

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE



A NATIONAL
POLICY

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

April 2006

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A NATIONAL POLICY

10th April 2006

Hon Louis Galea, B.A., LL.D., MP
Minister of Education, Youth and Employment
Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment
Floriana CMR 02

Dear Minister,

Early Childhood Education and Care Review

We enclose herewith a Report following a review we have carried out of the situation and relative policies and services in the field of early childhood education, in accordance with your letter and terms of reference.

The Working Group is available to meet with you to discuss this Report at your convenience.

We wish to thank all those who made their views known to us, and who helped us to progress with our deliberations.

Your sincerely,

Valerie Sollars
Chairperson

Monica Attard
Member

Chiara Borg
Member

Brian Craus
Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the early childhood education working group I would like to thank several Maltese and foreign colleagues for the feedback and support given in the preparation of this report.

Dr Valerie Sollars
Chairperson of the ECEC working group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In spite of the locally-available services in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), there has been no attempt to: discuss or design a national policy for the sector based on the cultural needs and the national climate; identify shared understandings and expectations of early childhood education and care, that is our “nation’s social construction of childhood” (Kagan, 2001); research the quality of the provision of available services. There has been no research on the impact of transitions children go through from homes to centres and from centres to compulsory schooling or even, the effect these settings have on children’s short and long term development.
- 1.2 An early childhood education and care policy needs to be shaped by considering dynamic forces within the family and within society. The responsibilities of ECEC are not limited or restricted to a clearly defined body or agency and any policy in the field must take into consideration demographic, economic and social developments. By taking into consideration the changes experienced by societies and within families as they struggle to reconcile work and care commitments the far-reaching impact of a good or weak ECEC policy can be highlighted.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 The conclusions from a comparative review of early childhood policies in 12 countries identify eight key elements of policy that are likely to promote equitable access to good quality services in the field (OECD, 2001). These include:
 - A systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
 - A strong and equal partnership with the education system;
 - A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support;
 - Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure;
 - A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
 - Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision;
 - Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection;
 - A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

THE CURRENT LOCAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 Policies focusing on ECEC are naturally influenced by policies, factors, decisions and structures which go beyond care and/or education. Issues with a direct bearing on ECEC include:
 - the cultural and contextual climate;
 - the labour market, employment patterns and gender issues;
 - the provision and availability of early childhood facilities;
 - staff training and qualifications;
 - curricula and learning programmes;
 - methodological practices and resources;
 - financing;

- transition issues;
- parental involvement and training/participation;
- evaluation and monitoring.

- 3.2 Crucial issues need to be addressed in the immediate, short and long-term.
- 3.3 The child-care issue is still largely considered to be a woman's issue where women are generally expected to terminate their employment temporarily or permanently to raise the family. Although men and women have equal access to job opportunities with the same conditions, very few men make use of parental leave. Apart from the cultural mentality in our society which has for a long time considered men as the bread winners and women as the ones responsible for the family, more men tend to occupy positions that render better-paid employment than females, such as managerial and professional posts. Consequently, if someone has to give up an income, it is the lower wage earner to forfeit the job.
- 3.4 Family-friendly policies at all places of work need to be introduced. Employers have to be convinced that employees who are confident with their child-care arrangements contribute to greater productivity and better work output. Employees who rely on unstable child-care arrangements are more likely to absent themselves from work resulting in loss of productivity and efficiency.
- 3.5 To date, child-care settings are totally financed through parental fees. Good, quality care can be promoted if there is a real commitment by employers to support child-care centres.
- 3.6 Employed child-care workers have recently started receiving some training leading to basic qualifications. It is necessary to start planning for long-term professional training to ensure that all workers employed in the care and education of children between birth and 8 are professionally qualified so that they can plan and execute their responsibilities in a professional way.
- 3.7 At Kindergarten level, the work force is still largely under-qualified, with most practitioners having learnt what to do on the job together with short and sporadic in-service training. Over the years, there has been no coherent training programme to upgrade the profession of personnel in the service. Of the 300 or so students who, over a period of ten years, completed a two-year course leading to a certificate in pre-school education, only a handful have been employed as KG assistants. A negligible number (3.7%; N=14) are in state schools.
- 3.8 At child-care centres and even in several schools, the head of centres are not qualified in essential management courses directly related to the early years. A number of heads of schools have never taught at primary level or have spent most of their teaching years at secondary schools. 59% of administrative staff in state schools were never responsible for managing a KG centre prior to their promotion to an administrative post. Heads of services need not only be good business people, leaders and managers but they need to be aware of pedagogical and educational practices which are suitable for the children attending the centre or school.
- 3.9 There needs to be internal and external monitoring of the services and practices being offered at all levels of child-care establishments (child-care centres, KG centres and schools). Child-care and KG centres work in isolation without support from other centres or professional personnel who can support them in practical difficulties which are met with regularly. In the absence of appropriately-trained personnel, working in isolation becomes more problematic as practices which are



inappropriate for the holistic development of young children are more likely to go unchecked.

- 3.10 External monitoring of centres needs to be done by suitably qualified staff who not only ensure that standards are being reached and maintained but can support the centres with the necessary improvements.
- 3.11 Since there is not one single authority or agency currently responsible for early childhood education and care, transition issues from child-care to KG centres and eventually to compulsory schooling become difficult to manage and co-ordinate. This results in adult carers not having access to crucial information about the educational programme, learning and development of the child in a previous setting.
- 3.12 Limited and/or lack of resources is another challenge faced by early childhood centres. This inadequacy is reflected generally in consumables and day-to-day resources essential for the learning environment. In some centres, the premises themselves lack essential areas such as out-door play areas.
- 3.13 A curriculum, specifically designed for early years, linking theory and practice is absent. Practitioners do not have any clear documentation about the content and planning of their work or how such material can be translated to their daily practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES

- 4.1 Generous leave benefits for working parents could help reduce the need for costly infant provision and promote more equitable sharing of responsibilities.
- 4.2 Tax rebates, funding and/or subsidies for accredited day-care centres and small, private KG centres. Guarantee of affordable, quality provision is of paramount importance especially for low and middle-income parents.
- 4.3 Establishments responsible for young children ought to publish literature to promote their practices. This would result in a better-informed public.
- 4.4 Parents should be encouraged to visit different centres/to shop around and see what is available. Parents should be invited to spend time at centres when there are children.
- 4.5 Introduction of family-friendly benefits at place of work. Employers should be partners in child-care provision.
- 4.6 Ratios of adult to children need to be addressed. There should be a maximum of 15 three and four-year-old children with 1 qualified adult + 1 assistant. In child-care centres, there should be a maximum of two or three babies (under 12 months) with 1 trained/qualified adult; four children aged 12 to 24 months with one trained adult and a maximum of 8 children aged 24 to 36 months with one trained adult.
- 4.7 Staff at all levels and in all settings (state/private) should have appropriate qualifications. Over a period of time, current staff qualifications have to be upgraded until a situation is attained where all members of staff employed in the early years sector have a minimum qualification.
- 4.8 Practitioners in the field should have substantial skills, partly acquired in their

personal and professional training to carefully observe, evaluate and alter the programme of activities being offered to children attending their centre in order to provide high quality experiences.

- 4.9 Programmes should be pedagogically sound and conducted by appropriately trained professionals. A high quality programme in early childhood implies child-initiative, play and involvement. If a programme is over-focused on formal skills, it is more likely to provide opportunities for children to fail, and to develop a higher dependency on adults, promoting in them negative perceptions of their own competencies. Where KG centres form part of schools, a specific person has to be designated as the person responsible for the curricular programme at the centre.
- 4.10 Rather than working independently and in isolation staff at child-care centres should form networks or clusters. This could facilitate issues related to administration, organisation of training, negotiating with the authorities re issues related to salaries, training, holidays, insurance and setting of parental fees.
- 4.11 Centres should be encouraged to work in collaboration in order to find out more about appropriate and best practice. Such sharing of positive experiences could help to disseminate good practice across centres.
- 4.12 Within centres, there should be incentives to train and/or employ qualified staff to continually improve expertise. These incentives could also be linked to financial remuneration/subsidy for the centres themselves.
- 4.13 At a local level (centre/school-based) research ought to be undertaken in order to find out what immediate, short and long-term effects early childhood settings are having on the children in a range of skills one expects children to develop.
- 4.14 Each KG centre and early childhood institution should provide an annual report based on self-evaluation, reports from parents and children.
- 4.15 External monitoring and evaluation of practices at early childhood centres should be the responsibility of appropriately qualified staff.
- 4.16 When an application for a new centre is put forward and more importantly, once a license is given there should be careful scrutiny of premises, of staff and their qualifications and good standing.
- 4.17 Once a centre earns a license, unannounced inspections should be conducted periodically. A license should be renewed periodically.
- 4.18 The license can be revoked if premises or practice are not according to established standards. Transition periods may be allowed in order to allow for the service providers to upgrade premises, facilities or practices.
- 4.19 The license should be displayed in the main entrance of the building. Should there be a temporary license pending up-grading of premises or improvement in any sector, this should be clearly indicated together with a time-frame by when the situation is to be rectified.



INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE AND AIMS: THE NEED FOR A POLICY ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

The period between birth and the age of 8 is crucial in the development of human beings because the range and quality of events and activities experienced during this period have a direct impact on:

- each child's personal growth and development in various areas, namely: personal, social and emotional development; cognitive/intellectual development; language development and physical development;
- children's achievements in compulsory schooling;
- the future life-style, life-skills and opportunities available for each individual in the community.

Setting and achieving high standards of quality experiences in early childhood is an investment in the well-being of the country's citizens and the country itself.

Early childhood education and care is a critical first step in building the foundation for a child's ongoing learning and development. Over the last decade, the field has attracted the attention of Governments in many countries and the issue has shifted from one which used to consider whether there should be provision for early childhood education to one where there is an ever-pressing need to ensure the provision of quality services in the sector which are accessible and affordable for all.

In Malta, state provision for four-year-olds has been available since 1975 whereas provision for three-year-olds has been available since 1988. Private provision for three and four-year-olds has also been available for at least 18 years. Provision by the various religious orders varies but in some instances, KG centres have been available for around 100 years. Within the last decade, several child-day care centres have opened to cater for under-three year olds. To date, these are all private concerns without any funding (except for parents' fees) and without regulations.

In spite of all the services available, there has not been an attempt to discuss or design a national policy for Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) based on:

- the cultural needs and the national climate;
- our shared understandings and expectations of early childhood education and care, that is our "nation's social construction of childhood" (Kagan, 2001);
- the quality of the provision of available services;
- the impact of transitions children go through from homes to centres, and from centres to compulsory schooling; or even,
- the effect these settings have on children's short and long term development.

In the local context, the lack of a clear policy has led to a situation where the setting-up and management of centres which are responsible for ECEC have very limited, if any, professional background, support, management teams or educators/carers with the result that there is substantial evidence, mostly anecdotal, of practices which go against healthy expectations and experiences associated with early childhood education and care. For example, as recent as 2002, there was still a wide-spread belief that rather than professionally trained and qualified staff, mothers who have raised their own children are the best educators/carers to employ with under-threes and KG-aged children (Sollars,

The early years are a crucial period in a child's development

Locally, provision for three and four-year-olds is available for all

There is no ECEC policy in the local context



2002). Child day-care and KG centres, whether state or private, operate in isolation without any form of monitoring from or collaboration with interested stakeholders. There is a minimum regulatory framework binding state KG centres¹. For centres where care is provided for newborn to 3 year-olds, the first draft of child-care standards was publicly presented through a consultation document in July 2004².

