

Early Childhood Education and Care

(0–7 years)

**National Policy Framework
for Malta and Gozo**





Message from the Minister for Education

I am well aware that the development of society, economy and the environment, directly influences child development and consequently the wellbeing of tomorrow's adults. The early years are the starting point for successful lifelong learning and are integral in addressing sustainable development goals. Investing in young children, safeguarding and realising their rights in practical ways and ensuring optimal foundations for their well-being, learning and holistic development fuels the need for a National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

It is within this context that I endorsed the development and publication of this early years' policy framework, which is a first step towards a comprehensive high-quality ECEC provision in a Maltese context.

The rationale behind this policy is to address the fundamental need for a multi-sectoral response, embedded within an integrated ECEC system. A democratic, systematic and universal design approach, establishing a shared understanding of quality ECEC and creating more vital collaboration with families and among all stakeholders, will provide a clear direction that achieves the desired impact through strategic action.

Additionally, this policy framework, based on the European Commission's Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, is an opportunity to maximise young children's development which will profoundly impact on children's future learning, health and earning potential which can perpetuate intergenerational benefits. This will also contribute in addressing the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016).

This is an ambitious and challenging policy framework. However, I am confident that all stakeholders will work closely together to adopt and implement this strategy, which once adopted, we will have improved learning tools for our children's development and consequently the well-being of tomorrow's adults.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justyne Caruana". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dr Justyne Caruana

Members of the working committee

Dr Jacqueline Vanhear	Chairperson Director, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE)
Ms Solange Bonello	Manager Research, Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)
Ms Anne Marie Cassar	Director, Institute of Community Services, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)
Dr Rosienne C. Farrugia	Resident Academic Lecturer, Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta
Ms Josanne Ghirxi	Director, National School Support Services, Directorate for Educational Services (DES)
Ms Tanya Mangion	Education Officer, Early Years, Department of Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP)
Mr Dermot Galea	Chief Executive Officer, Foundation for Educational Services (FES)
Mr David Chircop	Head of Programmes, Foundation for Educational Services (FES)
Ms Dorianne Cachia, Mr Anthony Grech, Dr Carlos Grima, Ms Bernardette Mercieca	Education Officer, Quality Assurance Department, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE)

Public Consultation Process

The draft Early Childhood Education and Care (0-7 years) National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo was published in the public domain on 21st May 2021. The Ministry for Education through the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education carried out a public consultation through the online consultation website www.konsultazzjoni.gov.mt for a period of six weeks. The public could participate either through an online survey, or by sending their considerations and comments by post or via email.

The feedback collected was analysed and discussed among the members of the ECEC working committee and resulted in this finalised version.

Introduction

Rationale and vision underpinning this policy framework

One of the most critical time periods in children’s learning and development is from birth to seven years.¹ This short period in one’s life lays the foundation and impacts the overall trajectory of children’s lives in a variety of ways. While acknowledging that no two children learn in the same way or develop on the exact same time line, the experiences throughout the first seven years of life mould the architecture of the developing brain and the core capabilities a child needs to achieve better outcomes and to function well in society later on in life.²

Research shows that investing in the early years is one of the most cost-effective interventions a country can make to yield the highest economic return in human capital when compared with investments made at later stages in life.³ Early childhood years’ experiences, particularly throughout the first seven years of a child’s life, have an intense impact due to the unparalleled speed at which the brain develops, affecting learning, health, behaviour and consequently, social capital and income.⁴ With this in mind, the main principle underpinning this document views the young child as a rights-holder, competent, able and born with unlimited potential. Moreover, this policy framework document also takes into consideration that even in particular extraordinary circumstances such as those presented during the global pandemic, the education and care in early childhood may be maintained and supported through collaborative efforts that can mitigate short- and long-term impacts on young children.



