC centres are becoming more culturally diverse with children from different backgrounds and home environments, acknowledging that these children might have different needs is important for the effectiveness of a programme. Settings and activities that are designed to accommodate young children's different approaches to learning have been found to reduce disruptive and inattentive behaviour, like fighting with peers and unwillingness to respond to questions or co-operate in class (Philips *et al.*, 2000). The wide range of cultures, communities and settings in which young children grow up makes it essential to engage different stakeholders in developing and refining curricula and to adapt curricula, when needed, to local or cultural circumstances. This is to ensure that curricula actually meet children's needs and truly focus on the child and their development (NAEYC, 2002).

Balancing diverse expectations

It is important that all stakeholders agree on the contents of the pre-primary curriculum. Governments and parents may share common objectives, such as preparing children for school; but they may also disagree on the appropriateness of specific pre-primary subjects for children, such as the integration of ICT in the classroom. In multicultural societies, governments may want to create a skilled and knowledgeable workforce and prioritise shared values for building a sense of community. Meanwhile, minority group families may be more concerned with transmitting native languages and customs to children while respecting specific beliefs on child rearing. Curricula can contribute to balancing different expectations of early childhood development in the curriculum and ensure that expectations and needs of different stakeholders are met (Bennett, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2011).

Provides guidance, purpose and continuity

Curriculum can provide clear guidance and purpose through explicit pedagogical guidelines. A focused curriculum with clear goals helps ensure that ECEC staff cover critical learning or development areas. It can therefore equip children with the knowledge and skills needed for primary school and further learning and facilitate smooth transitions between education levels (UNESCO, 2004).

Improves quality and reinforces impact

Curriculum can establish higher and more consistent quality across varied ECEC provisions; and having a steering curriculum is found to contribute to decreased class repetition, reduced referral to special education and better transitions to primary school (Eurydice, 2009). At the same time, a high-quality curriculum can reduce the fade-out effect of knowledge gained in preschool (Pianta *et al.*, 2009).

Facilitates the involvement of parents

Curriculum can inform parents about what their children are learning in an education or care setting. It can act as a bridge between ECEC staff and parents for information sharing and needs-based interventions. Parental knowledge of the curriculum can be particularly important for children with special needs or learning difficulties to provide added support at home. One of the most effective approaches to increasing children's later achievement and adjustment is to support parents in actively engaging with children's learning activities at home (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall 2006). Activities that can be beneficially promoted include reading to children, singing songs and nursery rhymes, going to the library and playing with numbers.

What aspect matters most?

Thinking beyond curriculum dichotomies

Traditionally, ECEC curricula have been categorised into academic and more comprehensive models. An academic approach makes use of a staff-initiated curriculum with cognitive aims for school preparation. A comprehensive approach centres on the child and seeks to broaden the scope for holistic development and well-being (Bertrand, 2007; OECD, 2006). An academic approach can prescribe teaching in critical subject areas but can also limit a child-centred environment characterised by self-initiated activity, creativity and self-determination (Eurydice, 2009; Prentice, 2000). With more flexible aims, a comprehensive approach can better integrate social and emotional well-being, general knowledge and communication skills but risks losing focus of important education goals, as can be seen in Table 1.1 (Pianta, 2010; Bertrand, 2007; UNESCO, 2004).

It is argued that high-quality ECEC settings are related to curriculum practice in which cognitive and social development are viewed as complementary and of equal importance. Such integrated curriculum is believed to contribute to high-quality ECEC and improved social behaviour (Table 1.2) (Bennett, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). As an example, Sweden is considered to have high-quality ECEC in part because its curriculum contents place the same value on social and cognitive learning (Sheridan *et al*., 2009, Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

It should be noted that "mixed models" that combine different curriculum approaches are not always successfully integrated in practice. In some countries, the implementation of a mixed model curriculum has been found to be less effective than pure "academic" or "comprehensive" approaches. Nevertheless, a clear dichotomy between the "academic" and "comprehensive" approaches is not necessarily warranted. Instead of focussing on the "type" of curriculum, it may be beneficial to highlight a curriculum's 1) critical learning areas and 2) implementation (Eurydice, 2009).

Table 1.1. Effects of academic and comprehensive curriculum models

Which "model" is most likely to improve a child's...	Academic	Comprehensive
IQ scores	X	
Motivation to Learn		X
Literacy and Numeracy	X	
Creativity		X
Independence		X
Specific Knowledge	X	
Self-confidence		X
General Knowledge		X
Initiative		X
Short-term outcomes	X	
Long-term outcomes	X	X

Source: Pianta *et al.*, 2010; Eurydice, 2009; Laevers, 2011; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Table 1.2. Different curriculum models' effect on school behaviours

	Direct Instruction	Child Centred (constructivist)	Child Centred (social)
Misconduct at age 15	14.9	5.9	8.0
Ever been expelled from High School	16.0%	5.9%	8.0%
Total number of classes failed	9.6	5.0	4.9

Notes: For "Misconduct at age 15", the sum is out of 18 possible criteria of misconduct. For "Ever been expelled from High School", this is the percentage of sample group members that had been expelled from High School. For "Total number of classes failed", this is the number of classes failed by per member of sample group (asked at age 23). Results are from a study of different curriculum models impact on disadvantaged children in New Jersey. The sample groups are randomly selected and have comparable socio-economic backgrounds and other background characteristics. "Child Centred (constructivist)" is a High/Scope curriculum model, "Child Centred (social)" is a Nursery School programme with a focus on social skills. Both curriculum models place stronger weight on child-initiated activities.

Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Critical learning areas

Literacy

The importance of literacy is well-documented as the means through which all other subject areas are acquired (NIEER, 2006). Researchers continually point to the benefits of literacy for language development and reading outcomes (UNESCO, 2007). Literacy has also been consistently linked to improved school performance and achievement, as well as higher productivity, later in life. Evidence suggests literacy should focus on improving vocabulary and listening skills; building knowledge of the alphabetic code; and introduce printing (NIEER, 2006). The OECD has shown that children whose parents often read to them show markedly higher scores in PISA 2009 than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all (OECD, 2011). Research also shows that children quickly establish a stable approach to learning literacy. In order to do so, it is essential that they are exposed to texts, pictures, books, etc. in different communicative contexts. For example, structured play that is integrated into children's everyday interests can more easily introduce the fundamentals of written language (Mellgren and Gustafsson, 2011).

Numeracy

There is a general consensus that early mathematics should be implemented on a wide scale, especially for disadvantaged children. Even the youngest children use abstract and numerical ideas (amounts, shapes, sizes) in everyday "play" (Björklund, 2008); and staff can use children's existing knowledge and curiosity to develop mathematical concepts, methods and language (Amit and Ginsburg, 2008). In everyday activities, numeracy should focus on "big ideas" to support mathematical competence, namely numbers and operations; shapes and space; measurement and patterns (Amit and Ginsburg, 2008; NIEER, 2009).

Developing early mathematical skills means that the child discerns relations in space, time and quantities and acquires an ability to use his or her understanding in communication with others when solving problems, in logical reasoning and in representation (Björklund, 2008 and 2010). Longitudinal studies on early numeracy show that a child's understanding of numbers and numeric relationships can predict later acquisition of arithmetical skills and mathematical competence (Aunio and Niemivirta, 2010; Aunola *et al.*, 2004).

ICT

Computer-facilitated activities can have positive impacts on play and learning. They can tap into a child's creativity and motivate curiosity, exploration, sharing and problem solving (UNESCO, 2010). ICT can even eliminate boundaries between oral and written language and allow the visualisation of mathematical concepts and relationships (UNESCO, 2010). But while computer use is positively associated with achievement in math, it can be negatively correlated with reading. Some studies demonstrate that more frequent use of computers among low-achieving readers can hinder literacy progress, as computers tend to replace face-to-face instruction, which is critical in literacy development (Judge *et al.*, 2006).

Science

When a child experiences science-related courses early in life, he or she is found to be encouraged to ask questions, think more critically, experiment, develop his/her reasoning skills, read and write. Studies suggest that children become better problem solvers and even experience a raise in their IQ when they are taught principles of logic, hypothesis testing and other methods of reasoning. These dimensions are all tackled in science practices (Bybee and Kennedy, 2005).

Art and music

Arts can boost children's attention, improve cognition and help children learn to envision, *i.e.*, how to think about what they cannot see. The ability to envision can help a child generate a hypothesis in science later in life or imagine past events in history class. Intensive music training can help train children for geometry tasks and map reading. However, there is little attention in research to children's use of art and music practices and its effect on developmental outcomes (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Physical and health development

Motor skills, such as crawling, walking and gym classes or play time, are related to children's development of social skills and an understanding of social rules. Health education and hygiene practices are found to have positive effects for children and their parents. Children participating in ECEC programmes with specific hygiene and health guidelines have improved hygiene habits, which often result in healthy weight and height in comparison to children who do not benefit from such practices (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Play

It is important to integrate exploration, play and peer interaction into the curriculum. Evidence suggests that "social pretend play" and "child-initiated play" lead to better co-operation, self-regulation and interpersonal skills (Bodrova and Leong, 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Child-initiated play has been specifically linked to symbolic representation (Bodrova and Leong, 2010). Researchers point out that the combination of indoor and outdoor play – involving the use of media, role play, drawing and puppets – provides numerous high-quality development opportunities for children to create and negotiate (Aasen *et al.*, 2009).

Choice, self-determination and children's agency

Research shows that children are more competent and creative across a range of cognitive areas when they are given the *choice* to engage in different well-organised and age-appropriate activities (CCL, 2006). A curriculum can stimulate this behaviour through including cross-disciplinary learning activities that trigger children's curiosity. Fun and interesting themes, such as "Alive!" (the study of living vs. non-living things), can make learning more personal and relevant for young learners (NIEER, 2007). Implementing such activities in small groups can encourage greater autonomy (Eurydice, 2009; Laevers, 2011) and provides more space for spontaneous or emergent learning (NIEER, 2007). Children's participation is not only important in order to facilitate effective learning of different curriculum elements but can be important in its own right and foster democratic values. When placing value on children's agency, it is considered important that children are allowed freedom of expression and that their modes of communication are recognised in everyday interactions (Bae, 2009).

Children's perspectives

Research on ECEC curriculum confirms the importance of children's perspectives not only through their participation in activities – but through their active input in decision making (Broström, 2010; Clark *et al*., 2003; Sommer *et al.,* 2010). Evidence suggests that consultation with children (only when age-appropriate and possible) can increase their self-esteem and foster social competence (Clark *et al.,* 2003). It can also help ECEC staff and management reflect on their own practice and aspects such as the design of indoor and outdoor spaces (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson, 2008).

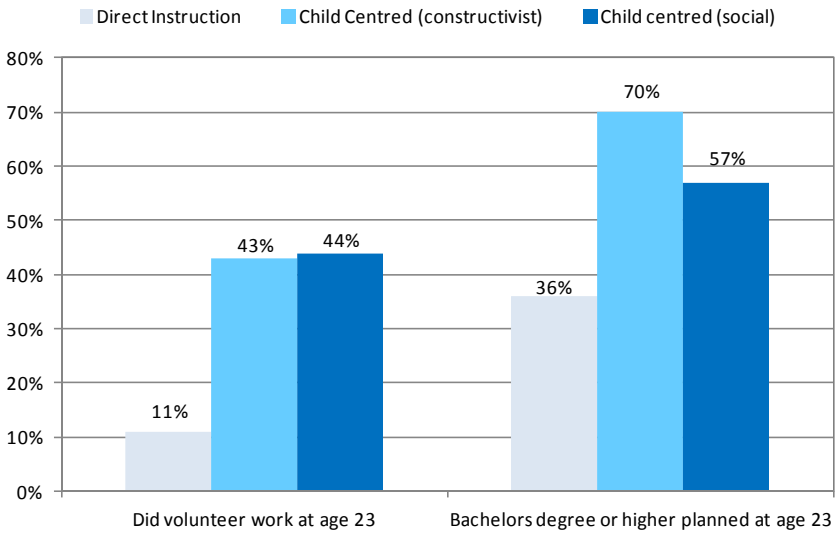
Child-initiated learning

Children learn best when they are active and engaged; when interactions are frequent and meaningful; and when curriculum builds on prior learning (Kagan and Kauerz, 2006; NIEER, 2007). The ability of staff to create a chain of learning events over time with clear direction and concrete activities is also important for consistent development, especially in academic topics (Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

Evidence suggests that a curriculum with a high level of child-initiated activities can have long-term benefits, including an increased level of community service and motivation to pursue higher education (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Impact of different curriculum models

On community involvement and motivation to pursue further studies



Notes: Results are from a study of different curriculum models' impact on disadvantaged children in New Jersey. The sample groups are randomly selected and have comparable socio-economic and other background characteristics. "Child Centred (constructivist)" is a High/Scope curriculum model, "Child Centred (social)" is a Nursery School programme with a focus on social skills. Both curriculum models place stronger weight on child-initiated activities.

Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Teacher-initiated learning

Research demonstrates that teacher-initiated learning (common in the academic approach) can reduce early knowledge gaps in literacy, language and numeracy. Numerous studies have concluded that high-quality academic programmes involving explicit teaching can have positive short-term effects on IQ scores, literacy and math (Pianta *et al*., 2009) (Table 1.1). These skills have been found to be strong predictors of subsequent achievement (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 2007). However, as pointed out above, child-initiated learning can have long-term benefits and is highly important for children's future social development. In order to maximise learning, development and social outcomes, it is suggested that ECEC curricula should combine child-initiated with teacher-initiated contents and activities (Sheridan, 2011; Sheridan *et al*., 2009).

What are the policy implications?

Adapting curricula to local circumstances

A greater extent of local adaptation of curricula can reinforce the relevance of ECEC services. This can be especially important when "national" values or ideas on early childhood development are not shared by all (Eurydice, 2009). Co-constructed responses developed in partnership with teachers, parents, children and communities can greatly enhance the local appropriateness of curriculum aims and objectives (OECD, 2001).

Designing curriculum based on cognitive and neurological science

Cognitive developmental science and neurological research indicate that children learn certain things at particular ages, in a certain sequence. The "peaks" of brain sensitivity may vary across functions/skills as follows (Figure 1.2) (Council Early Child Development, 2010):

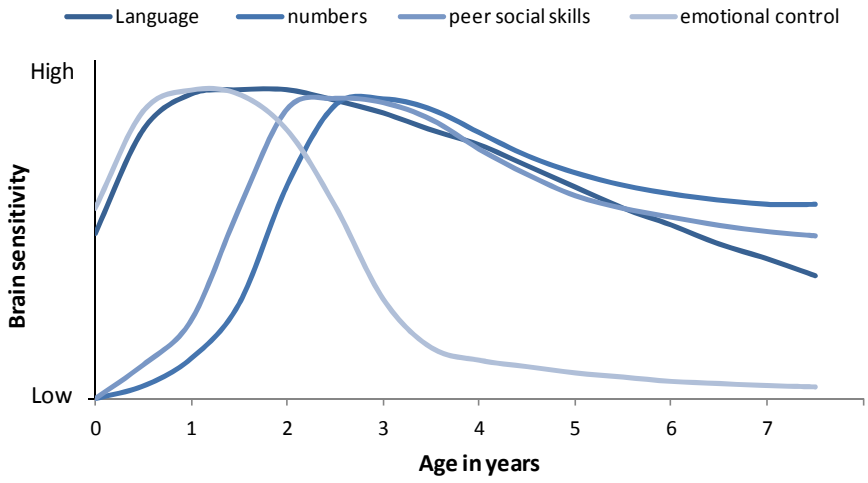
Emotional control and peer social skills

The brain sensitivity to development of emotional control starts from the middle level, increases to the high level from birth to around age one, and declines to the low level where it stays from age four. Peer social skills start with the low level, increase rapidly from ages one to two, gradually decrease and remain at a medium level from age four.

Language and numbers

Language development starts at the middle level, increases to the high level at around ages one to two, slightly decreases towards age four, and will continue to decrease towards the middle and low levels from then on. Numeracy starts with the low level, increases rapidly from ages one to three, gradually decreases but will be maintained at the high level from age four.

Figure 1.2. Sensitive periods in early brain development



Source: Council for Early Child Development (2010).

Recognising the "virtues" of complimentary curriculum models

In practice, comprehensive programmes are thought to better facilitate a child-centred environment where learning builds on existing knowledge from children's perspectives. Children's priorities can be identified in a number of ways, for instance, children can be engaged in taking photographs of the most important "things" in the classroom. Experiments like these have been able to identify the importance of friends, staff, food and outside play. Other information-gathering tools, such as interviews, questionnaires and role-play, reveal that children like to finish their activities and appreciate support for periods of transition between activities (Clark *et al*., 2003). Children can benefit from teacher-led interaction and formal instruction (Eurydice, 2009). However, play-based, as opposed to "drill-and-practice", curricula designed with the developmental needs of children in mind can be more effective in fostering the development of academic and attention skills in ways that are engaging and fun (Brooks-Gunn, 2007).

Considering national characteristics and ECEC structural factors

National characteristics and ECEC structural factors provide insight into the appropriateness of curriculum models. Where staff have little certification and training and ECEC provisions are fragmented, staff may benefit from added guidance and a more concrete curriculum. In

countries encouraging child-centred activities and giving space to staff to create local innovations and adaptations, a child-centred model requires practitioners to be adequately qualified and trained to balance wide-ranging (and more abstract) child development areas. Thus, the chosen curriculum must be coupled with adequate staff training, favourable working conditions and appropriate classroom materials (OECD, 2001; 2006).

Ensuring sufficient and appropriate staff training

To enhance children's learning and development, (additional) staff training is needed on curriculum in general, but also on specific areas in which staff might need additional training support, such as multicultural classroom management and adaptation of curriculum contents to diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Furthermore, in a rapidly changing society, knowledge on the use of ICT is becoming more relevant, which can also facilitate early development, especially in reading (Judge *et al*., 2006).

Ensuring that curriculum or standards are well-aligned for children aged zero to six and beyond

It is not only important that curriculum standards are present in ECEC environments but that they are well-aligned from ages zero to six, or even beyond: an aligned vision of ECEC contents can ensure more holistic and continuous child development.

What is still unknown?

Comparative advantage of different curriculum models

Table 1.1 compares the specific outcomes of "academic" and "comprehensive" curriculum models based on a selection of research findings. It remains unclear which of the two approaches produces the largest long-term benefits on health, college attendance, future earnings, etc. Geographical and political positioning has likely influenced the existing research: American researchers are more likely to support an academic ECEC approach, whereas the trend in Europe points to the importance of non-cognitive learning areas. More research is therefore needed to clarify the mixed research findings across different country-specific ECEC contexts.

Pedagogical strategies to support "play"

Most researchers agree that children's "play" is important for cognitive, social and emotional development. It has been traditionally integrated into subject-based learning, improving literacy, math and science outcomes. However, there is little differentiation between types of "play" (*e.g.*, social, pretend, object) that serve different developmental purposes. A lack of evidence leads many to unfairly separate play ("child-initiated games with no purpose") from curriculum ("teacher-initiated practices with useful benefits") (Bodrova and Leong, 2010).

Non-Western curriculum models and their effects

There is considerable literature on "academic" and "child-centred" curriculum models as seen in North America and Europe. But a Western child-centred curriculum focused on individual benefits can actually contradict other value systems, including those who privilege group interests (Kwon, 2004). Thus, there is a need to research and diffuse alternative national curriculum models that are locally adapted and implemented.

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CHAPTER 2

WHERE DOES THE CZECH REPUBLIC STAND COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

The Czech Republic's Framework Education Programme for Pre-school Education *(FEP PE) is a cogent document regarding the orientation and aims of ECEC. The framework covers a broad spectrum of subjects including academic and socio-emotional learning areas; sets out learning competencies and expected inputs from staff and management; recognises the importance of parental engagement; and emphasises the importance of good leadership and management for effective curriculum implementation.*

Capitalising upon its strengths, the Czech Republic could further enhance quality through its curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) reflecting on the coverage of the framework; 2) improving alignment with primary schooling; 3) reflecting upon content areas to respond to societal changes, such as revisited attention to health and well-being, the use of ICT in ECEC, and improved attention to cultural diversity and age-appropriateness; and 4) further improving the communication skills of staff for effective implementation and dissemination of the curriculum.

The Czech Republic's *Framework Education Programme for Pre-school Education* (FEP PE) is overall a well-described, comprehensive document that addresses aspects of early learning based on the country's values and beliefs. It is focused on education and early learning as well as teaching children knowledge and competencies. The framework covers academic subjects but also reflects on socio-emotional learning areas; it includes expected inputs from staff and management and learning competencies for child development. The framework also addresses what is required to accommodate parents and highlights the importance of strong leadership and management for curriculum implementation.

Strengths

Mapping or identifying children's needs, development and learning

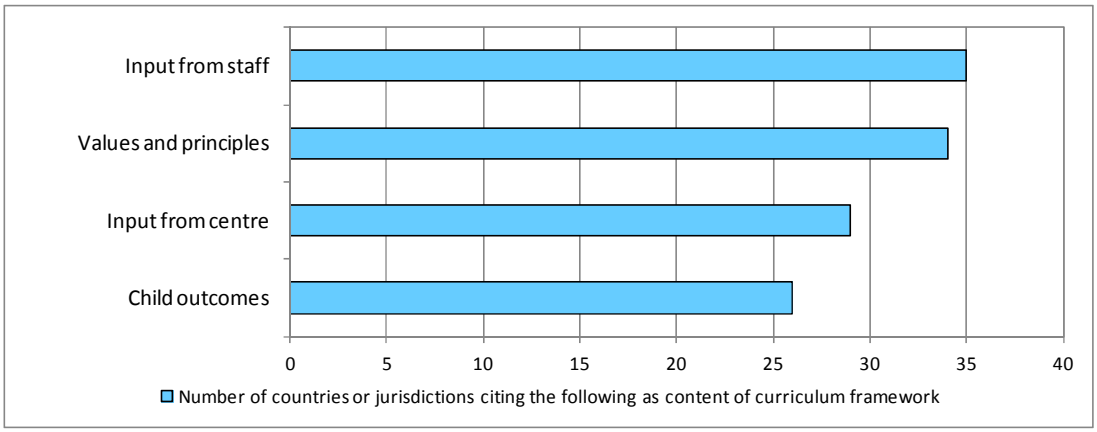
Curriculum descriptions can, in general, be categorised into "input"- or "outcome"-based approaches. Among OECD countries, fewer countries specify "child outcomes" and "input from the centres", while most ECEC curriculum frameworks include "input from staff", *i.e.*, specific requirements as to what is expected of ECEC staff (Figure 2.1). While Anglo-Saxon countries, including New Zealand and Scotland, favour the outcome-based approach, Nordic countries tend to avoid using the term "child outcomes".

The Czech Republic's FEP PE contains expected inputs from staff and management as well as expected outcomes for children. By setting child outcomes or developmental goals, staff can be supported in identifying children's needs and mapping children's development and learning processes. The framework explicitly states the importance of adapting activities and learning, as well as outcomes, to the capacity and needs of the individual child. The expected outcomes describe general aims in a range of development 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. For each of the areas, outcomes (competencies) have been established.

These competencies are phrased in terms of learning competencies, problem-solving competencies, communication skills, social and personal skills, and active participation in activities. The concept and content is based on values and ideas generally accepted and shared by the Czech society, which are regarded as important for development.