A lack of policy leads to disparate practices

Private KG centres are free to follow their own programme which they develop autonomously. There are centres which give in to parental demands and give two and three year olds some “home-work”. In a nutshell, how positive or otherwise children’s experiences are within early childhood settings, in the long run depends on how resourceful, creative and conscientious the individual carers and educators are with the children. The richness of children’s experiences is as rich as the pre-training, in-service training, personal commitment and initiative of the individual carers. This leads to very disparate practices of varying quality across centres.

Achieving a coherent policy for ECEC is not an easy task and this is a difficulty Malta shares with other countries. Designing, developing and implementing an effective policy in the field of ECEC is a complex task because of the multiple stakeholders, organisations and agencies involved: “due to the variety of agencies involved, the diversity of services both formal and informal, and weaknesses in both policy co-ordination and data collection” (Bennett, 2002).

Policy needs to consider the dynamic forces within the family and within society

Policy needs to be shaped by considering the dynamic forces within the family and within society. The responsibilities of early childhood education and care are not limited or restricted to a clearly-defined body or agency and any policy in the field must take into consideration demographic, economic and social developments. The far-reaching impact a good or weak policy for early childhood education can have may be highlighted by considering changes which societies are undergoing where families cannot reconcile the balance of work and care commitments. Potential parents may delay having children or doing without. Alternatively, parents, generally mothers, withdraw permanently or temporarily from the labour market especially if there are time limitations for restricted access to services (OECD, 2003).

Children are born and raised within families which are very different. In recent years, there have also been significant changes in current childhoods: between birth and five, children are spending longer hours away from home and the mother as the primary care-giver in favour of multiple settings with multiple caregivers. Thus, policy measures must take into account sufficient income support to prevent deprivation which in turn is linked to increased employability of parents.

Interface between the needs of children, parents and the labour market.

Improved access to affordable and quality ECEC, paid and job-protected parental leave and greater flexibility in work arrangements are all important to facilitating a better balance of work and family responsibilities. ...

(OECD, 2001, p. 125)

¹ In January 2002, the Education officer in charge of the pre-primary and Junior section issued a ‘revised and updated’ document entitled *Guidelines & suggestions for the implementation of the curriculum in KG*

² Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity & Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment (2004). *Consultation document on early childhood development and care*. Available at http://www.msp.gov.mt/documents/family/childcare_consdoc_en.pdf

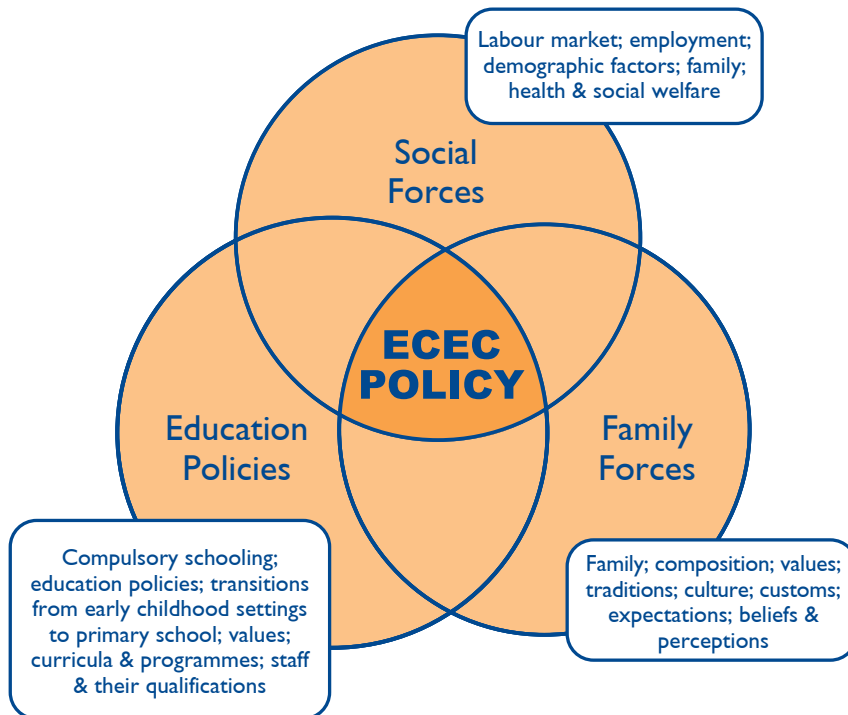


Figure 1: Forces which shape and ECEC policy

An effective policy in ECEC has implications for an equally effective education policy. If good quality early childhood education experiences are followed by poor school experiences, the positive experiences provided in early childhood settings cannot produce lasting benefits. An effective policy in ECEC is one which is contextually sensitive to societal changes and “responds in a holistic and integrated manner to the needs of children and families” (OECD, 2001, p. 125).

An effective policy is contextually sensitive to societal changes

OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL POLICY DOCUMENT ON ECEC

The local policy aims to provide specific recommendations regarding practices in the following key areas:

- Family engagement and support
- Funding and financing
- Curriculum development (appropriate programmes and activities)
- Staff qualifications and training opportunities
- Transition issues
- Monitoring and evaluation



SECTION I: THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT - RECOMMENDATIONS

One publication, which has had a major impact on policy development in the field of early childhood education, is the OECD publication *Starting Strong* (2001). This research reviewed the existing national policies of 12 countries between 1998 and 2001. The OECD has just concluded reviewing policies in another 8 countries and an updated publication with a provisional title of *Starting Strong 2* is expected towards the end of 2005/beginning of 2006. As a result of documentation collected from all the participating countries, eight key elements likely to promote successful ECEC policy have been identified. A successful policy is one likely to promote equitable access to quality provision.

