



## Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

### LESSONS LEARNED FROM DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM AND STANDARDS

This section summarises country experiences as “lessons learned”. It aims to be a quick read about challenges and risks to consider when implementing policy initiatives.

#### Lesson 1: Orient the curriculum reform to focus on “child” and “holistic development”

When revising its curriculum, **Italy** focused mostly on the child. The country believes it is important to keep in mind the individual personality of all children and the importance and influence of the parents as well as the social environment. Italy notes that focusing on the child and his/her personal development is crucial for successful implementation and stakeholder buy-in. They call it “the core of the process of building a curriculum”.

**Flanders (Belgium)** learnt that it is important to offer children the opportunity to develop skills in situations that are realistic to them. Children learn from their own living environment and other people’s environments. Harmonious personal development asks for well-balanced attention to all development zones of the child. Flanders indicated that not only cognitive and motor components but also socio-emotional aspects should be addressed when aiming to provide a broad education.

Inspired by article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, **Norway** introduced a section in the Kindergarten Act (2005) 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 Plan for the content and tasks of Kindergarten (2006). Children are seen as subjects or agents in their own right who should be met with respect in their diverse forms of expression. The plan emphasises the importance of adults’ attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children so that they can integrate children’s participation in work on the content of kindergarten and bring up children to participate actively in a democratic society. The kindergarten shall, in collaboration with and close understanding of the home, safeguard the children’s need for care and play and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development.

#### Lesson 2: Engage key stakeholders and relevant experts in the curriculum revision process

When reviewing the Infant Curriculum, **Ireland** worked directly with practitioners in infant classes, their principals, parents and children. National and international research was also used for review as well as consultation processes with the wider education sector. Ireland found this to be very useful in gaining wider awareness of the curriculum and stakeholder buy-in to support implementation.

**Mexico** found it effective to pursue a collaborative approach to reaching an agreement on a general curriculum framework, taking into account different points of view of organisations, parents and other stakeholders. When the draft curriculum was proposed, it reflected and respected the diversity of approaches as well as the views and needs of the population.

**Sweden** set up a reference group when revising the curriculum. The government learnt that having a reference group with broad and different competences is highly relevant to finding a suitable revised draft that reflects the needs of various professionals and children with different backgrounds. Sweden also believes it is important to involve researchers. Their input and consultation formed the essential basis of the revision.

In **Spain**, the period for feedback and opinions on draft proposals to improve quality in ECEC and compulsory education was found crucial for identifying principles that should govern the early childhood education system. Autonomous communities (regional governments), representatives of school councils and other stakeholders were invited to express their views and express their position on these proposals directly to the Ministry of Education. This stimulated open, public debate on quality in ECEC learning and contributed to improved curriculum design in Spain.

**Luxembourg** highlights the usefulness of involving foreign experts in the revision process. Facing challenges in linguistic areas due to the different languages spoken throughout Luxembourg, the involvement of foreign experts contributed to a revised curriculum focusing more on the regional context and needs of children.

**Korea** found it critical to collect different perspectives and identify the needs of various stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, teachers, directors, academic associations and local and central authorities) by forming task force teams and review committees when revising or developing curriculum. Due to its split, market-driven ECEC system, Korea learnt that it is highly important to balance gathering opinions and reaching some consensus from the education and care sectors, especially in developing the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5*.

### **Lesson 3: Ensure coherency in learning and up-bringing for continuous child development**

According to **Flanders (Belgium)**, it is important to have horizontal coherence between the different learning areas within ECEC. The aims of different subjects should be interrelated. Flanders notes that this leads to a greater continuity in children's early learning and development.

In developing the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5*, **Korea** emphasised the importance of both vertical and horizontal coherence and consistency in children's development and learning experiences regardless of the type of ECEC institution. Alignment of the *Standard Childcare Curriculum* to the elementary school curriculum, which tended to be relatively weak compared to the *National Kindergarten Curriculum*, will be strengthened. Furthermore, aligning the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5*, the *National Kindergarten Curriculum* and the *Standard Childcare Curriculum* for ages three to four is being actively pursued.

**Japan** took into account the recent changes in children's environmental context when revising the *Course of Study for Kindergartens* and the *National Curriculum of Day Care Centre Works* in 2008. This included changes in the way children are being brought up, different lifestyle habits and family compositions, social norms and new methods of communication. This led to greater continuity in up-bringing between the home and learning environment. It also resulted in a clearer

concept of kindergartens and day care centres and a greater awareness among stakeholders of the significance of early childhood services.

#### **Lesson 4: Plan sufficient time to raise awareness of the curriculum change and to implement the change; plan a feasible review exercise**

**Luxembourg** learnt that good communication with all stakeholders is extremely important when implementing changes in a curriculum. This ensures consistency in the implementation of the changes. Communication on the changes should be well co-ordinated at the policy level to promote the revised curriculum. When communication is organised efficiently, it results in better understanding among practitioners and inspectors.

The priority of **Ireland** for the next two years is to continue raising awareness of the existence of its curriculum *Aistear* and to support the early childhood sector in its implementation. The country learnt that it is necessary to provide sufficient time for providers to use *Aistear* before planning a review, noting that it takes at least two years to properly implement the curriculum.

**Slovenia** learnt that it is important to implement curriculum gradually, taking sufficient time for centres to prepare. The number of preschool institutions and primary schools implementing the new curricula increases every year. For implementation, each preschool institution and school has to set up a team in charge of the introduction and implementation processes. Based on Slovenia's experience, gradual implementation results in more efficient implementation and correct usage of the curriculum.

#### **Lesson 5: Ensure that ECEC centre leaders can effectively manage financial and human resources as well as pedagogic practices and, in addition, train staff for effective implementation**

**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 in Norway. Therefore, one of the national priorities on competence development in ECEC in Norway is pedagogical leadership.

In 2009, **Sweden** started the "Preschool Boost", which included in-service training (university courses) for preschool teachers (15 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System [ECTS], 10 weeks) and child minders (5 weeks) in language/communication and mathematics. Pedagogical leaders for preschool were also offered university courses (30 ECTS, 20 weeks) in language/communication, mathematics and evaluation. Implementation conferences were organised by the National Agency for Education for municipality management and heads of preschools. This initiative gave staff and management more competence to work with the new, clarified goals in the Swedish curriculum.

**Prince Edward Island (Canada)** stated that the successful implementation of their Early Learning Framework, launched in September 2011, depends most largely on well-educated early childhood educators and pedagogical leadership from the director. These two aspects are key to successful implementation.

## Lesson 6: Use simple and common language to draft the curriculum that can be easily understood by staff and parents

**Australia, Flanders (Belgium), Finland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden** have learnt that it is useful and important to explain the curriculum in simple language, avoiding technical terms. When the curriculum is explained in understandable language, it is found that both staff and parents with different backgrounds have better knowledge about the curriculum. This also results in better implementation of the curriculum by educators and other ECEC staff. New Zealand found that it stimulates expanding the use of the curriculum by parents in home learning activities.