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* and Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* also specify expected child outcomes in addition to input from service providers and staff. New Zealand focuses largely on developmental process outcomes and little on actual child outcomes in terms of precisely what a child should know at a certain age, whereas the Scottish curriculum does focus on the latter. Norway's curriculum framework has a strong focus on input: the values and principles that guide the curriculum and practice, expected inputs from staff, tasks or activities to be carried out by staff, and learning areas to address; and it does not address any child outcomes. Norway has a stronger focus on holistic child well-being, rather than on the educational aspects of ECEC.

Figure 2.1. Approaches of ECEC curriculum[1]



Note: Respondents may list more than one content category.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Identifying and addressing special needs

In addressing how to map and adapt ECEC programmes to children's individual or special needs, staff is better informed of what practices are important in helping furthering the development of these children. Besides, it can contribute to identifying the needs of children. The Czech Republic's framework is the only one, compared to New Zealand, Norway and Scotland, which pays particular attention to the special needs of children. Large attention is placed on children with disabilities, and some attention is given to the needs of gifted children. The framework contains information to help staff identify special needs as well as suggested activities and programme adaptation to accommodate these.

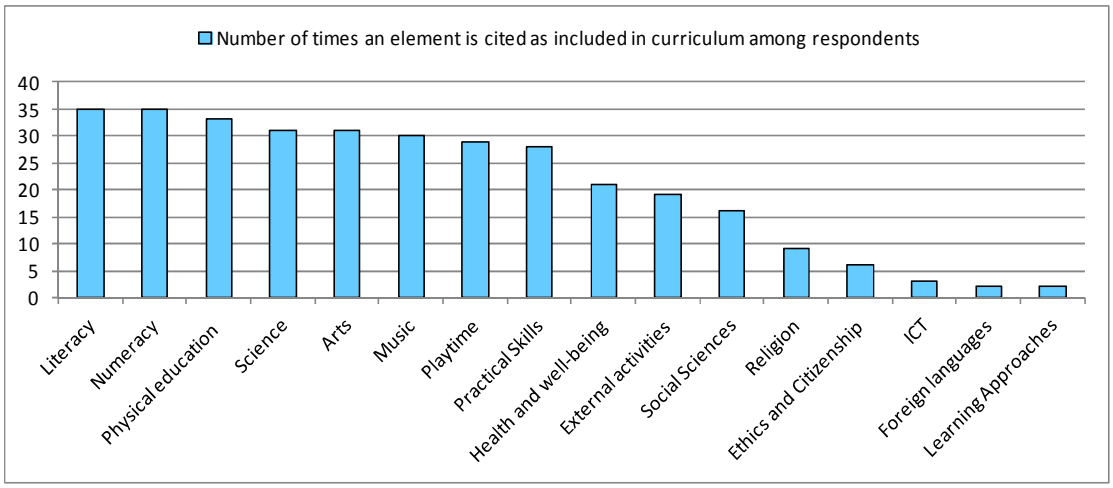
Well-balanced content covering cognitive and socio-emotional subject areas

The Czech Republic's framework includes academic-oriented learning subjects, such as literacy and language learning, math and science. However, the development of socio-emotional skills is also addressed in framework. There is a wide consensus on the importance of academic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, for children in ECEC. As indicated, the Czech Republic includes these in their curriculum; and New Zealand, Norway and Scotland also include these two items in their curriculum or framework (Figure 2.2).

"Arts" and "music" are other common subjects included in curriculum frameworks. All countries (including the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Scotland) include both curriculum areas. Each country also addresses practical skills in its framework, although not always as a separate subject in itself but integrated in or interwoven with other subjects, such as physical health, a subject area included in each country's framework.

The Czech Republic and New Zealand do not prescribe "religion" as a specific subject area in their curricula, whereas Norway and Scotland do. The Czech Republic's framework addresses the principles that guide ECEC programmes, which are based on Czech history and societal values; and the framework indicates that children should learn to understand and respect the norms and values held by society. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* addresses the values and expectations society holds with a learning strand dedicated to belonging and highlights the important of children being comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events in their environment, from their own and other cultures.

Figure 2.2. Content areas included in ECEC curriculum[2]



Note: Respondents may list more than one element. See Annex for definitions and methodology for data collection.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Recognition of the role of play in child development

Play has many forms of expression and can lead to understanding and friendship across age groups and linguistic and cultural barriers. Through playful interactions with each other, foundations for learning and social competence can be made. 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 (Figure 2.2).

The Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Scotland include "playtime" as a separate curriculum element but also emphasise that play is integral to learning and development. The Czech Republic's framework states that teaching should include subjects and activities that appeal to children. It also emphasises that teacher-initiated activities should be well-balanced with child-initiated activities. Child-initiated play is regarded as important since it stimulates children's curiosity and "natural way of learning".

Norway's framework gives play a "prominent role in life at kindergartens": indoor and outdoor exploration form the basis of early child development and contribute to the holistic development of a child. A strong recognition of children's agency and an appreciation of the value of "being a child" influence the Norwegian curriculum. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* gives the opportunity for open-ended exploration and regards play as an effective learning strategy.

Furthermore, the Czech Republic and Norway prescribe activities for outside of the centre, whereas New Zealand and Scotland do not (Figure 2.2.).

Addressing inclusion of parents in the curriculum

Democratic partnership and parental engagement are important aspects of ECEC curricula: parents can be an important source of constructive feedback and input to ECEC programmes. Co-operation between preschools and parents ensures that children receive the opportunity of developing in accordance with children's potential.

Curricula in the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Scotland note that preschools should help families by supporting them in their role of raising children, helping them grow and develop. In the Czech Republic and New Zealand, it is a legal obligation for ECEC

centres to engage parents in ECEC. In the Czech Republic, New Zealand and Norway, parents have the possibility to be involved in decision-making processes. In the Czech Republic, this includes giving parents the opportunity to participate in developing the education programme of the preschool and to discuss the programme content (Table 2.1).

Regarding parental inclusion, the Czech Republic's framework specifically lists conditions that need to be fulfilled for parental participation in ECEC. Among the conditions is that kindergarten programmes are expected to encourage family education, assisting parents in upbringing and consulting them on child development, and that ECEC staff should create a relationship of mutual trust and openness with parents.

Table 2.1. Engagement of parents in ECEC

Making it a legal obligation	Making it a parental right	Putting it in a policy paper	Involving parents in decision making	Allowing parents to be providers
Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Japan*, Netherlands*, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal*, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Czech Republic, Norway, Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovenia, Spain, Sweden	New Zealand, Norway, Slovak Republic	Australia, Belgium, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Belgium, Germany, Manitoba (CAN), Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Sweden

Notes: "Making it a legal obligation" means that ECEC services are obliged to provide opportunities for parents to be engaged in ECEC, or they are obliged to accept the engagement of parents. For Japan and Portugal, "Making it a legal obligation" only applies to kindergartens/preschools; and for the Netherlands, it only applies to child care.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Recognition of the importance of leadership and management for effective implementation

Although there is an increasing need for the development of leadership skills in many OECD countries, leadership has received only intermittent attention by early childhood theorists and researchers. Additionally, there might be a lack of awareness among ECEC staff and managers of the importance of leadership and management skills. However, leadership is of great relevance in ensuring high-quality ECEC provision and good implementation of the curriculum, as leadership strengthens staff performance.

ECEC staff in the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Scotland can follow professional development training on planning and management. Aspects of leadership are also included in the initial education of ECEC staff in most OECD countries. However, very few countries address the importance of leadership and management in their curriculum, and only a small number of countries (including the Czech Republic and Scotland) indicate what is expected from management in addition to what is expected from ECEC staff. The Czech Republic's framework includes a section dedicated to the importance of kindergarten management. It emphasises the relevant role of management in creating a positive work atmosphere; and it describes the expected tasks and roles of the headmaster and other staff in managing positions, the importance of motivating staff and the purpose and goals of evaluating staff performance.

Potential areas for reflection

Curriculum design is a highly political and domestic matter, so international comparison needs to be interpreted with caution. Therefore, it is important to be reminded that the following potential areas for reflection are identified as a result of desk-based international comparison without stakeholder's views, such as through a country visit, due to the constraints of the working methods involved.

Curriculum coverage

The Czech Republic operates a "split" system in which the Ministry of Health Care is responsible for child care and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports governs early education. Many countries with a split system have created a learning framework for children in the older age bracket of ECEC only: from around age two-and-a-half or three to compulsory schooling. This is the case in the Czech Republic as well: the Czech Republic's *Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education* covers children from the ages of three to six (compulsory primary schooling age).

New Zealand, Norway and Scotland have an integrated ECEC system under one lead ministry. These three jurisdictions seek to integrate education and care in order to provide holistic child development. The integrated approach to ECEC is reflected in the use of a single curriculum framework covering children from birth until compulsory education. Scotland stands out with a curriculum going beyond the start of compulsory education; its *Curriculum for Excellence* covers all children from the age of three until the age of 18 (Figure 2.3). They also have guidelines in place for ECEC staff working with the youngest children (zero-to-three-year-olds). This age group is covered in the frameworks of Norway and New Zealand.

However, the Czech Republic does not have a curriculum framework or staff guidelines in place for staff working with the youngest children, aged zero to three. A framework or guidelines can support staff in improving classroom quality; strengthen their caring and educational skills; and support them in optimally making use of the opportunities to stimulate early child development. The research section (Chapter 1) also points out that it creates more confidence in the staff's ability to do their job well.

Curriculum alignment

The Czech Republic's framework for preschools is part of the general education system and is based on the same principles and objectives as other branches of the educational system. However, there are few explicit links to primary education in the document.

Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* has a strong link with primary schooling: the curriculum covers children aged three to 18 and aligns all curriculum subjects over this age range while ensuring that subject areas are adapted to children's ages. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* explicitly links each subject area to the primary school curriculum. These links clearly describe what children are expected to do in primary school, how this relates to the experiences in ECEC and what activities staff can implement to facilitate this transition. This can smoothen the transition from one early education provision to another. Neither the Czech Republic nor Norway provides this extent of practical advice on alignment between ECEC and primary education in their frameworks. Additionally, the Czech Republic's framework does not indicate what is expected of staff with regard to specific curriculum subjects: there is little clear indication on what staff should teach or which activities per curriculum subject can stimulate child development.