Research has identified key elements leading to successful ECEC policies

According to the OECD review, key elements of a successful ECEC policy include:

1. A systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation.
 - a. A clear vision underlying policy, with a focus on children as a social group;
 - b. Co-ordinated policy frameworks at centralised and decentralised levels;
 - c. A lead ministry that works in co-operation with other ministries, departments and sectors.
 - d. A collaborative and participatory approach to reform
 - e. Strong links across services, professionals and parents in a given community.
2. A strong and equal partnership with the education system.
 - a. Supporting a lifelong learning approach from birth
 - b. Building on the strengths of both ECEC and schools.
3. A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support.
 - a. More attention to the policy and provision for the under 3s, including parental leave;
 - b. An inclusive and flexible approach to diversity, without compromising quality or access
4. Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure.
 - a. Recognising ECEC as a public service requires government support;
 - b. A well-funded system of services supported by an infrastructure for quality assurance.
5. A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance.
 - a. The application of regulatory standards for all forms of provision supported by co-ordinated investment;
 - b. Participatory and democratic process to define and assure quality;
 - c. A pedagogical framework focusing on children's holistic development to support quality practice;
 - d. Monitoring that supports and engages staff, parents and children.
6. Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision.
 - a. Quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector;
 - b. Expanding initial and in-service training to reflect a wide range of educational and social responsibilities;
 - c. Developing strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse mixed-gender workforce.

7. Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection.
 - a. Coherent procedures to collect and analyse data on the status of young children;
 - b. Identifying and addressing data gaps in the field through international efforts
8. A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.
 - a. Research on areas concerning key policy goals and the links between research, policy and practice.
 - b. Expanding the research agenda to include areas and discipline that are under-represented;
 - c. Supporting a range of methods and dissemination strategies to inform diverse audiences.

ECEC policies incorporate factors that contribute directly to the field together with relevant historical developments

Appendix I provides an overview of early childhood education services in several countries. Information is given about the cultural climate and types of provision available together with crucial issues related to financing, ratios, staff qualifications, curricula, pedagogical practices and parental involvement. Naturally, different countries deal with issues related to ECEC differently depending on the factors that contribute directly to the field as well as to historical developments relevant to the particular country. However, irrespective of differences in cultures, finances available or historical developments, within each country efforts have been made or are underway to promote a shared national belief in the need for a childcare strategy that will bring care and education closer together; a belief in the importance of good quality care that is available, accessible and affordable for all children so that parents can truly be in a position to choose whether to work or stay at home and to have a real choice in terms of quality services available. In summing up the need for the Scottish Childcare strategy (1998), it is acknowledged that although parents have to make choices regarding their preferred arrangements for childcare, Government must ensure that parents have access to services to enable them to make genuine choices. The principles of quality, affordability, diversity, accessibility and partnership have to be respected (Scottish Childcare Strategy, 1998).

In several countries, the 90s brought with them changes in views about childhood as well as childcare provision. Changes were brought about as a result of changing patterns in the work force and the increase in the number of women going out to work and/or furthering their studies. The 1992 EU Council recommendations on childcare urges member states to ensure that childcare services are **affordable and combine safe and secure care with a broad education or pedagogical approach**. The legal notice also highlights the needs of parents and children in determining access to services which should be available in all areas and regions. Services should be accessible and responsive to children with special (e.g. linguistic) needs and to children in single-parent families. (EU summaries of legislation, 2005).

A successful early childhood education policy should include opportunities which facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life (OECD, 2003). This can be achieved through several measures such as tax benefits, child-care policies and workplace practices which enable parents to combine a career and family life (OECD, 2002).



SECTION 2: THE LOCAL CONTEXT CURRENT SITUATION

DEMOGRAPHY

The Maltese archipelago consists of a group of 5 islands, two of which are inhabited. As a result of its geographical position, in the centre of the Mediterranean, the islands boast a very rich and varied history spanning some 7000 years. According to the demographic review of the National Statistics Office (2006), the population of the Maltese Islands as estimated at the end of 2004, was made up of 402,668 people - 199,580 males and 203,088 females³. This includes the Maltese population and all non-Maltese residing in Malta. Excluding the number of permanent, foreign residents, there are 389,769 Maltese inhabitants – 193,917 males and 196,752 females. Considering the size of the Maltese islands (316km²), these figures highlight the high population density per square kilometre, namely 1,274 persons. This makes Malta the country with the highest population density in Europe.

Maltese population estimates

Age breakdowns from the National Statistics Office 2004 estimates (NSO, 2005a) indicate a steady drop in the number of births in Malta.

Ages	Males	Females	Total
0 to 4 year olds	9964	9572	19536
0	1890	1780	3670
1	1955	1952	3907
2	2000	1812	3812
3	1989	1881	3870
4	2130	2147	4277

Ages	Males	Females	Total
5-8 year olds	9598	9030	18628
5	2188	2140	4328
6	2310	2193	4503
7	2548	2304	4852
8	2552	2393	4945

Source: http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_file.aspx?id=1502

Table I Maltese children⁴ by sex and single years of age: 31st December 2004
(based on the November 1995 Census)

³ Estimates are based on the 1995 national Census of Population. Population estimates are updated annually taking into account the components which bring about change - birth, death, migration and the registration of foreigners as Maltese nationals.

⁴ Figures based on 388,867 as the total population. If one were to include births to foreigners residing in Malta, the total number of children aged 0 to 4 is 20,575; total number of children aged 5 to 8 is 19,368.

LABOUR MARKET, EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER ISSUES

Employment patterns in the Maltese society

The participation rate of Maltese women between the ages of 15 to 64 is very low. According to the news release about the labour force survey (NSO, 2005b)⁵, the overall employment rate for females in July 2005 was 32.6%. From the age of 35 onwards, women in employment are absent.

In comparison to European countries, Malta has the lowest female employment rate for 15 to 64 year-old women (European Commission, 2005a). Only 32.8% of Maltese women are in employment in comparison to 45.2% in Italy and Greece, 46.2% in Poland, 56.5% in Ireland and 61.7% in Portugal to mention but a few examples.