Figure 1: Nurturing Care Framework (NCF), 2018

Malta is an island that invests generously in human capital, acknowledging that this is the island’s primary resource. It is this vision of investing in young children, safeguarding and realising their rights⁵ in practical ways and ensuring optimal foundations for their well-being, learning and development that fuels the need for a National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Malta. It is evident that the potential advantages of high quality ECEC are significant, far-reaching and long-lasting (Vandenbroeck et al. 2018). The development and publication of this early years’ policy framework is a first step towards a comprehensive high-quality ECEC provision in the Maltese context. The aim is to address the fundamental need for a multi-sectoral response embedded within an integrated ECEC system. A democratic, systematic and universal design approach, establishing a shared understanding of quality ECEC and creating more vital collaboration with families and among all stakeholders, will provide a clear direction that achieves the desired impact through strategic action. Additionally, this policy framework is being regarded as an opportunity to maximise young children’s development which will profoundly impact on their future learning, health and earning potential which can perpetuate intergenerational benefits. It will also contribute in addressing the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016). World leaders, including Malta, endorsed this action plan which aims to ensure that “no one is left behind in the efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable development and build an inclusive and sustainable future for all”.⁶

1 Ministry for Education and Employment (2012) National Curriculum Framework (2012, p.45).

2 Center on the Developing Child Harvard University available at <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.

3 More detailed information about related research at <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>.

4 The World Bank. 2016. Snapshot: Investing in the early years for growth and productivity – <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/276471475756836740/Snapshot-investing-in-the-early-years-for-growth-and-productivity>.

5 This policy framework is guided by the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989).

6 G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development (2016) - https://www.b20germany.org/fileadmin/user_upload/G20_Action_Plan_on_the_2030_Agenda_for_Sustainable_Development.pdf.

Sustainable development recognises the interdependent dimensions of social development, environmental protection and economic development acting together, and “any practices and policies developed without taking each into account are likely to weaken and may even fail” (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2010 p.5). The development of society, economy and the environment directly influences child development and consequently the wellbeing of tomorrow’s adults. The early years are the starting point for successful lifelong learning and viewing the children as competent, rights-holders and agents of change is integral in addressing sustainable development goals.

This ambitious policy framework is admittedly challenging and the committee working on the policy framework unanimously agreed that as a starting point one needs to capture children’s authentic voices in relation to what this document will attempt to address and achieve. It is this approach that spearheaded this document, firmly planted in the belief that by focusing on the child’s voice, the ECEC sector in Malta will further develop. To this effect, young children’s voices from early years settings were gathered from across the three different sectors i.e. state, church and independent in an effort to understand the views and experiences of children living on the Maltese islands. Subsequently, this data was used to inform the drafting of this policy framework.

Following on the European Commission’s Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, which was adopted by the EU Member States’ Education Ministers in 2019, the policy framework addresses five goals, namely: Accessibility, Workforce, Curriculum, Monitoring and Evaluation and Governance and Funding. Each goal has been purposefully designed bearing in mind three overarching principles, which are considered equally important and for successful implementation, namely: taking on a multi-sectoral approach to ECEC service provision, embracing a universal design approach where every child belongs and engaging with parents as partners in their child’s educational journey.

A multi-sectoral approach to ECEC

The working committee drafting this policy framework document were mindful that research evidence suggests that ECEC systems are more effective when approached through multi-sectoral collaboration. The European Commission and the Council of the European Union stress that a multi-sectoral approach allows “governments to organise and manage policies more simply and efficiently, and to combine resources for children and their families” (Communication from the Commission, 2011, p.7). Bringing various systems together and keeping the overall well-being of each individual child at the focus, would create shared understandings of the interconnected quality of the developmental process. Therefore, a multi-sectoral approach is permeated in each goal with a vision of facilitating the provision of high-quality ECEC and supports a more coherent and comprehensive collaboration across the many interconnected facets of the education and care of children.