Figure 2.3. Coverage of ECEC curriculum frameworks or guidelines by age group

	Standards/curriculum for Care
	Standards/curriculum for Education and/or Education and Care
	No standard curriculum is in place for the specified age group
	Compulsory schooling

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Australia	Belonging, Being, Becoming - Early Years Learning Framework for Australia							
Austria								
Belgium (Flemish Comm.)			2.5y	Ontwikkelingsdoelen				
Belgium (French Comm.)			2.5y					
Canada (British Columbia)	British Columbia Early Learning Framework for 0-5 year olds					British Columbia Early Learning Framework for 5-6 year olds		
Canada (Manitoba)			Early Returns Curriculum					
						Manitoba Kindergarten Curriculum		
Canada (Prince Edward Island)	Early Learning Framework							
Czech Republic				Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education				
Denmark	Preschool curriculum Læreplaner							
Estonia		1.5y	Framework Curriculum of Preschool Education					
Finland	National curriculum guidelines on early childhood education						Core Curriculum for Pre-primary education	
France			2.5y	National curriculum for école maternelle				
Germany (Baden-Württemberg)	Orientierungsplan für Bildung und Erziehung für die baden-württembergischen Kindergärten						up to 10	
Germany (Bavaria)	Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung von Kindern in den ersten drei Lebensjahren			Der Bayerische Bildungs- und Erziehungsplan für Kinder in Tageseinrichtungen bis zur Einschulung				
Germany (Berlin)	Berliner Bildungsprogramm für die Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung von kindern in Tageseinrichtungen bis zu ihrem Schuleintritt							
Germany (Brandenburg)	Grundsätze der Förderung elementarer Bildung in Einrichtungen der Kindertagesbetreuung in Brandenburg							
Germany (Bremen)	Rahmenplan für Bildung und Erziehung im Elementarbereich							
Germany (Hamburg)	Hamburger Bildungsempfehlungen für die Bildung und Erziehung von Kindern in Tageseinrichtungen						up to 15	
Germany (Hesse)	Bildungs- und Erziehungsplans für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Hessen						up to 10	
Germany (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)	Bildungskonzeption für 0- bis 10-jährige Kinder in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern						up to 10	
Germany (Lower Saxony)	Orientierungsplan für Bildung und Erziehung im Elementarbereich niedersächsischer Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder							
Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia)	Mehr Chancen durch Bildung von Anfang an - Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen						up to 10	
Germany (Rhineland-Palatinate)	Bildungs- und Erziehungsempfehlungen für Kindertagesstätten in Rheinland-Pfalz						up to 15	
Germany (Saarland)	Bildungsprogramm für saarländische Kindergärten							
Germany (Saxony)	Sächsischer Bildungsplan - ein Leitfaden für pädagogische Fachkräfte in Krippen, Kindergärten und Horten sowie für Kinderttagespflege						up to 10	
Germany (Saxony-Anhalt)	Bildungsprogramm für Kindertageseinrichtungen in Sachsen-Anhalt							
Germany (Schleswig-Holstein)	Erfolgreich starten: Leitlinien zum Bildungsauftrag in Kindertageseinrichtungen						up to 15	
Germany (Thuringia)	Thüringer Bildingsplan für Kinder bis 10 Jahre						up to 10	

Figure 2.3. Coverage of ECEC curriculum frameworks or guidelines by age group (continued)

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hungary				National Core Programme of Kindergarten				
Ireland	Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Aistear							
Israel				Framework Programme for preschool				
Italy	3 months			Guidelines for the curriculum				
Japan				Course of Study for Kindergarten				
	National curriculum of day care centers							
Korea				National curriculum for kindergarten		Nuri Curriculum		
	Standardized childcare curriculum							
Luxembourg				Le plan d'études				
Mexico	Childcare curriculum			Early childhood education curriculum				
Netherlands			2.5y	Development goals/competences				
New Zealand	Te Whāriki							
Norway	Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens							
Poland				Core Curriculum for Preschool Education				
Portugal				The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education				
Slovak Republic				The National Education Programme				
Slovenia		National Curriculum for Pre-school Institutions						
Spain	Early Childhood Curriculum							
Sweden		Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98					Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet Lgr 11	
Turkey				Pre-school education programme				
United Kingdom (England)	Statutory Framework for the Eary Years Foundation Stage							
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Pre-birth to three - staff guidelines			Curriculum for Excellence		up to 18		
United States (Georgia)			Georgia's Pre-K Content Standards					
United States (Massachusetts)				Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences				
United States (North Carolina)				Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies to Guide Their				
United States (Oklahoma)				Priority Academic Student Skills				

Notes: 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.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Reflection on the importance of age-appropriateness

The starting point for most OECD countries regarding children's learning and their development is the experience children have already gained, their interests, motivation and their ambition to acquire knowledge. To be able to build on this, the age-appropriateness of activities and subjects is highly important. However, the Czech Republic does not reflect much on the age-appropriateness of activities or curriculum topics. Little guidance and recommendations are given in its framework on how to adapt children's activities and learning to their age, as not all children aged three to six can cover the same subjects in similar manners or conduct similar activities.

New Zealand specifically prescribes different activities for and expectations towards children according to the age group they belong to. The Scottish curriculum also prescribes different guidelines for different age groups within ECEC. Both the Czech and Norwegian curricula delegate this task to ECEC centres to a further extent, giving providers large flexibility in adapting the framework to the national guidelines. This requires strong staff competences and skills, as they will have to adapt subjects and activities to the age of their children with little support or guidance from the framework.

Respect for cultural diversity and social integration

In almost all OECD countries, the number of foreign-born residents has increased between 1990 and 2010 (Figure 2.4, Panel A). The size and composition of the immigrant population, as well as the impetus of the increase, vary across countries.

The proportion of immigrants is relatively low in the Czech Republic, it increased from 4.1% in 1990 to 4.4% in 2010. However, the figure is on the rise.

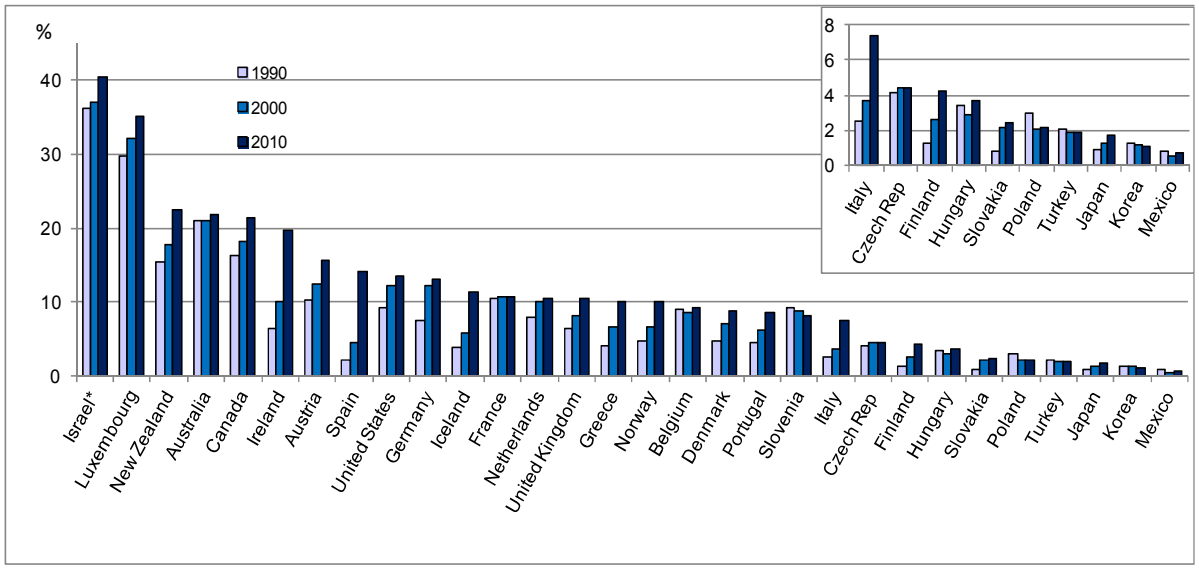
The internationalisation of societies imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. Preschools and care centres are important social and cultural meeting places that can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalised community. Awareness of cultural heritage and learning about the culture of others can contribute to children's ability to understand and empathise with the circumstances and values of others.

The framework in New Zealand is developed around the idea of "community" and "biculturalism". New Zealand centres their ECEC curriculum on the recognition of different social and cultural contexts, addressing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country's population where Māori children have the possibility to be educated in their native Māori language. Norway's framework pays attention to the importance of recognising and respecting other cultures and different values. In the Czech Republic's framework, little attention is paid to this, although the Czech societal and cultural values are well explained and regarded as highly important.

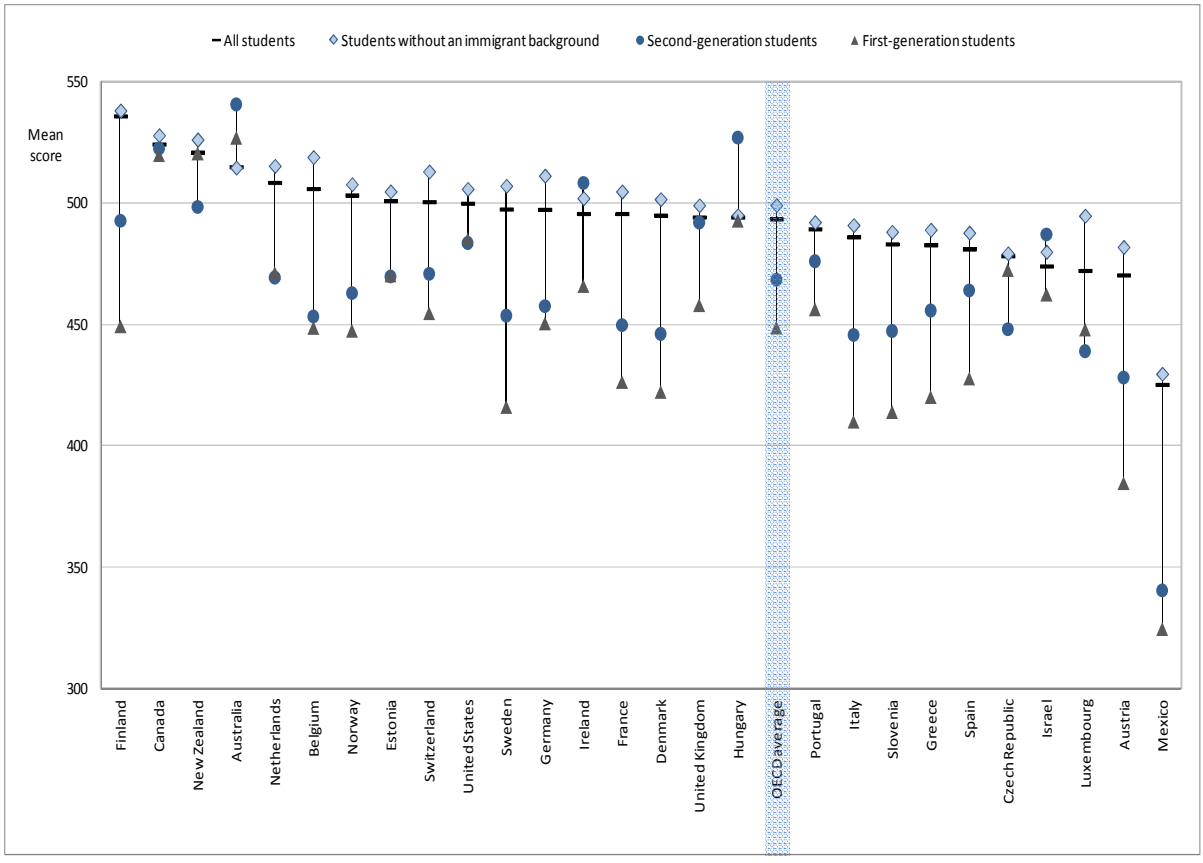
While countries are becoming increasingly multi-cultural with possible issues related to integration or "a feeling of belonging", most countries do not address such subjects in their curriculum. Belonging, however, is a topic that receives great attention in New Zealand's curriculum, while in the Czech Republic's framework, issues of belonging and multiculturalism do not receive much attention.

Figure 2.4. Immigrant population

Panel A. Trends of international migrants, as a percentage of the total population



Panel B. Reading performance, by immigrant status



Notes: For Panel A, international migrants are defined as individuals whose country of birth is not that in which they reside. Statlink: *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932320732*. For Panel B, countries are ranked in descending order of the mean score of all students.

Source: For Panel A, United Nations Population Division (2008), International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision, online version, http://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp?panel=1, accessed June 2010 from OECD (2010), *Trends shaping education 2010*. For Panel B, OECD PISA 2009 Database, Table II.4.1.

Reflection upon content areas in response to the changing needs of society

The Czech Republic's framework addresses emerging curriculum topics of increasing relevance related to healthy socio-emotional development; however, the contents could be re-visited regularly to better capture the changing needs of the society.