Age Group	Sex				Total	
	Males		Females			
	No	%	No	%	No	%
15 - 24	14,730	14.3	13,533	28.8	28,263	18.9
25 - 34	24,720	24.1	14,153	30.1	38,873	26.0
35 - 44	25,346	24.7	7,971	17.0	33,317	22.2
45 - 54	26,871	26.1	8,433	18.0	35,304	23.6
55 - 64	10,442	10.2	2,869	6.1	13,311	8.9
65+	668 ^u	0.6	---	---	668 ^u	0.4
TOTAL	102,777	100.0%	46,959	100.0%	149736	100.0%

Source: http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_file.aspx?id=999

Table 2 Age distribution for total employed persons (January – March 2005)

Working patterns of mothers

Research among 518 families making use of child-care and small private KG centres shows a big difference in the working patterns of mothers and fathers: 91.7% (475) fathers were in full-time employment as opposed to 35.1% (181) of mothers (Sollars, 2002). Whereas there were no differences in the number of fathers in full-time employment whose children attended child care (91.5%) or a small KG centre (91.8%), there was a great difference in the employment pattern of the mothers with 45.4% in full-time employment making use of child-care centres and only 31.3% of mothers whose children were at small, KG centres being in full-time-employment.

Gender patterns in family-raising matters

In the same study, 49.6% (257) families report that prior to using child-care or KG facilities, the mother was the person with the responsibility for looking after the child. For 24.9% (129) families, various people were responsible and this included both the father and the mother. In only 1% (5) of the families was the father identified as the person who looked after the children before using child-minding facilities.

Another study which considered factors that affect women's participation in the formal labour market revealed that 27.3% of females not involved in the formal economy report that they have to look after family members whereas 24.9% are happy to be at home taking care of the family. Other reasons cited by women for not working included "a woman's place is in the home with husband & children; not being encouraged or allowed to work by family members as well as the idea that housework has to be done and there is no time for paid employment" (Baldacchino, 2003).

⁵ http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_file.aspx?id=1491



Recent research findings from a study entitled *Modern Men in an Enlarged Europe*, show that only 1% of Maltese fathers take parental leave. This is comparable to findings in Lithuania but very different to the situation which exists in countries like Iceland where more than 80% of men take time off to help care for newborn babies⁶. Locally, parental leave has been available in the public sector since 1996 but was only introduced in the private sector in 2003. While employees of the public sector have a year's paternity leave, the private sector offers only three months. In Malta, paternal leave is unpaid and comes with a lot of restrictions. It has not been widely publicised, and men are still reluctant to make use of it because of traditional gender role barriers. The authorities are being urged to introduce paid paternal leave and increase the number of days off work (*The Times of Malta*, 2005). It is worth noting that the 1998 EU Commission follow-up report to the 1992 recommendations on childcare specifically reports that then, only seven of the 'old' 15 EU countries provided for paternity leave. With the exception of the Nordic countries, this is limited to a few days. The report concludes that fathers need to be encouraged to make use of the opportunities for child care that are available to them. Whilst short-term leave at the time of a child's birth is becoming more popular, longer-term care options seem to be ignored by the vast majority of fathers. Whereas a radical shift in attitudes is desirable, the report notes that the majority of Member States have launched information campaigns (2005, EU summaries of legislation).

Few fathers take parental leave

Another reason which might contribute to less men staying at home concerns the family earnings. The average gross annual salary for male employees is Lm5539.29 whereas the average gross annual salary for females is Lm4589.37 (NSO, 2005c). It seems logical to argue that if one of the wage-earners is to give up a job, this onus falls on the lower wage earner.

Wage differentials among men & women

With a bias towards females to give up employment and raise children, there are several concerns that need to be addressed. Research indicates that the lifelong effects of a woman's downgrading to part-time work or withdrawing completely from the work force to care for young children has considerable negative effects on professional development, lifelong earnings, pensions and career progression (Harkness & Waldfogel, 2002, as cited in OECD, 2004)

Effects of women's withdrawal from employment

		2002	2003	2004	2005
Employed	Males	102120	101159	102801	102777
	Females	46283	45883	45301	46959
Total Employed		148403	147042	148102	149736
Unemployed	Males	6715	8502	6297	6806
	Females	4160	4094	4739	4032
Total Unemployed		10875	12596	11036	10838
Inactive	Males	48085	47766	48311	48184
	Females	111659	113210	113552	113515
Total Inactive		159744	160976	161863	161699

Source: http://nso.gov.mt/statbase/data_table_display.aspx

Table 3 Labour status for persons aged 15+

⁶ http://www.gender-balance.undp.ro/european_union_gender_news/Modern_Men_in_an_Enlarged_Europe.php
<http://www.timesofmalta.com/core/article.php?id=190801>;
<http://www.timesofmalta.com/core/article.php?id=208989>

Employers and child care arrangements

Employers need to be educated and convinced of the positive outcomes for their business as well as for the well-being of their employees if conditions of work favour the employment of both men and women. Parents are concerned for the well-being of their children and studies have shown that when employees have difficulties with child-care arrangements, they are less effective in the workplace (Bond, Galinsky & Swanbert, 1998 as cited in Van Horn, J.E. & Beierlein, J.G. (undated). Childcare problems can lead to:

- Increased tardiness and absenteeism
- Higher turnover rates
- Higher recruiting and training costs

Any of these can jeopardize

- Productivity
- Work quality
- Profitability

Child-care problems can have a wide-ranging effect on the workplace (Van Horn, & Beierlein, undated) including unproductive time at work owing to child-care concerns; having to deal with family issues during working hours; taking time off work because of child-care problems.

CHANGING FAMILY SIZE & STRUCTURE**Changing patterns in society**

There are another two situations unfolding within Maltese families which strengthen the argument in favour of high-quality provision within centres and institutions which cater for early childhood education and care: a drop in birth rate within families as well as an increasing number of children to single-mothers. The former could be evolving because of the high standard of living people want to achieve. This would imply delaying parenthood as a result of the cost of amenities and services together with the uphill struggle to move up the career ladder. Also, the lack of suitable child-care centres may be a deterrent for young parents who would still like to maintain their job as well as raise a family. This becomes an even greater concern where reliance on the extended family is no longer taken for granted. Research within 518 families indicated that 17.6% (91) of grandparents are only available for a limited time whereas for 9.3% (48) of the families, grandparents are unavailable (Sollars, 2002).