Figure 2: A multi-sectoral approach (NCF, 2018)

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasise that what happens in the early years affects a child for life and therefore interventions must be multi-sectoral to be most effective:

“The healthy development of a child’s brain depends on multiple positive experiences. Nutrition feeds the brain; stimulation sparks the mind; love and protection buffer the negative impact of stress and adversity. And distinct interventions are mutually supportive, achieving the strongest results when delivered together.” (Lake & Chan, 2014, p.1)

7 The design of the goals was guided by European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017.

Consequently, achieving the goals in this policy framework will very much depend on a multi-sectoral approach and it is being recommended that the Ministry for Education should take the leading role in this approach.

Where every child belongs

This policy framework was drafted keeping at the forefront the notion that inclusion is a journey that brings about positive but challenging decisions towards equity and acceptance. Over these last three decades, Malta has made huge strides towards inclusive education. In recent years, several measures were adopted to address poignant matters such as absenteeism, accessibility, and responding to diversity. Such measures provide an insight into current policies and practices.

A systematic approach to inclusion and equity are instrumental for providing the solid foundations for quality education. Equity ensures equal opportunities for success, with fairness without sameness to all learners. With regards to responding to diversity, the removal of barriers and, when required, the provision of relevant accommodations to ensure equitable access should be considered as the most widely implemented strategy to cultivate inclusive school cultures and environments, where learners feel safe, secure and have all the opportunities to succeed.

Progress in relation to inclusion and equity require effective strategies for implementation. Malta has launched a National Inclusion Policy and Framework in 2019⁸, presenting key areas towards an inclusive education system that is accessible and designed to meet the strengths and needs of each individual child. These documents are based on the conviction that all learners are entitled to experience success through equitable access to become expert learners through a resilient learning environment which responds to the different ways in which learners prefer to learn. This Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environment using Universal Design for Learning (Meyer et al., 2014) enhances accessibility and removes curricular, social, and physical barriers towards inclusion.

Parental engagement - Parents as partners

Parents are primarily and foremost responsible for their child's health, nutrition, security, safety, well-being, and opportunities for early learning. They play a fundamental role in their child's early development through their style of parenting, the home environment they create and the attitudes and values they pass on to their child. ECEC provision plays a vital part in supporting parents in their role as their child's caregivers and first educators. It provides a unique opportunity for establishing strong partnerships with parents based on mutual respect and empowering a consistent two-way communication between ECEC educators and parents. Meaningful, regular opportunities for active involvement in the child's learning and development are essential elements of the parent-practitioner relationship.

“Parents and other community members ... have assets and expertise that are essential to the partnership... They have knowledge of their children that is not available to anyone else. They have vested and committed interest in their children's success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute...” (Fullan, 2016, p.159).

Furthermore, extensive literature provides evidence that parents who are actively engaged and involved will have children who perform better academically and improve social competences (McDowell et al., 2018). Within this context, this ECEC policy framework has been drafted with the belief that all parents, irrespective of their ability, social, socio-economic, cultural, and religious status, should be trusted and valued as partners in all aspects of the education and care of their child. All ECEC policies, services and practices should be planned, developed, and implemented keeping in mind that parents are the most important stakeholders, and that working in partnership with them will provide a holistic educational experience that is essential for the well-being, learning

8 Ministry for Education and Employment. (2019). *A policy on inclusive education in schools: route to quality inclusion*. Floriana. Ministry for Education and Employment. (2019). *A National Inclusive Education Framework*. Floriana.

and development of all children. This resonates with the National Curriculum Framework (2012, p.43)⁹ that indicates parental interaction as a key factor for learners' successful educational development.

What happens next?

The working committee considers this policy framework as a precursor document leading to a nationally shared vision for ECEC in Malta. This document has identified five primary goals in achieving the national vision and the next step is to translate these goals into action.

Implementing the policy effectively is critically important. In this regard, it is being recommended that a team is intentionally set up for this purpose. The team would be tasked to design a strategic action plan that would serve as a road map to fully achieve each goal, in collaboration with other government ministries and relevant stakeholders.

The strategic action plan should address each goal by identifying challenges, communicating with the wider system through a multi-sectoral approach, maintaining strong links with educators and stakeholders, evaluating regularly the progress achieved, planning implementation over a specific period of years, and setting milestones involving different government ministries.