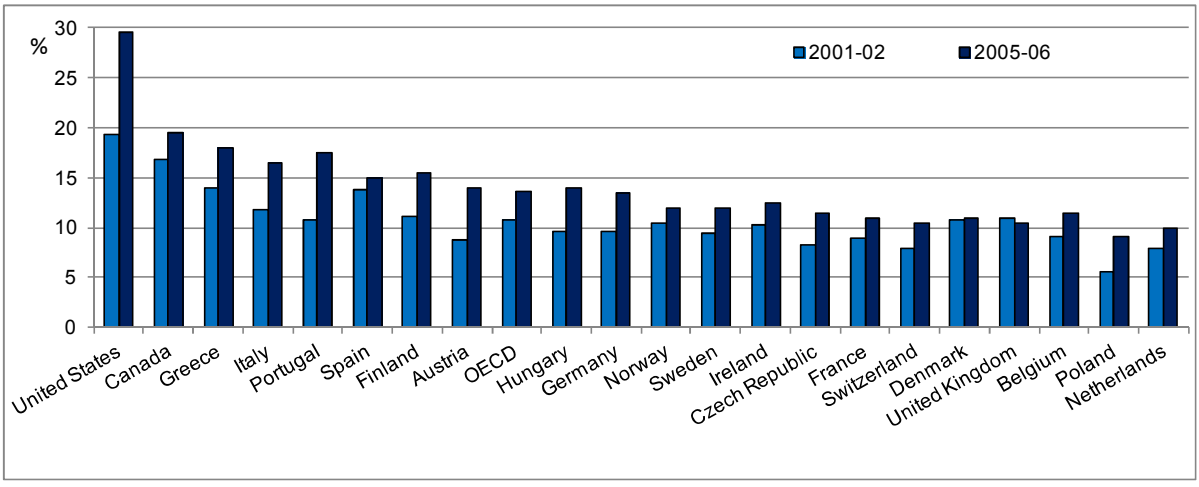
Health and well-being

Child obesity is one factor that affects child well-being, and in many countries, it is on the rise (Figure 2.5). In 2005-06, between 10-30% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries were considered obese, while this was between 8-19% five years earlier. The Czech Republic's obesity rate among 15-year-olds increased from 8.3% in 2001-02 to 11.5% in 2005-06. This is below the OECD average, but it increased over time.

These figures indicate that families and children have a less healthy lifestyle and might exercise less than they did a decade ago. Research found that when children (and parents) are educated about hygiene, health and physical exercise, this improves children's early physical development. While the Czech Republic includes subjects related to "physical education" in its ECEC framework and gives guidelines regarding children's nutrition, the approach or contents could be re-visited, thinking ahead and considering the rising obesity rates. Furthermore, consideration can be given to including "health and well-being" among prescribed curriculum content areas and to include parents in these subject areas by teaching them about health issues or having them involved when teaching children such important aspects.

Figure 2.5. Child obesity going up

Percentage of 15-year-olds suffering from obesity



Source: OECD (2009), *Health at a Glance 2009*; OECD Indicators from OECD (2010), *Trends shaping education 2010*.

ICT

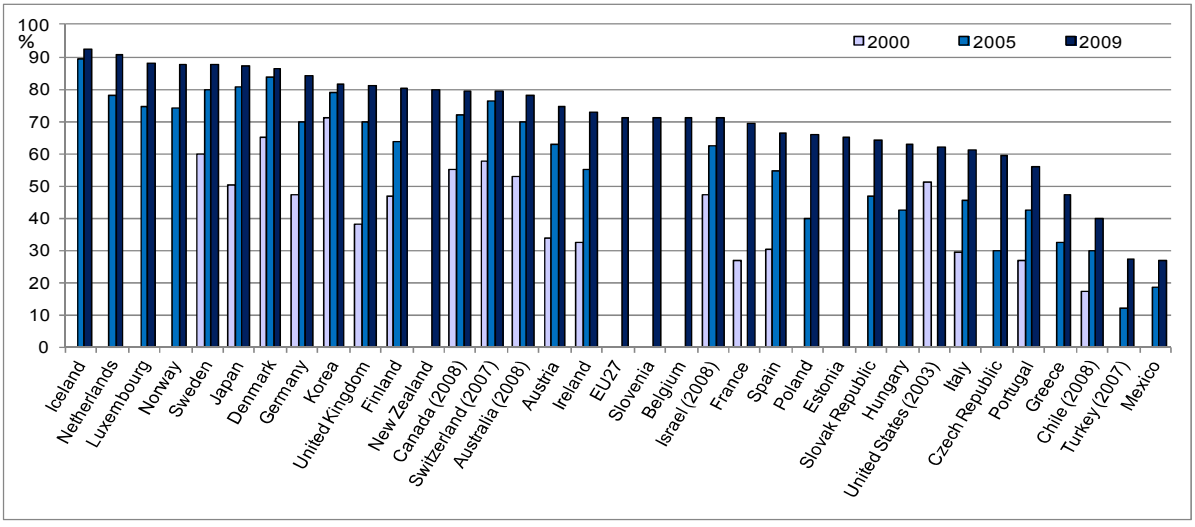
Information and communication technology (ICT) has developed rapidly over the past 40 years. ICT has now become part of our everyday lives. Access to computers at home grew rapidly in OECD countries between 2000 and 2009, although discrepancies can be observed across different countries (Figure 2.7). Computers and ICT have profound potential to impact how people live, learn and work. If used wisely, ICT can foster many benefits, including helping children visualise abstract issues or learn how to read. It fosters children's technological skills, and children are expected to have a minimum of ICT knowledge and literacy when entering the labour market.

In the Czech Republic, about 60% of households have access to a computer, and this figure is increasing rapidly. In Norway, the availability of home computers in households is high (close to 90%). In New Zealand and the United Kingdom, a large majority of households (80%) have access to a computer at home.

Only few countries have incorporated ICT and technology into their ECEC curriculum, including New Zealand (Figure 2.6). In the Czech Republic, this is not a topic prescribed in the national preschool curriculum framework, but individual ECEC centres might include it in their own curriculum plan. Due to the increasing importance of familiarity with ICT, the profound influence ICT has on lives and careers, and the advantages computer-based learning brings for early development, it is becoming of great importance for staff in preschools to be trained on ICT.

Figure 2.6. The use of ICT (including PC, portable and handhelds)

Households with access to computer at home as percentage of all households



Note: Generally, data from the EU Community Survey on household use of ICT, which covers EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Turkey, relate to the first quarter of the reference year. For the Czech Republic, data relate to the fourth quarter of the reference year. *Statlink*: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932321530.

Source: OECD, ICT database and Eurostat, Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, July 2010.

Staff communication skills

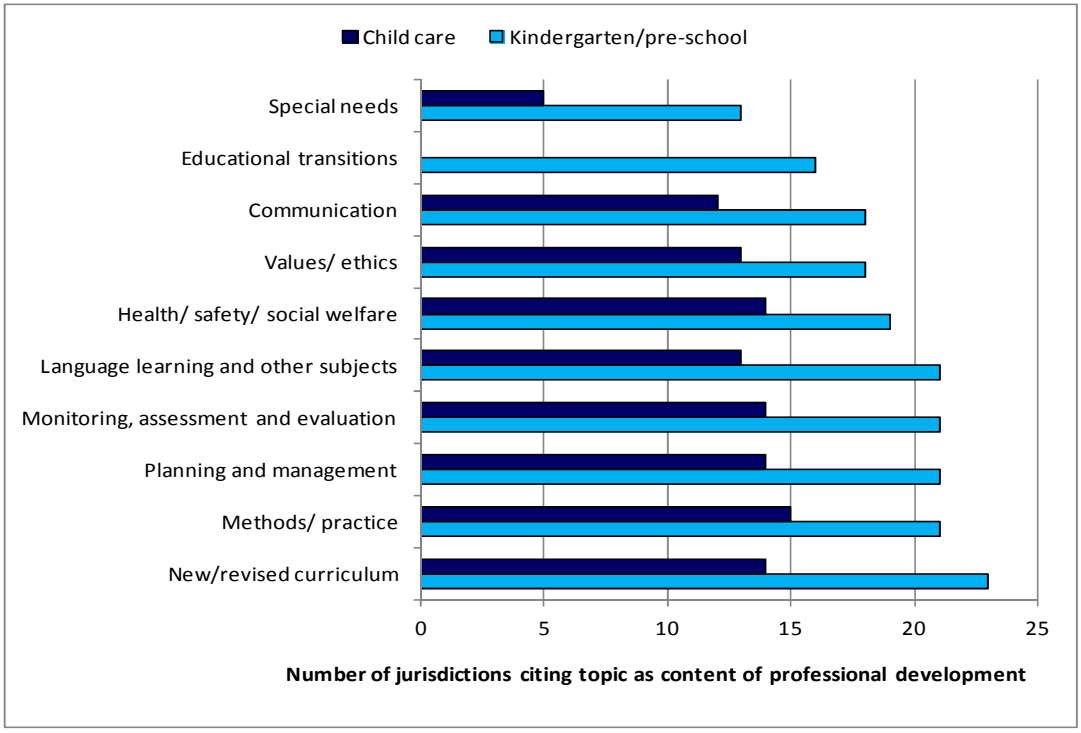
ECEC staff require strong skills in how to communicate not only with colleagues on issues arising on the job but also with parents to discuss their child's development.

Communication with parents can improve staff's skills to implement curriculum and improve their playroom or classroom practices and skills. Additionally, parents who are well-informed of their child's or centre's curriculum are more likely to use aspects of the curriculum in the home. Oftentimes, parents are dependent on ECEC staff to hear about the centre's activities, routines in the playroom or classroom, and the curriculum. Little information on this might be available elsewhere, and they might not even know where to find it. Developing staff members' communication skills can encourage meaningful interactions between staff and between staff and parents with possible beneficial outcomes for both children's and staff's development.

The Czech Republic offers in-service training on "communication" for kindergarten staff, whereas most countries, including New Zealand and Norway, do not (Figure 2.7). However,

such training might not address communicating with parents. Since parental inclusion is an important aspect in the Czech Republic's framework and is recognised by research as an important aspect of stimulating child development, furthering staff skills on how to communicate with parents – especially immigrant parents or parents with a low socio-economic background – might be useful for staff in ECEC centres.

Figure 2.7. Content of professional development[3]



Notes: Countries were given a range of topics to select from, including the possibility to list topics not mentioned in the selection. Answers indicating "other" without specifying which topic was referred to with "other" are not included in this figure. Countries with an integrated ECEC system who indicated that the subjects of professional development were similar for the whole ECEC sector/ECEC age range: responses have been included in both "child care" and "kindergarten/preschool" since the content of professional development refers to the whole ECEC age range, including ECEC workers with younger children (herein referred to as "child care").

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

NOTES

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, 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.

3 For kindergarten/preschool, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. For child care, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Finland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Spain and Sweden.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGS AND STRATEGIES?

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC curriculum are: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment.

The Czech Republic has made several efforts to tackle these challenges by, for example, explaining the expected tasks and purposes of preschools; encouraging family engagement and participation in ECEC to improve the alignment between learning at home and in the preschool; including example activities, actions and practices for staff in the framework; and implementing self-assessment practices used for improving staff quality. To further their efforts, the Czech Republic could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand, Norway and Scotland, such as developing age-appropriate content based on children's needs; having a common framework covering the entire ECEC age range; improving working conditions or providing practical tools to stimulate effective implementation; and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum framework.

This chapter aims to identify alternatives the Czech Republic could consider when facing challenges in curriculum revision and implementation. It first describes common challenges faced by countries and then presents the different approaches the Czech Republic has been using to tackle the challenges. Lastly, it identifies strategies New Zealand, Norway and Scotland have undertaken.

Common challenges

The OECD international survey on quality has identified four common challenges that countries face in designing, revising and implementing a curriculum framework: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment.

Defining goals and content

When designing a curriculum framework, guidelines or standards, the goals of ECEC have to be defined as well as the actual content of the curriculum. Defining these is a challenge in many OECD countries due to the different visions of stakeholders of what the curriculum should aim at and include. Policy makers, researchers, ECEC professionals and parents consider different subjects to be important, and each has their own cultural values and ideas about early development. Aligning curriculum goals and content with the current and future needs of society at large can be challenging, especially with changes, such as increasing migration and advances in information and knowledge economies.