Mothers and employment benefits

In some aspects, the Maltese situation is similar to the Irish context. According to the OECD review for Ireland⁷ “high drop-out rates from the labour market, the increasing number of women in part-time work, the low participation of older female cohorts are signs...that traditional patterns of gender inequality still survive” (p. 70). Women and their families gain greatly, both at a personal and a professional level, from being in employment. Apart from the contribution to society, they can gradually build up independent pension benefits for their later years. Moreover, long-term employment helps in the avoidance of long-term poverty which can badly effect the woman and her dependents (OECD, 2004).

⁷ (2004). *OECD Thematic review of early childhood education and care policy in Ireland*



PROVISION AND AVAILABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD FACILITIES

Early Childhood education facilities in Malta can be broadly classified under three categories:

- Child/Day care centres which cater for 0 to 3 year olds;
- KG centres which cater for 3 to 5 year olds in the state sector; some private KG centres take children as young as 30 months (2.5 year olds)
- Primary schooling for 5 to 11 year-olds. For the purpose of this document, details about 5 to 8- year-olds will be included. Compulsory education starts in the year when a child turns 5.

Child Day-Care Centres

Child day-care centres are a relatively recent phenomenon in the Maltese society, with the earlier ones being set up in 1996/97. Although to date service-providers of child-day care centres are not a direct responsibility of any particular government entity, historically, initiatives for under-threes seem to be linked formerly to the Department for the Advancement of Women⁸ and more recently to the Department for Social Welfare Standards⁹ both within the Ministry of Social Policy¹⁰. Although the Department for Women in Society was not responsible for the child-care sector, it did keep a list of centres and coordinated the first child-care centre (Dawra durella centre) to be subsidised by the state. Since 2002 Agenzija APPOĠĠ has been running a child-care and family resource centre situated within *ACCĒSS Community Resource Centre* in Birgu. This centre was purposely built and in order to provide a holistic service, it addresses parental issues together with practical programmes such as first aid, road safety and safety at home. Moreover the centre seeks an active role in the local community. The centre is free for those who are on social assistance and or live on a minimum wage but there are fees for those who have higher incomes.

Initiatives for child day-care centres

In 2002, a Technical Committee for Child Day Care centres (TCCDC) was set up by the then Minister of Social Policy, specifically to start the process which would eventually lead to the legislation of child care centres. Once the legislation is in place, service providers and premises will have to be licensed in order to offer the service. Whilst the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) is currently the lead Ministry responsible for services catering for the 0-3 age bracket, since 2003 there has been close collaboration with the Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment (MEYE) on the issue and this is due to the strong educational aspect within the service.

Towards regulations and legislation of child day care centres

A consultation document with draft regulations was published (July 2004) jointly by the MEYE and the MFSS. The document highlights the principles and standards to be achieved in the following areas:

Principles and standards for child care centres

⁸ The Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women has replaced the Department for the Advancement of Women.

⁹ Since August 2005, the Department for Family Welfare was renamed Department for Social Welfare Standards to reflect the change of responsibilities of the Department.

¹⁰ Since March 2004, the Ministry of Social Policy was renamed Ministry for the Family & Social Solidarity.

- Suitable persons and organisation
- Physical environment, premises & equipment
- Health and safety of children
- Care, learning & play
- Behaviour management
- Food and drink
- Equal opportunities & children with special needs
- Working in partnership with parents
- Child protection
- Policies & procedures

Although legislation is pending, the proposed standards are being used as an administrative document. Several initiatives have been taken to implement the standards¹¹. For example, the maximum number of children a centre can take is determined by the space ratio of 5m² per child. Prospective providers are informed that training is compulsory. In addition, new planning applications for child-care centres are forwarded to the MFSS for consultation and assessed according to the proposed standards¹².

Taking stock of current provision

In 2004, the MFSS in conjunction with the TCCDC started collecting data about child-care centres through a newspaper advert whereby service providers were asked to contact the Ministry. Currently, the list includes:

- 20 child care centres (for under three-year-olds who do not have or need a licence from the Education Division)
- 4 home-based child care providers (who currently operate without any license)
- 14 private KGs, which have a license from the Education Division for over three-year-olds but which also, cater for children under three.

¹¹ These initiatives include training programmes offered through the Employment Training Corporation (ETC), consultation visits to potential centres and a gap analysis questionnaire to take stock of the existing situation re child-care premises. The Department for Social Welfare Standards (DSWS) is currently under-going a gap analysis exercise with around thirty-five facilities catering for the under threes. Providers have been invited to fill in a self-assessment questionnaire which determines the level of compliance with the proposed standards for facilities catering for children under three. Providers have also been offered the assistance of an assessor who would evaluate the quality of the service currently being delivered. The information gathered will be analysed, a report drawn up and recommendations will be put forward by the DSWS to the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity regarding a programme priorities and timescales for the phasing-in of the implementation of the ten proposed standards. Decisions on the way forward will then be taken at Ministerial level.

¹² To date, planning applications for child day care centres are being assessed according to the MEPA supplementary policy guidance (SPG) document for kindergarten facilities and schools. The TCCDC advocated the drawing up of a SPG that deals with the particular characteristics and exigencies of child day care centres. Both entities collaborated closely on the matter and a separate SPG for child day care facilities has been drawn up. This document is currently available for public consultation (http://www.mepa.org.mt/Planning/index.htm?Supplementary_guidance/childcare_day_centers/mainframe.htm&1).



There are four pending applications for a child-care centre. However, in the absence of legislation or a regulatory framework, data about current services available remain sporadic.