Figure 3: Proposed implementation of policy through a strategic action plan



⁹ Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) (2012) *A National Curriculum Framework for All*.

Glossary of Terms

Children: in the context of this policy, children refer to every human being from birth to seven years of age.

Children at risk of exclusion: children can be at risk of exclusion because of their individual circumstances or because they, or their families belong to a group which is disadvantaged in society. These children may include those with disabilities, with mental health problems, in alternative care, at risk of neglect/abuse, undocumented child migrants/asylum seekers, those whose families live in poverty or are socially disadvantaged, those whose families have a migrant and/or second language background, those whose families have limited access to services, Roma and traveller children.¹⁰

Competent system: an ECEC system which possesses the core competencies at:¹¹

- **individual level:** ongoing professional growth that comprises the capability and ability of reflective individual practitioners to build on a body of professional knowledge, practice, and develop and show professional values.
- **institutional level:** discussing and implementing the vision for quality practice, planning for changes in practice with those involved in the setting (including staff and families), documenting changes and reflecting on them, engaging in shared monitoring and evaluation, and working with others as a learning community.
- **inter-institutional level:** cooperating, collaborating, and coordinating between similar settings, between settings where children and families transition (such as kindergarten and primary schools), between sectors (such as education, health, social services), between educators and researchers, between in-service and pre-service training providers, etc.
- **governance and policy level:** having coherent public policies that support a competent workforce, inter-institutional collaboration, and adequate resourcing (human, structural, financial), empowering monitoring and evaluation processes, supporting applied research and promoting child- and family-centred approaches as the foundation for ECEC services.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): in Malta, this includes provision for children from birth through to the first two years of primary education, that falls within a national regulatory framework.¹²

ECEC educators: individuals engaged in the practice of a profession within an ECEC setting.

ECEC leaders:¹³ individuals with chief responsibility for the administrative, managerial and educational leadership at any ECEC setting. As part of their leadership role, educational leaders are responsible for the daily management of the ECEC setting, children's learning and well-being, monitoring and supporting staff members and collaboration with parents and professionals.

ECEC settings: a place where ECEC service provision is delivered for children from birth to seven years of age. Most ECEC settings in Malta typically fall into one of the following categories:

- publicly or privately owned and operated centre-based, or work-based childcare centres for under three-year-olds,
- State, Church or Independent owned and operated kindergarten settings for three to five-year-olds, either standalone or forming part of a larger educational establishment,

¹⁰ European Commission, 2014. Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission. ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-qualityframework_en.pdf.

¹¹ Ionescu, M., Tankersley, D., Trikić Z, Vonta T., A Systemic Approach to Quality in Early Childhood Services for children from 3 to 10 years of age. Documentation Study on ISSA's work on Quality Improvement. Leiden: ISSA, 2018.

¹² Adapted from (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014, p. 155).

¹³ Adapted from European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- the first two years of compulsory primary education in State, Church or Independent schools for five to seven-year olds.

ECEC quality: a multidimensional concept which includes:¹⁴

- **structural quality:** considers how the ECEC setting is designed and organised. This includes staff qualifications and skills, children group size, the ratio of educators to children, health and safety requirements, and the policies, procedures and practices which bear a direct impact on the organisation of the setting.
- **process quality:** considers aspects that have a direct influence on children's experiences, wellbeing, and development. These include the relationships between educators and children, the integrated approach to care and learning, day-to-day pedagogical practices, and working in partnership with parents.
- **outcomes quality:** considers cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, spiritual and physical/health developmental outcomes.

Evaluation indicators: criteria that inform the judgements of external reviewers when evaluating the quality of ECEC service provision. They are also intended to assist the settings' internal evaluation.

Family: a person or a group of persons who are linked to the child, either by blood, kinship and/or responsibility of care and upbringing.¹⁵

Inclusion: an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination.¹⁶

Integrated ECEC curriculum framework: an ECEC curriculum, for children from birth up to seven years of age, with a broad pedagogical framework that sets out the principles for sustaining children's holistic development through educational and care practices that are responsive to children's interests, needs, and abilities.