Most countries set out goals, guiding principles and content in their curriculum framework or guidelines explicitly stating the aims of the country's ECEC services, curriculum, the roles of different actors involved in ECEC, and the subjects prescribed at national level. This is most often a result of intensive consultations with the different stakeholders in ECEC.

Curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Ensuring continuous child development from birth to primary education is a key challenge in countries with a "split system" where child care and early education are administered by different ministries. In these countries, a lack of a curriculum framework for children aged zero to three is often non-existent; or if it exists, is not aligned with the curriculum for children aged three to six. The rationale of the split system is often attributed to differences between the two sectors, such as historical roots, different goals and focus on contents.

Ensuring smooth transition from ECEC to primary education is also a challenge in integrated systems like in New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. Teaching approaches and practices that children experience are often disconnected in ECEC settings and compulsory schooling.

Effective communication and implementation

Gaining wide support for curriculum and implementation is a challenge faced by many countries. Without "buy-in" from those who are to implement a change or a new idea, any reform may fail. And the "buy-in" or "consensus" cannot be built – without sufficient and strategic consultation – at the implementation stage.

It is also a challenge to implement the change or new idea without support. The kind of support required for effective implementation depends on various characteristics of the staff as well as contexts.

Furthermore, preparing conditions for staff to effectively implement the curriculum is another challenge. Insufficient guidelines and resources are likely to enhance difficulties, especially for inexperienced, new staff or staff with lower qualifications. Certain working environments, such as having too many children to look after, may hinder practising the pedagogy guided in the curriculum.

Monitoring or evaluation of effective implementation at the programme level is another challenge for national governments.

Systematic evaluation and assessment

Determining a curriculum's effectiveness and relevance is challenging for many countries due to a lack of capacity at the policy level for conducting evaluations, collecting valid, informative, credible information and data, and assessment procedures and instruments that combine efficiency and being informative.

The Czech Republic's efforts

The Czech Republic has made considerable efforts to tackle the challenges.

To better define goals and content

Setting out clear curriculum goals and guiding principles

In the Czech Republic, in 2004, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports published the *Framework Education Programme for Pre-school Education* (FEP PE), which corresponds to new studies of the development of preschool-aged children. The FEP PE 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 PE 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 PE, each school develops its own educational programme in accordance with its special conditions (an obligation since September 2007).

Clarifying the tasks of preschool education

The Czech Republic's FEP PE explains the expected tasks and purposes of preschools. Preschool education is expected to enrich the preschool child's daily routine in a meaningful way and provide them with professional care. Its aim is to make sure the first steps of the child's learning are built on sophisticated, professional, human and socially valuable foundations and that the time spent in kindergarten is a happy and pleasant experience for the child as well as a source of good and reliable bases for life and education.

Preschool education aims to facilitate the child's journey through life and education. Its task is to develop the child's personality; support their physical development, health, personal satisfaction and well-being; assist the child in understanding of the surrounding world; motivate them to further learn and study; and teach the child to live in a society, acquainting them with the rules and values recognised by this society. An important task of preschool education is to create a solid foundation for the child's further education by supporting in all circumstances individual development capabilities of children, so that when leaving the kindergarten, each child has reached the ideal level of knowledge and development.

Setting out key competencies for children

The Czech Republic's *Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education* (FEP PE) sets out key competencies, or child outcomes. These competencies are phrased in terms of learning competencies, problem-solving competencies, communication skills, social and personal skills, and active participation in activities. The concept and content is based on values and ideas generally accepted and shared by the Czech society about competencies that contribute to learning, ensuring happy and successful lives, and strengthening democracy and civil society. These competencies comprise sets of activity-oriented and practical outputs that complement each other. The competencies are set only for children finishing preschool education, but children are not being assessed or tested on these competencies. Whenever children do not meet the competencies set out in the FEP PE, it does not have any consequences on a child's possibility to start primary education.

Provide possibilities for preschools to implement their own programme

The FEP PE defines a common framework that must be followed. It is open to all schools, teachers and children, establishing conditions for each school, teaching staff, expert working group, professional association or any individual teacher to create and implement their own school education programme in line with the framework. The FEP PE indicates that in order to stimulate correct implementation and support of the preschool's individual programme, the headmaster should include the ECEC staff in the design process.

The FEP PE describes which aspects or information should be included in every preschool's individual programme. These include kindergarten's identification data (*e.g.*, location, name, headmaster of the preschool); general characteristics of the school (*e.g.*, number of classes); educational conditions (*e.g.*, material equipment, management, personnel, information on parental participation); the organisation of education (*e.g.*, age of children, methods applied); characteristics of the education programme (*e.g.*, the educational aims and objectives, how the preschool aims at fulfilling these); educational content (*e.g.*, specific educational offer linked to the objectives and aims); the evaluation system (*e.g.*, what will be evaluated, how often and in what way). Each preschool programme can be based on educational philosophies, such as Montessori and Waldorf, as long as it is aligned with the FEP PE.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Encouraging family engagement and participation to align home learning with ECEC learning

Parental participation in preschool education is regarded as highly important in the Czech Republic. The framework indicates that this contributes to a better understanding of child development and can contribute to staff performance and their practices. Parents are encouraged to be involved in designing the kindergarten's programme, based on the framework, since parents have a particular and often more extensive knowledge of the development process of their children. Preschools in the Czech Republic also offer consulting services and various educational activities regarding the upbringing and development of young children, which informs parents about how to raise children and stimulate their development. These forms of parental engagement can also contribute to implementation of the curriculum in the home environment – extending the learning in ECEC services to the home.

For effective communication and implementation

Making the curriculum framework a binding document

With the new Education Act of 2004 (Act No. 561/2004 Coll. on Preschool, Elementary, Secondary, Higher Vocational and Other Education – Education Act), the Czech Republic's *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* became binding not only for preschool teachers but also for providers of education institutions and their professional and social partners. This ensures that everyone working in preschools implements the framework.

Including examples of activities, actions and practices for preschool staff

The Czech Republic's framework programme includes, for each of its five curriculum areas, examples of activities and actions staff can implement to reach the objectives of that particular area and stimulate the development of early competencies. The programme describes clear examples of expected outputs for each of its five areas and identifies some "risks". Risks are staff behaviours and actions that can form an obstacle in reaching the objectives and children's development.

Emphasising the importance of management

The framework includes a section dedicated to the importance of kindergarten management. This section emphasises the relevant role of management in creating a positive work atmosphere and describes the expected tasks and roles of the headmaster and other staff in managing positions as well as the importance of motivating staff and evaluating staff performance. Very few countries include such information in their curriculum, although management and leadership are of crucial importance in stimulating child development and improving workforce quality.

Setting out material, health and social conditions for ECEC provisions

The framework indicates the material, health and social conditions for kindergartens and explains under which minimum conditions kindergartens should function to optimise child development and staff practice. Material conditions refers to, *e.g.*, space, furniture, tools, toys and outdoor areas. The health conditions indicate that children should get a balanced diet, have a daily rhythm, should play outdoor, that there is time for rest and sleep, and that staff should set the right example by living a healthy lifestyle. Lastly, the social conditions refer to equal treatment of children's freedom, teacher-initiated and child-initiated learning and activities, showing mutual trust and being polite. These conditions indicate what the Czech Republic regards as important in ECEC and explains to staff how quality can be enhanced and what is expected of them and the ECEC setting.

Including a glossary in the framework programme

To ensure all ECEC staff, as well as other readers of the framework, understand the content, a glossary of terms is included in the document. Every term or concept which underlies the framework has been further explained to clarify its meaning.

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Implementing self-assessment practices in ECEC

The framework dedicates a section to self-evaluation and assessment in preschool. Self-evaluation is a method used in the Czech Republic for staff feedback and improvement. The framework states that self-evaluation is a process of continuous evaluation of educational activities, situations and educational conditions, which are carried out in the kindergarten.

Information gained through self-evaluations provides feedback to teachers on the quality of their own work and is used to improve the education process and educational conditions.

In the Czech Republic, self-evaluation can concern different areas. Generally, the preschool and education programmes are compared with the national curriculum, the *Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education* (FEP PE), and the extent to which these programmes are in accord with the FEP PE. Based on the acquired information, it is possible to design and implement any necessary amendments.

Evaluating kindergarten practice

Kindergartens evaluate their work in a comprehensive way with a focus on the following areas: fulfilling the programme's objectives; quality of educational conditions; method of processing and implementation of the educational content (processing and implementation of integrated blocks); teachers' work (including their self-assessment); and the results of the education. Specific criteria for evaluation of all areas that are subject to evaluation are stipulated in the FEP PE.

The Czech Republic indicates that, if evaluations are to be functional and useful, it is necessary to collect, process and use information regularly and systematically. The FEP PE therefore stimulates preschools to create their own evaluation system as a part of their own school programme, which should include the subject of the evaluation (what is being monitored, what specific aspects is the focus of evaluation); evaluation methods; the schedule (specific dates or frequency of evaluation); and the teachers' responsibilities (who will be responsible for what).

Possible alternative strategies: Lessons from New Zealand, Norway and Scotland

Alternative approaches from New Zealand, Norway and Scotland can provide "food for thought" in overcoming challenges.

To better define goals and content

Emphasising the importance of equality and respect rooted in Christian and humanist values

Norway has based its curriculum (*Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*) on Christian and humanist values. This means that kindergartens (*barnehager*) should base their activities on ethical values that are rooted in Christianity[1] and humanism – which are assumed to be widely held by the Norwegian population. The Christian and humanist values on which the plan is based include empathy, forgiveness and a belief in human worth, equality, common responsibility, honesty and fairness. Kindergartens in Norway should promote human dignity, equality, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health, sustainable development and respect for the environment. This indicates that kindergartens are assigned a societal role: its primary goal is described as to safeguard children's basic needs for care and play and promote learning as the core of holistic, all-around development.

Kindergartens have the role to support each individual child, whilst taking into account the common interests of children. Equality, tolerance and respect are highly important cornerstones of Norway's framework: the equality of genders and children with different backgrounds is emphasised and should be reflected in the early education. Norway is not merely aiming at ECEC staff in its framework but also the children's parents or guardians, the owners/managers of ECEC provisions, and municipal authorities responsible for monitoring ECEC centres. The plan has been developed for all adults closely related to ECEC so as to stimulate children's early development, and early development is regarded

as "collaboration" between these adults. Activities within ECEC centres should be carried out keeping in mind the values that guide the framework in order to promote responsibility and interest on the part of children and encourage their participation in society. The children and their parents are expected to contribute to activities and be included in processes.

Setting curriculum goals and guiding principles based on community and cultural values

New Zealand's curriculum approach is based on societal, communal and cultural values: the sense of community and cultural heritage and understanding. The curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. *Te Whāriki* is founded on the aspirations for all children in New Zealand to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. There are four broad principles at the centre of the early childhood curriculum: empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships. Five strands, or essential areas of learning and development, arise from these four principles. The five strands relate to well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. The curriculum includes a Māori immersion curriculum to recognise and meet the needs of the Māori population and also addresses the Tagata Pasifika culture to ensure that the language and culture of the Māori and Pasifika is protected, respected and supported. The curriculum is therefore bilingual and bicultural, developed in both English and Māori language.

Scotland (**United Kingdom**) has developed *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families*.[2] The document reflects the principles and philosophy which underpin the *Curriculum for Excellence*[3] 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.

Developing age-appropriate content based on children's needs

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* defines how progress towards learning in early childhood learning environments can be achieved. To ensure the framework is age-appropriate, the content is made for three different age groups within ECEC: infants (birth to eighteen months), toddlers (one to three years) and young children (two-and-a-half years to school entry age). *Te Whāriki* is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that children's needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings. For children who require resources alternative or additional to those usually provided within an early childhood education setting, an Individual Development Plan or Individual Education Plan (IDP or IEP) will be developed.