In another move to support the setting up of child-care services, the Employment Training Corporation (ETC) has secured funding under the ESF scheme. These funds are to be used in order to support employers who would like to offer child-care services for their employees. The project provides for:

- A start-up grant of 900 Euro to each organisation to adapt the premises to a desirable standard and/or to render it safe and stimulating for toddlers and children.
- A start-up grant of 1500 Euro to each organisation to buy the equipment and furnish the place adequately. The grant can also be used to buy toys and other necessary material used in a childcare centre.
- Half the salaries of trained child carers. The Action provides for the payment of half the cost of a child carer, to be matched by the organisation (proposed salary of €10,000 per annum plus statutory benefits).
- Fees chargeable to parents are not to exceed €100 per month for each child in full-time care. This figure has been set for two reasons: (1) it constitutes 20% of the minimum wage, and 10% of the median wage, and is thus considered to be a fair fee, and (2) if each carer employed cares for at least five children (while respecting the carer-child ratios for different age groups), the providing entity will be able to recoup the half of the carer's salary to be borne by itself. Fees are to be charged according to use, as soon as the childcare centre is up and running and the service is being utilised by the parent.

The Department for Social Welfare Standards, formerly known as the Department for Family Welfare, is now assuming the role of a regulatory body for the Social Welfare sector. Its operations will focus on the registration of Social Welfare services, monitoring and assessment of set standards, and ensuring compliance with regulations adopted by the Government. The overall objective is to improve the quality of life of people using services, thus protecting and enhancing their dignity, safety and welfare. The department will adopt a supportive, developmental and collaborative approach, while taking into consideration the views of stakeholders. The child day care sector is one of the priority areas identified by the Department and which is currently being addressed. The mission statement adopted by the department is 'Improving social welfare standards through dialogue and regulation'. Currently the department is undergoing a capacity building process (training staff, restructuring its modus operandi) to enable it to function appropriately for its new role. Initially the role of the inspectorate will be more of a supportive nature - the assessors will help the providers upgrade their services gradually. They will also provide them with information on how they can improve their service. Temporary licences will be issued later.

The Department for Social Welfare Standards as a regulatory entity

Kindergarten Centres

The electoral manifesto of the Malta Labour Party prior to the 1971 General Elections specifically mentioned the introduction of kindergarten centres:

Setting up of state-run KG centres

“in a modern industrial society where women are given opportunities to work in factories etc., it is necessary that apart from primary schools, the nation provides schools for children of a younger age (Kindergartens and infant schools). A labour government gives a start to such schools through a pilot scheme ” (pg. 8).

Although the electoral manifesto of the Nationalist Party in 1971 did not have a direct reference to the setting up of early childhood centres, indirect reference to life-long learning was made:

... A Nationalist Government will continue to expand facilities for education at all levels. ...A Nationalist Government will continue to follow the study of modern education methods and particularly the concept of permanent education which encourages development of the culture and personality of a person throughout his whole life"

Peace and Progress, Programme for the Nationalist Party,
General Election 1971

According to a document issued by the Education Officer in charge of Kindergarten (January, 1985) "in 1975, the Maltese Government embarked on an extensive programme of providing free nursery education on a voluntary basis for all children aged three years nine months to five years of age. To ensure these facilities were accessible and within easy reach, KG centres were opened in every town and village in the Maltese islands. With 64 centres open, approximately four thousand children started benefiting from this social and educational service". The document also reports that children were in groups of 15 to 20 with every KG assistant. At the time, 260 KG assistants were employed.

National objectives for state KG centres

There were several aims behind the opening of KG centres on a national level. These included:

- Giving children the opportunity to socialise and develop their abilities under guidance;
- Giving children from home lacking suitable educational opportunities, the chance to develop and catch up with the others;
- Providing remote preparation for entry into primary schools;
- Providing relief for working mothers.

State provision for three-year-old children was first provided in 1988.

Church-run KG centres

As regards Church schools, no records have ever been drawn up providing an overview of when and which Church schools first started offering services for KG-aged children in Malta (Archbishop's delegate for church schools, personal communication, 2005). However, data collected from a few church schools indicate that some have been around since the late 19th century or early 20th century with some centres opening as early as 1880 and 1903. With the exception of two religious orders, the Franciscan and the Ursuline nuns, few have wide-spread provision for 3 and 4-year-old children. At a number of convent-schools, KG provision is available for 4-year-old children only; these are specifically referred to as 'pre-grade' classes and children attending such classes are prepared for entry into formal education within the same school system. There are more pre-grade classes available for girls than for boys.

Private KG centres

Apart from state and church provision, a number of small private KG centres started operating in the late 80s. Research conducted in 23 child-care and private KG centres (Sollars, 2002) indicates that most of the small, private KG centres were set up between 1987 and 1997. There seemed to be a niche created for such centres as a result of the changes that had come into effect for children to gain entry into the church-run private schools. Until 1984, church-run schools had their own procedures for accepting registrations and determining their student in-take. Since 1984, entry into church schools has been on the basis of a ballot system: following a call for applications, children eligible to attend a church school are those whose application has been drawn up. Consequently, private enterprises started to open in response to parental demand. Parents who did not want to enrol their children at a state school but whose application for a church-school had not been drawn up started looking for alternative arrangements.



Population trends in KG schools

Recently, most of these small, private KG centres have seen their numbers dwindle; some have closed down. While they may have had 70 children or so at one time, having 20 to 40 children seems to be more realistic nowadays. Many of the service providers believe that this shift has been brought about as a result of the extension of independent private schools which are offering services for 3 to 16 year olds. However, it seems that a lower birth-rate is also effecting the schools' population in general.

According to Education Statistics for 2002¹³, in 2001/2002, the number of children in pre-school was 9,604 - a decrease of 2.5% over the previous year. This reinforced the downward trend which had been recorded in the previous four years. Government schools registered the biggest decline with 2.5% whereas non-government schools registered a reduction of 2.4%. Although compulsory education starts at the age of 5, more than 90% of three and four-year-old children attend KG centres regularly. According to statistics for European countries¹⁴, in 2003, Malta had one of the highest enrolments of four-year-olds at 98.7%. Higher percentages were registered in four other European countries (European Commission, 2005a). NSO statistics for scholastic year 2003/2004, report that the 7688 three- and four-year-old children attending KG constituted 94.3% of children in this age group (NSO, 2005a).