Learning outcomes: the five broad learning outcomes of the Early Years cycle are the overall guide for ECEC educators' pedagogy. These include

- Children who develop a strong sense of identity
- Children who have a positive self-image
- Children are socially adept
- Children who are effective communicators
- Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners.

Multi-sector coordination: the collaboration between organisations and/or ministries in different areas of policy (e.g. education, health, social, finance) and different sectors (e.g. private, public, third) as well as parents, parent associations, communities and people working together to achieve policy outcomes.

National standards: in Malta, these include the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006) for those offering an ECEC service provision for children under three years of age and the National Quality Standards for those offering an ECEC service provision for children from three to seven years of age, including any future updates to these standards.

Parent: in the context of this policy, parent refers to the person/s or entity which is/are recognised by the State as being responsible for the care and upbringing of the child.¹⁷

14 Taguma, M, Litens, I & Makowiecki, K. (2013). *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Sweden: OECD.

15 Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (2017) *National Children's Policy*.

16 UNESCO-IBE, 2008, p.18.

17 Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (2017) *National Children's Policy*.

Proficient: the ability to communicate with a level of accuracy and in adequate standard both verbally and written in a particular language.

Quantitative and qualitative data: data generated from the monitoring and evaluation of structural and process quality of ECEC service provision in order to establish facts, trends, and evidence on the current situation of ECEC.

Stakeholders: all those who are invested in the care and education of children in ECEC settings, primarily the children themselves, parents, families, educators and educational leaders, service providers and community members.

Systemic qualification framework: a set of standardised principles and procedures that serve as an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels and as defined in the Malta Qualifications Framework. The aim is to ensure the effective comparability of qualifications.

Universal Design: a design approach most frequently used in architecture that refers to proactively designing environments and spaces to create the least restrictive access for individuals across the widest range of situations without the need for modification.¹⁸

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): a framework to improve and optimise teaching and learning for everyone based on scientific insights into how humans learn. It equips the educator with an understanding of how learning occurs to ensure that all learners can access and experience meaningful, challenging learning opportunities by providing multiple means of engagement, recognition as well as action and expression.¹⁹

Vulnerable and marginalised families: families who are at risk of exclusion due to lack of access to rights and resources as well as denied opportunities in mainstream economic, political, cultural, and social activities.

Whole-of-government approach: an integrated government response to ECEC issues. It involves different ministries/public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal. It aims to achieve policy coherence in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of ECEC policies, standards, and services.²⁰

Whole-of-society approach: all relevant stakeholders working to support national efforts in relation to ECEC policies, standards, and services. This strengthens coordination among stakeholders, in order to make their efforts more effective. These stakeholders include individuals, families, communities, intergovernmental organisations, religious institutions, civil society, academia, the media, voluntary associations, and – when appropriate – the private sector and industry.²¹

18 Centre for Excellence in Universal Design available at <http://universaldesign.ie/>.

19 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) available at www.cast.org

20 World Health Organisation (2018). *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential*. World Health Organisation

21 *ibid.*

Goal 1: Accessibility

Accessibility in ECEC refers to service provision which is affordable and available for all children and their families. It requires universally designed settings which accept and adapt to, and are accepting of, the various needs of all children and other stakeholders.

1.1 Equitable access to entry

1.1.1 Equitable access to high-quality ECEC service provision for all children, particularly those who are considered at risk of exclusion.

1.2 Equitable access to the physical environment

1.2.1 A physical environment both indoors and outdoors, that enables all children to have access to and engage fully in the learning and care opportunities offered.

1.2.2 Resources that are accessible for all children and respect the individual needs of each child.

1.2.3 Equitable access for all to learn about, through and within a digital environment.

1.3 Equitable access to learning and care opportunities

1.3.1 A provision that is based on the principles of equity, inclusion, justice and gender equality, and is free from prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination.