Te Whāriki 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, the school years and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework for schools. The five strands of development focus on well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. Each strand is linked with essential skills or learning areas, such as communication, language development, numeracy and mathematics, science, technology, social sciences, arts, health, work and study skills, problem-solving capabilities, social development and self-management.

Developing goals for identifying children's needs

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum includes several dispositions, 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 and, similar to the curricula in Nordic countries, reflect the holistic way children grow and learn: cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of human development are interwoven. The early childhood curriculum therefore takes up a model of learning that weaves together intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of specific skills. The whole context around the child (the physical surroundings, the emotional context, relationships with others and the child's immediate needs at any moment) will affect and modify how a particular experience contributes to the child's development. This integrated view of learning sees the child as a person who wants to learn, sees the task as a meaningful whole and sees the whole as greater than the sum of its individual tasks or experiences.

Since *Te Whāriki* emphasises social relationships and personal well-being, outcomes are formulated in terms of relationships and well-being and are focused on the skills and abilities children should develop rather than actual attainment targets. For each strand, knowledge, skills and attitudes are described, and examples of experiences are given, which help to meet these outcomes. Examples of outcomes include: confidence and ability to express emotional needs, knowledge about how to keep oneself healthy, and a sense of responsibility for one's own well-being and that of others. For staff, questions for reflection are included, which aim at guiding staff in stimulating children in their development and improving staff pedagogy and quality. Additionally, for each strand and goals, adults' responsibilities in management, organisation and practice are explained. Each of the strands or learning areas also lists specific links to schooling to stimulate continuity between early childhood education and primary school. This section indicates what skills or attributes children moving from ECEC to school likely need to ensure continuous development and lifelong learning, *e.g.*, be able to work co-operatively; have experience in making choices and decisions, setting their own goals and using their initiative; understand basic concepts about rules, rights and fairness; and have established self-care skills.

Scotland (**United Kingdom**) clearly prescribes in the *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.

Specifying goals for staff's work, avoiding the use of child outcomes

In **Norway**, the framework indicates goals for what children shall experience but does not refer to any child outcomes. It includes goals for the work within each learning area in order to promote the development and learning of children and clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff. The aims that focus on children's experiences and learning are expressed as process aims: the work of ECEC staff is expected and encouraged to lead to these aims. The aims include examples, such as helping children develop their understanding of concepts using a varied vocabulary; becoming familiar with books, songs, pictures, etc.; having positive experiences of outdoor activities and being outdoors in different seasons; and learning about religions, ethics and philosophy as aspects of culture and society. Expected actions and activities of staff towards reaching these aims form part of the framework and help staff stimulate early, holistic child development.

Intertwining children's natural play into all learning areas

Age-appropriateness and needs-based pedagogy are highly valued aspects of the **Norway**'s framework. 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. The framework strongly emphasises the importance of building conscience within children about the environment and nature as well as respect for natural environments. Observation and reflection skills in young children are regarded as important and are expected to be stimulated in early development.

Each learning area covers a wide range of learning, and they are intertwined in play and activities. The staff groups are free to choose methods in order to foster children's curiosity, creativity and thirst for knowledge. Additionally, municipalities have the responsibility to ensure that kindergartens for Sámi children are based on Sámi language and culture.

Reviewing or analysing the curriculum to improve relevance to meet children's or staff's needs or ECEC goals

On the basis of changes in society and changes in needs of children, families and the community, **Norway**'s framework was revised in 2005 and entered into force in 2006. The main reasons for the revision were the changes in the Norwegian society since the first framework was established: the school reform in 1997 (school start age lowered from seven to six years); a larger part of children under school age in kindergartens; the increase of children under the age of three in kindergartens; more children with full day attendance; increased cultural diversity and plurality of values; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that strengthened children's legal position in society; increased focus on the content and quality of kindergartens; and the fact that international reports and national documents point out ECEC as a good fundament for lifelong learning. Norway introduced new legislation for kindergartens in 2005. Key intentions in 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.

The central principles of the first framework were brought along to the revised version. The kindergarten as arena for play, care and learning for small children is underlined, and recent research on small children's socialisation and learning is taken into account in the revision. The first framework (Framework Plan for Kindergartens Q-0903B, 1995) was a large document of about 140 pages. It was a bit unclear what the regulation was and what was recommended. The current framework is more concise, which clarified its status as a regulation in accordance with the kindergarten act.

Recently, a new public commission was set up in Norway to give advice on what all children should experience 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*.

Based on the national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, Early Childhood Education services in **New Zealand** each develop their own curriculum programme for child development in accordance with the needs of children, parents and the community. Through the use of evaluative procedures, the programme will be continually, or at least regularly, modified to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children within the curriculum goals. New Zealand also finds it important that *Te Whāriki* as a whole, or a particular range of experiences in the

programme, is modified if not working well to meet the needs of children and the goals of the curriculum.

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 aged three to eighteen with less descriptive outcomes and practices.

Ensuring flexibility for local adaption of the curriculum to meet child-specific needs or reflect local circumstances

According to the Kindergarten Act, the owner of a kindergarten in **Norway** may adapt the framework to local conditions, to the interests and needs of individual children, the group and the local community, and this should be set out in the kindergarten's annual plan. Since preschool children are not a uniform group, and children arrive at kindergarten with different backgrounds, the provision of an equal, high-quality day care programme requires individual adjustments to the service and local adjustments to the content. The content of kindergartens shall be designed in such a way that is relevant to individual children and to the group and should be included in the kindergarten's 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 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.

The kindergarten's co-ordinating committee, consisting of staff, parents and owner, must establish the annual plan for the kindergarten's pedagogical activities. The staff and especially the pedagogical leaders are expected to carry out the pedagogical programme in each kindergarten in accordance with the framework, local adaptations and the annual plan. Based on the different needs of children, centres can develop teaching material, methods of working, equipment and approaches.

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 meet the varied needs of all children and young people.

Involving stakeholders in the design process to ensure stakeholder buy-in

The first framework in **Norway** was drafted by a committee set up by the former Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration, consisting of researchers, practitioners and representatives from local authorities. The Sámi Assembly drafted a Sámi part. Both drafts were on public hearings. Afterwards, the Ministry made a new draft for public hearing before the framework was established. In 2005, new legislation concerning kindergartens was established. 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. For the current framework, the former Ministry of Children and Family Affairs set up a working group, consisting mostly of researchers and practitioners, to draft a revised framework in accordance with a mandate given by the Ministry. After a change of government in 2005, the ministerial responsibility for kindergartens was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research, which made some changes to the draft. It was sent to a public hearing prior to the establishment of the 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. It was emphasised to develop the framework in connection with the curriculum for primary and secondary education to secure a smooth transition from kindergarten to school.

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[4], 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.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Aligning with international conventions regarding children's rights

Norway and **Scotland** (**United Kingdom**) have aligned their curricula with international conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The legislative framework of Norway (the Kindergarten Act and the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*) states the expectations concerning the quality of kindergartens, including conditions for learning and well-being. Norway introduced a section in the Act giving "Children in kindergarten (...) the right to express their views on the day to day activities of the kindergarten". This is followed up in the framework. Children are seen as subjects or agents in their own right who should be met with respect in their diverse forms of communication.

Additionally, on account of the special rights of Indigenous peoples, Norway has a special obligation to safeguard the interests of Sámi children and parents. This relates to the International Labour Organisation's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Sámi children need to be helped to retain and develop their language and culture regardless of where they live in Norway. Kindergartens in Sámi districts should be an integrated part of, and demonstrate the diversity, vigour and variety of, Sámi society. Sámi statutes include the aim of strengthening children's identity through the use of Sámi language and by teaching children about Sámi culture, ways of life and society. Important aspects of Sámi child rearing should be retained through working methods and everyday life. The programme of kindergartens must be arranged in such a way that children are involved in various work processes and are able to participate in cultural and social activities. It is crucial that staff speak Sámi at these kindergartens. At kindergartens catering to Sámi children outside of Sámi districts, parents and children are entitled to expect staff to be familiar with Sámi culture and to emphasise it as part of the kindergarten's programme.

Covering the whole ECEC age range as an integrated system

Norway's framework is designed for the integrated ECEC system in the country and therefore covers the care and education of all children in ECEC, aged zero to six years. The clauses for kindergarten, schools and vocational training have the same structure and express the same value base. This is done to contribute to greater coherence between

kindergartens, schools and training establishments. The purpose clause still reflects the uniqueness of kindergartens. Norway has also made a clear connection between the framework for ECEC and the Curricula for Norwegian Primary Schools. The learning areas are, to a great extent, the same, as the subjects are similar in ECEC and primary school.

To ensure that children and parents receive as comprehensive a service as possible, helping children as they grow up and develop, kindergartens must collaborate with other services and institutions in the municipality. Cross-disciplinary and holistic thinking is of central importance in the Norwegian framework. Kindergartens in Norway have the obligation to, in collaboration with schools, facilitate the transition of children from a kindergarten to year one and to any after-school groups. This shall be done in close collaboration with the children's homes. Plans for children's transition from kindergarten to school must also be specified in the kindergarten's annual plan. Kindergartens should, based on needs, co-operate with child welfare services, mother and child health clinics, pedagogical-psychological counselling services and educational establishments to ensure that children receive necessary help and support for child development.

Linking the ECEC curriculum to primary schooling curriculum or other levels of education

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum in **New Zealand** is linked to the country's Curriculum Framework for schools. The principles in the school curriculum put emphasis on a "natural connection" across learning areas and competencies, as well as the positioning of the competencies, as parallel domains alongside the strands of *Te Whāriki*. For each of the strands of the ECEC curriculum (well-being, belonging, contributions of children, and communication and exploration), links have been made with the learning areas and skills in the school curriculum to smoothen the transition from preschool to primary school. The emphasis in New Zealand has shifted towards expecting the school "to make connections" with the new entrant child's earlier experience, rather than the child arriving "ready for school". The strengthening links between the different early childhood education services have encouraged a growing appreciation of each other's differences and similarities.

Curriculum for Excellence is **Scotland**'s (**United Kingdom**) curriculum for children and young people aged three to eighteen. It replaces the curricula for children aged three to five and five to fourteen to ensure continuous development. *Curriculum for Excellence* builds on the foundations developed in the critical years of pre-birth to three, which is supported by the new *Pre-Birth to Three* national guidance.[5]

For effective communication and implementation

Involving different stakeholders in the revision process

In **Scotland** (**United Kingdom**), anyone with an interest in education was invited to be part of the feedback and revision pro*cess of the Curriculum for Excellence*. The draft experiences and outcomes were published online and were accompanied by an online questionnaire for individuals, groups, schools and organisations to feed back their thoughts and views. Additionally, 37 focus groups were held, covering each curriculum area and involving practitioners, senior education managers, representatives from professional bodies, industry, parents and learners to discuss the draft experiences and outcomes. The University of Glasgow was commissioned to analyse the feedback on the draft experiences and outcomes.

Informing stakeholders about curriculum change through seminars and meetings

Norway organised a round-table discussion to define the needs to inform stakeholders about the changes in curriculum and the priorities for a strategy for implementation. Different stakeholders were invited: the organisations of municipalities and kindergarten owners, the

trade unions, the universities/university colleges, the county governors and others. Information meetings were also held for country governors regarding the curriculum and its implementation.

In August 2010, Norway established a national parent board for kindergartens (*Foreldreutvalget for Barnehager*) to represent parents and advise the Ministry of Education and Research on matters relating to informing parents about ECEC matters.

In **Scotland** (**United Kingdom**), ECEC staff members were informed of curriculum changes at meetings, events and seminars. Providers organised meetings for parents and explained the *Curriculum for Excellence* via PowerPoint presentations[6] developed by Teaching and Learning Scotland.

Providing extensive information on the curriculum online

The website of the Ministry of Education in **New Zealand**[7] provides widespread information about the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, including the curriculum document as a whole, guidelines for staff, assessment practices and news on the curriculum. It also gives examples of practices staff can use in their ECEC centre, gives information on changes or examples of curriculum implementation and on professional development programmes. The Ministry also has its own official online magazine: the *Education Gazette*.[8] The magazine covers a variety of news articles, notices and vacancies and provides a monthly update to the early childhood education sector.

In **Norway**, the website of the Ministry of Education and Research has a page dedicated to the content of kindergartens with extensive information and links to relevant documents. Furthermore, the ministry published a series of pamphlets that address issues and practices around different themes of relevance to the framework.

Enhancing staff competences, training staff and attracting staff

In **Norway**, project funding was made available for the revised framework by the Ministry of Education for improving staff competences and recruitment of staff from 2007-10. Grants were conditional upon municipalities establishing plans for competence development, as well as an implementation plan aligned with national priorities, which are pedagogical leadership, children's participation, language environment and linguistic stimulation, and collaboration and coherence between kindergartens and schools.

In addition, Norway emphasises that good management of ECEC centres is highly relevant for successful implementation of a curriculum. Norway learnt that resources should be well-managed and that the management team, including owners and head teachers, should inspire the rest of the staff in effective implementation. The management is also responsible for ensuring that their own and other staff's competences are sufficient and suitable for working in ECEC provisions and that staff work is goal-orientated. Additionally, management is responsible for meeting the legislative standards and regulations. Strong management with capable people in the management team was found to be key to successful implementation. Therefore, one of the national priorities on competence development in ECEC in Norway is pedagogical leadership.

New Zealand focuses staff training on the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the Early Childhood Curriculum, and provides training to improve learning outcomes for all young children, especially those at risk. Teachers are expected to strengthen their teaching practices. The government also provides training to support the implementations of *Kei Tua o Te Pae*, Assessment for Learning. Teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

Providing practical implementation tools to staff

The curriculum framework for ECEC in **New Zealand** provides professionals with examples of experiences that help meet the outcomes of the curriculum. The support guidance is divided into experiences helpful for infants, toddlers and young children to ensure practices and activities are age-appropriate. It provides ideas for activities and what is important to keep in mind for staff working with children. It also sets out questions for reflection for staff members, which help professionals analyse what they could improve when implementing the curriculum.

Scotland's (**United Kingdom**) *Pre-Birth to Three* includes practical case studies, which staff can use for implementation. A national implementation guide and accompanying staff support materials have been developed, including a DVD, CD and poster that are relevant for all adults working with and for babies and young children. This pack is issued to all early years establishments; and the interactive online version[9] combines all materials contained in the pack. Scotland also developed a communication toolkit for staff, addressing what *Curriculum for Excellence* means at different educational stages. The kit includes ready-made materials, such as posters, for use at ECEC centres and schools, a series of leaflets with the summary of a case study from the child's and the parent's points of view, a "pupil voice" video and a "practitioner voice" video as well as additional resources and links.

Additionally, templates [10] to support staff in creating or customising materials for communicating with parents are available online. Learning and Teaching Scotland, a non-departmental public body, also developed information sheets for parents on the importance of different curriculum subjects, including literacy, mathematics, transitions between different education systems and outdoor learning. A series of posters were distributed to providers, which can be used to raise awareness among parents about the *Curriculum for Excellence*.

In 2006, in **Norway**, the Directorate for Education and Training created the handbook "Children in Multilingual Families"[11], which provides parents with answers to frequently asked questions about children's bilingual or multilingual development. In addition to offering advice to parents, it also helps staff in day care centres respond to parents' questions and reflections on the bilingual development of their children. It includes examples and articles on how to involve parents actively in language stimulation.

To support the implementation of its framework, Norway issued guiding booklets on relevant themes, such as pedagogy for the youngest children, multiculturalism, children's agency and participation, language and language stimulation, numeracy, outdoor activities and gender equality. These booklets were commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and authored by experts. The intention behind the booklets is to promote reflection and discussion between staff on the framework and the realisation of goals in local contexts.

University colleges/universities in Norway developed videos and provide online education possibilities on curriculum topics, such as multiculturalism, natural sciences, mathematics, reading and language development, and arts and culture.

Piloting before implementing nationwide/state-wide

More than 600 early years establishments and schools in **Scotland** (**United Kingdom**) took part in a formal trialling process to test specific experiences and outcomes from the *Curriculum for Excellence* in practice across all curriculum areas. Schools and centres chose experiences and outcomes to trial based on their planned programmes of work. They submitted reports containing detailed feedback, which was used to inform the revision process.

Improving working conditions to stimulate effective implementation

Pay parity between kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in **New Zealand** has made ECEC teaching a more attractive occupation. A funding system that provides incentives for services to employ more qualified, registered teachers has meant that services can afford to pay better salaries and significantly increased the number of registered teachers in the workforce, leading to more qualified teachers in Early Childhood Education centres who are trained in curriculum and its implementation.

Stimulating literacy curriculum development at home

In **Norway**, the project *BOKTRAS*[12] is based on co-operation between public libraries and kindergartens, with the aim of introducing young children to literature. It is a three-year project, which consists of setting up branch libraries in kindergartens. The libraries involved reach out to more families than those who already know about and make use of library services. In this way, family access to children's books is no longer restricted by pressures of time, distance to the nearest library or opening hours. The libraries use the kindergarten as an arena for the active promotion of literature, thereby helping to develop children's language and social skills.

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Integrating "curriculum" as part of evaluation or assessment practices

Evaluation and assessment forms a part of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum in **New Zealand**. The purpose of evaluation is to make informed judgments about the quality and effectiveness of the programme. The system of evaluation focuses on the ways human relationships and the programme provide a learning environment based on the goals of the curriculum. Evaluative procedures emphasise the quality of provision and make use of all the forms of assessment that can be carried out by both adults and children.

New Zealand implemented *Kei Tua o te Pae*[13], Assessment for Learning, in which teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. The national government offers training on this assessment practice to ECEC staff. The curriculum programme is evaluated in terms of its capacity to provide activities and relationships that stimulate early development. Such assessment ought to be a two-way process. Children's self-assessment can inform adults' assessment of learning, development and the environment by providing insights that adults may not have identified and by highlighting areas that could be included or focused on for assessment. Children and parents can help in deciding what should be included in the process of assessing the programme and the curriculum.

Additionally, the reflective questions listed in the curriculum provide one example of an evaluation process. People involved in providing the programme in each setting are encouraged to make evaluation part of their continuing dialogue.

In **Scotland** (**United Kingdom**), assessment is one of the strands of work in implementing the *Curriculum for Excellence* and *Pre-Birth to Three*. As part of the assessment, self-evaluations have been set up in centres as well as monitoring standards and outcomes over time. The framework of quality indicators set out in *How Good is Our School?* and *Child at the Centre* provides a focus for self-reflecting on professional practice and curriculum for improvement in schools and centres. Additionally, external inspections are organised to monitor curriculum and practices. The government is working with education authorities and other partners to develop processes for sharing assessment information so that education authorities can use the data to learn about the work of their schools and centres and, where appropriate, support changes in curriculum.

Evaluating the implementation of the curriculum

Vestfold University College in **Norway** has conducted an evaluation of how the framework is implemented, used and experienced. The evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and consists of two quantitative and two qualitative investigations among groups involved in the work: children, parents, preschool teachers, assistants, head-teachers, municipalities as local kindergarten authorities and county governors. The report shows many positive results concerning the implementation but also points out some challenges, such as the understanding of documentation and the mapping of children's development and learning, the need for competence in the sector and limited resources for implementation.

Assessing and monitoring kindergartens

In **Norway**, the municipal authorities are obliged to supervise/monitor kindergartens to see if the institution's practice is in accordance with legislation and the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*. The work of kindergartens is also assessed internally. The quality of the everyday interaction between people at the kindergarten is one of the most important factors for the development and learning of the children. Therefore, this is to be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Attention is paid to interaction amongst the children, between children and staff and amongst the staff. The work of the kindergarten shall be assessed, *i.e.*, described, analysed and interpreted, in relation to criteria set out in the Kindergarten Act, the framework and any local guidelines and plans.

A recent study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers shows that 55% of the municipal authorities have developed local criteria for monitoring kindergarten content aligned with this legislation and framework. Municipalities report that they base monitoring activities on the following aspects: report of concern from parents and the public, advice from national authorities, the annual pedagogical plan produced by each kindergarten and parents' responses to surveys on the quality of kindergarten.

Focusing on staff performance

Assessment practices in **Norway** regarding the curriculum and performance focus on staff pedagogical approaches – not individual performance of the child since staff attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children are regarded as key in raising children to become participative, democratic members of society. As a basis for reflection and learning, Norway uses documentation. This to understand children's learning and the work of staff to allow for reflection on the values and tasks of the kindergarten and the role of play, learning and development. Documentation can only be linked to specific goals in special circumstances but, in general, should not be used to categorise or judge children's development. If specific goals are to be set for individual children, there must be a reason, and the goals must be set in collaboration with the parents and any partners outside the kindergarten.

Using observation as assessment method

Assessment in **New Zealand** involves, as it does in **Norway**, intelligent observation of the children by experienced and knowledgeable adults for the purpose of improving the programme. Meaningful insights from observation and reflection can occur when adults listen, watch and interact with an individual child or with groups of children. These continuous observations provide the basis of information for more in-depth assessment and evaluation that is integral to making decisions on how best to meet children's needs. *Te Whāriki* points out that assessment of children's learning and development should always focus on individual children over a period of time. Staff should avoid making comparisons

between children, as the needs of the children, not assessment procedures, should determine the curriculum.

Using stories and narratives as assessment method

New Zealand also uses child assessment/development practices as a method in reflecting upon curriculum design and implementation. Children's experiences are described in a Learning Story Framework by staff and children. The framework focuses on assessment in a narrative form, as a story, a connection between the individual learner and the environment. It takes the view that children leave early childhood settings for further education with some well-established learning narratives or working theories: packages of inclination, knowledge and skills to be a learner. The initiative has been released with videos, accompanying readings and workshops, and has provided a useful way for children and practitioners to reflect on ways to implement curriculum and assessment and to develop their own locally-adapted *Te Whāriki*.

NOTES

1 Private kindergartens/owners are allowed to leave the Christian values out of their curriculum planning.

2 www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/nationalguidance/index.asp

3 www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/

4 www.ltscotland.org.uk/aboutlts/whoweare/

5 www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/index.asp

6 www.ltscotland.org.uk/resources/c/genericresource_tcm4628047.asp?strReferringChannel=understandingthecurriculum&strReferringPageID=tcm:4-627954-64

7 www.educate.ece.govt.nz/

8 www.edgazette.govt.nz/

9 www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/nationalguidance/index.asp

10 www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/toolkit/makeyourown.asp

11 www.udir.no/Upload/Brosjyrer/5/Barn_i_flerspraklige_familier_engelsk.pdf

12 www.splq.info/issues/vol40_3/10.htm

13 www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/Assessmentforlearning/KeiTuaotePae.apx

ANNEX. DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

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" (2011), 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.*, tying shoe-laces).

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.

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Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

CZECH REPUBLIC

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can bring a wide range of benefits – for children, parents and society at large. However, these benefits are conditional on "quality". Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or long-term productivity benefits for society.

This series of country reports focuses on quality issues. Each report tackles a specific theme that was selected by the country reviewed. These reports suggest strengths and point to areas for further reflection on current policy initiatives.

Contents

Chapter 1. What does research say?
Chapter 2. Where does the Czech Republic stand compared to other countries?
Chapter 3. What are the challenges and strategies?

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