1.3.2 Respect for diversity wherein all children are valued, and their identity, language, beliefs, and culture are supported at all times.

1.3.3 Equal access to gender-sensitive and culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate educational experiences that support children's holistic development.

1.3.4 A universal design approach to ECEC so that all children are enabled to be meaningfully and actively engaged in a range of rich pedagogical experiences.

1.3.5 Identification of learning and well-being needs of all children, and the removal of any barriers that might restrict accessibility and the engagement in the learning experiences offered.

1.4 Equitable access to all families

- 1.4.1 A provision that values and respects diverse family structures, voices, beliefs, practices, and needs.
- 1.4.2 Support for vulnerable and marginalised families to access high-quality ECEC service provision.
- 1.4.3 Equitable partnership with parents in the full range of experiences offered.
- 1.4.4 Continuous, multi-sectoral collaboration amongst governmental bodies, and with NGOs, local organisations, community, support groups, and all relevant stakeholders so that all families, including those at risk, are provided with the guidance and support they may require.



Goal 2: The Workforce

The workforce refers to all educators who work directly with children and their families in ECEC, offering a holistic provision that values equally both care and education.

2.1 A qualified workforce

- 2.1.1 Sufficient provision of qualified ECEC educators to meet the demand within the sector.
- 2.1.2 Recruitment across all ECEC settings of educators who have achieved the initial minimum qualification requirement relevant to their role in the setting.
- 2.1.3 Agreed upon minimum qualification requirements for the different roles of ECEC educators across the sector.
- 2.1.4 ECEC educators who are proficient in Maltese and English.

2.2 A mixed-gender workforce

- 2.2.1 A balanced male/female presence among ECEC educators so that education and care may benefit from a mixed gender workforce.

2.3 Initial training and professional development

- 2.3.1 A systemic qualification framework that helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality when developing initial training and continuous professional learning programmes for all educators in the ECEC sector.
- 2.3.2 The provision of professional development opportunities for ECEC educators who work directly with children. These need to be based on the needs of educators as identified by the ECEC leadership.
- 2.3.3 Participation of all ECEC educators in well-planned and accessible mandatory and voluntary continued professional learning opportunities which generate reflective thinking and sustain professional growth.
- 2.3.4 Regular monitoring and mentoring that supports ECEC educators and bridges the gap between theory and practice.
- 2.3.5 Regular and structured fora for ECEC educators to collaborate, discuss and share good practices.

2.4 Professionalisation of the workforce

- 2.4.1 High regard and esteem towards the ECEC sector to attract suitable persons to get qualified, recruited and retained in this profession.
- 2.4.2 Clear career pathways to qualification with diverse entry points and progression routes for all prospective and already employed ECEC educators working in different roles and settings.
- 2.4.3 Remuneration and working conditions that attract the best talent, acknowledge qualifications, experience, responsibilities, and parity, for all educators working in the different settings within the education sector.



Goal 3: Curriculum

An ECEC curriculum, grounded in an integrated national framework, refers to the planned and spontaneous experiences, emerging from children’s play and interactions, enabling children to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Well-designed universal learning environments, resources and educators’ guidance, observations and authentic assessment are integral to this curriculum.

3.1 A curriculum for all children

- 3.1.1 A curriculum that moves away from a one-size-fits all, is co-designed with young children and implemented with the rights, interests, and well-being of every child in mind.
- 3.1.2 A well-balanced curriculum of care and learning which supports children’s well-being, promotes their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, moral, spiritual, language, and creative development, and helps them develop their full potential.
- 3.1.3 An integrated ECEC curriculum framework for all children which ensures continuity, smooth transitions, and progression in children’s learning and development across the different ECEC settings starting from home to childcare through kindergarten and early primary. This curriculum is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of A National Curriculum Framework for All (MEDE, 2012) with particular focus on the five broad learning outcomes of the Early Years cycle as reflected in the Learning Outcomes Framework.

3.2 The learning experiences

- 3.2.1 Children recognised as right-holders, active participants, and capable learners, at the centre of all learning experiences that foster sustainable lifestyles that empower children to participate as global citizens.
- 3.2.2 Children provided with nurturing care and learning experiences through supportive, meaningful, and responsive interactions with their educators.
- 3.2.3 Children given the opportunity to communicate their feelings, views, and thoughts which are recognised and valued by their educators through a pedagogy of listening. In this way, children’s voices and choices are prioritised to direct the course of the play and learning experiences and to help them develop their self-concept, self-esteem and self-regulation.
- 3.2.4 Children experiencing learning through a wide range of child-centred inquiry and play-based learning opportunities designed to (a) respond to children’s emerging interests, needs, and learning potential, (b) stimulate their sense of awe and wonder, thinking, curiosity, and motivation to learn, and (c) enable their progress in learning and development towards the desired learning outcomes.
- 3.2.5 A language-rich environment in both Maltese and English which reinforces children’s self-esteem as bilingual learners and supports all mother tongues other than Maltese and English.
- 3.2.6 Meaningful opportunities for learning about, with and through digital technology to enhance the development of responsible multi-literacy communicative repertoires enabling children’s successful participation in a digital society.

3.2.7 Observation, monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of children’s learning and holistic development in a way that strengths are enhanced, risk factors are addressed, barriers are eliminated, and additional support and services are provided if needed.

3.3 The learning environment

3.3.1 A nurturing care and learning environment, both indoor and outdoor, that fosters a sense of belonging and which is well-designed and organized by sensitive adults to promote meaningful learning, creative exploration and computational thinking. A learning environment that is safe and responsive to the uniqueness of all children, and facilitates their social competences.

3.3.2 Learning areas, resources, and materials that are continually reviewed to (a) meet the evolving interests and needs of children, (b) provide a broad range of opportunities for independent and group exploration, creativity and discovery, and (c) facilitate meaningful and purposeful learning within and across all developmental domains and areas of learning.

3.3.3 A learning environment that promotes children’s active participation and engagement through play-based pedagogies and facilitates the holistic development and general well-being of all children.

3.3.4 A whole setting approach towards the promotion and implementation of sustainable and green practices.

3.3.5 A learning atmosphere which respects children’s well-being and, through a coherent approach, promotes children’s positive behaviour towards each other and their educators.

3.3.6 A learning environment that enables children’s engagement with multiple forms of media for communicative purposes. Embracing a balanced and emergent approach to the use of different language systems, symbols, patterns and digital practices.

3.4 Collaboration with the family and professionals

3.4.1 All families to be valued as the educators’ most important partners in children’s learning and development and to be supported in fulfilling their role as caregivers and educators.

3.4.2 Learning and development progress is periodically shared with parents through consultation, active involvement, and engagement of families in all aspects of their child’s learning and care experiences.

3.4.3 Collaboration and engagement with professionals from the wider community so that the holistic needs of every child are met.



Goal 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation refers to the regular and continuous process of quality assuring the service provision of ECEC settings at all levels and involves the ongoing and systematic collection and analysis of the generated data involving all key stakeholders, thus striving to increase transparency and accountability to the key stakeholders in the best interest of every child.

4.1 External monitoring and evaluation of quality at both national and service level

- 4.1.1 The regular monitoring and evaluation of service provision vis-à-vis national standards, including evaluation of records of children's learning and development, with the engagement of all stakeholders throughout the process, to ensure structural, process and outcomes quality in all ECEC settings.
- 4.1.2 The development of evaluation indicators, reflecting updated research evidence of what high-quality ECEC provision consists of and sustaining the national vision for ECEC.
- 4.1.3 The development of a joint monitoring system across ministries/entities to provide a more holistic picture of progress and generate information that enables cross-sectoral decision making.

4.2 Internal monitoring and evaluation of quality by ECEC service providers

- 4.2.1 The development of self-evaluation tools for the different ECEC settings to evaluate, reflect upon and improve the structural, process, and outcomes quality of their provision, in relation to the setting's vision and national ECEC policies and standards.
- 4.2.2 ECEC leadership which regularly monitors and evaluates staff quality, identify ways to improve practice, and guides the implementation of new initiatives for improved quality provision.
- 4.2.3 Individual and collective evaluation and analysis of practices within ECEC settings, based on evidence and considering all stakeholders (including children, families and educators), to inform and guide improvement.

4.3 Data collection

- 4.3.1 A national information system so that regularly updated quantitative and qualitative data, generated from the external and internal monitoring and evaluation of ECEC service provision is:
 - a. collected and collated systematically and regularly, and used to support the planning, development, implementation, review, monitoring and evaluation of high quality ECEC service provision at all levels in the system,
 - b. used for the efficient deployment of resources at all levels, thus increasing cost-effectiveness and improved outcomes for all children,

- c. used to effectively develop and implement national ECEC policies, programmes, and services, as well as for the development and implementation of family, labour market and education policies,
- d. made available to ensure accountability and transparency for improved quality ECEC provision.

4.4 Professional learning and development for external reviewers

- 4.4.1 Ongoing professional learning opportunities for external reviewers to enhance consistency and objectivity when monitoring and evaluating ECEC service provision.
- 4.4.2 Ongoing professional learning opportunities for individuals who are accrediting and monitoring the qualifications of ECEC educators to enhance consistency and objectivity.

4.5 Monitoring and evaluation of initial training and education programmes of study for ECEC educators

- 4.5.1 The regular internal and external monitoring and evaluation of the content and delivery of the initial training and education programmes of study organised by different entities for prospective ECEC educators, to ensure high quality initial professional preparation.

4.6 Easily accessible and regularly updated information related to ECEC.

- 4.6.1 Clear communication channels for parents to voice their concerns and provide feedback.

We learn, we play, we have so much fun, doing everything, we come to learn and feel happy, we play outside, we play with soft toys, in the baby area, in the forest, in the kitchen and on the nature table.

I feel happy when I play and run.

I don't like this flower because it's pink, make it blue, make grass red, the soil black.



Goal 5: Governance and Funding

ECEC governance refers to the country's organisational structure, and its placement of authority and accountability for policy formulation, strategic planning, regulation, resourcing, financing, implementation and evaluation of publicly funded ECEC service provision.

5.1 A common vision and clear expectations

- 5.1.1 A common vision which is built on shared knowledge, practices and values and has clear expectations on the quality of ECEC structure, process and outcomes.
- 5.1.2 Regular and effective communication about the common vision and expectations, permeating at all levels within a competent system, to create a sense of shared purpose in line with the holistic national vision.

5.2 Effective multi-sector coordination and collaboration

- 5.2.1 A competent system requiring an integrated whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to ECEC services and develops on the competencies and the reciprocal relationships amongst individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-economical-political context.
- 5.2.2 A well-resourced, high-level multi-sector coordination mechanism that coordinates policies, budgets, operational plans, work-force development, training packages and tools in the ECEC sector.

5.3 Sustained financial investment

- 5.3.1 Sustained financial investment for the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce that enables:
 - a. the improvement of the quality, affordability, and accessibility of initial training and education programmes of study;
 - b. the improvement of the quality, affordability, and accessibility of professional learning during in-service practice; and
 - c. support of qualified and competent ECEC educators with appropriate financial remuneration that is comparable across settings.
- 5.3.2 Sustained financial investment to support access for disadvantaged groups, particularly children with a disability and those considered to be vulnerable or marginalised.

5.4 A national platform on learning and research

- 5.4.1 A national platform focused on learning and research, that identifies local ECEC research priorities, carries out such research, and documents and publishes research findings and lessons learned.
- 5.4.2 Regular collaboration with other entities and stakeholders conducting professional research.
- 5.4.3 ECEC educators as primary contributors and instigate research relevant to current practices.



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Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education

Triq Joseph Abela Sclaro

Hamrun

HMR 1304

Email: customercare.dqse@gov.mt

Telephone: 2598 1400