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Govt	6799	6938	7019	6672	6545	6215	6082	5929
Private	4320	4222	4152	3965	3898	3824	3765	3675
Total	11119	11160	11171	10637	10443	10039	9847	9604

Table 4 Distribution of children attending KG centres

Age	Pre-Primary		Primary		Total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
3	1687	1720			3407
4	2181	2100			4281
5	657	796	1725	1608	4786
6			2427	2239	4666
7			2490	2310	4800
8			2596	2478	5074
Total	4525	4616	9238	8635	27014

Source: http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_file.aspx?id=1502

Table 5 Distribution of children (early years) for 2003-2004

¹³ http://nso2.gov.mt/publications/EDUC/2001_2002/education%202001_2002.pdf

¹⁴ http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1996,39140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailref&language=en&product=Yearlies_new_population&root=Yearlies_new_population/C/C3/C32/ccal1024



Primary Schooling

The introduction of compulsory primary schooling

Up to 1851, infant education was only catered for by private initiative (Camilleri, 2001). The then Chief Inspector and Director of primary schools, Can Paolo Pullicino “encouraged the development of infant teaching not only because this socialised children in the habit of schooling, but also in order to relieve poor parents from child-minding, a burden which prevented them from devoting themselves assiduously to some profitable work” (Camilleri, 2001, p.108). Attendance was not compulsory until the Compulsory Attendance Act of 1924. This law obliged any student registered in a Government or private school to attend till s/he was 12 years of age (Cassar, 2001). Compulsory school age was raised to 14 in 1928 and 16 in 1971.

Schooling and choices in the early years

Currently, parents can choose to educate their children through one of three systems: state-education; an independent private school system or a church school system. With a few exceptions, most state KG centres are attached to the primary school. In the private sector, centres that cater for early childhood education are more varied. Some private centres provide services for KG-aged children only and are located in large private houses. Such centres are completely independent from any other institution. Other private schools admit children at the age of 5 and offer primary schooling only; some admit children at the age of 4 and use this one year at KG to prepare the children for their first year in compulsory schooling within the same school system. This tends to happen in a number of church schools. Some independent private schools offer education for 3 to 16 year olds. Tables 6-8 illustrate the distribution of institutions and children by sex and age.

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Govt KG annexes	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
Govt schools ¹⁵	82	81	81	81	81	81	79	78
Private KG	44	43	44	40	37	38	38	37
Private primary	8	8	10	9	9	8	8	9
KG + primary	19	19	18	18	22	18	16	16
Primary + secondary	7	8	8	9	8	9	10	9
KG through secondary	7	7	9	10	11	10	9	9

Table 6 Distribution of institutions offering services for 3 to 8 year olds

¹⁵ Figures refer to primary schools which also include KG centres. With a few exceptions, most state KG centres are linked to the state primary school.



AGE	Boys			Girls			Total			
	Govt	Church	Indep	Govt	Church	Indep	Govt	Church	Indep	
3	1135	232	554	1087	236	438	2222	468	992	3682
4	1488	387	479	1386	445	347	2874	832	826	4532
5	1590	452	512	1410	597	363	3000	1049	875	4924
6	1702	521	446	1399	667	302	3101	1188	748	5037
7	1673	520	391	1457	684	282	3130	1204	673	5007
TOTALS	7588	2112	2382	6739	2629	1732	14327	4741	4114	23182

Table 7 Distribution of children at each age, classified by sex as on March 31 2002

	Boys			Girls			Total			
	Govt	Church	Indep	Govt	Church	Indep	Govt	Church	Indep	
KG	3075	730	1214	2854	824	907	5929	1554	2121	9604 ¹⁶
Year 1	1614	499	474	1394	672	335	3008	1171	809	4988
Year 2	1715	528	422	1439	701	305	3154	1229	727	5110
Year 3	1740	514	418	1537	732	282	3277	1246	700	5223
TOTAL	8144	2271	2528	7224	2929	1829	15368	5200	4357	24925

Table 8 Distribution of children by class as on March 31 2002

STAFF TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Staff at Child-Care Centres

Staff working with the under threes are generally unqualified. A number of service providers who were interviewed about their motivation for opening child-care centres admitted that having large premises which were not being used for domestic purposes were a significant factor in determining their business (Sollars, 2002). Their 'love for children' seems to be another consideration for setting up a child-care centre. Service providers also believed that employing staff with suitable academic qualifications was not a necessity; more importance was attached to the status of the employee. In practice, this means women who are mothers qualify as appropriate child-care workers. By virtue of having raised their children, they are considered suitable to look after other people's children. This situation is beginning to be addressed with training courses currently offered by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC).

Staff working with the under threes are generally unqualified

The course is for individuals interested in becoming childcare workers. It is intended to prepare participants to work with children from birth to five years of age. The course is divided into three phases which incorporate a theoretical as well as a practical component. Phase one is 120 hours long and establishes the underpinning theoretical knowledge in the areas of Child Development and Child Care; Phase Two is 180 hours long. It reviews and discusses theories and methods of Early Childhood Education. Phase three consists of 500 hours of practice in Childcare Centres and incorporates practice with babies, toddlers and 2-5 year old children in various childcare settings.

Courses are currently offered by the Employment and Training Corporation

¹⁶ This figure includes 3 and 4 year-olds as well as children who would have turned 5 in the first 3 months of the year.

Phases two and three run con-currently. The training being offered by ETC is claimed¹⁷ to be equivalent to an NVQ Level 3¹⁸.

Staff at Kindergarten Centres

Recruitment and initial training of KG assistants in the 70s

When state KG started operating in 1975, the KG assistants were employed on basic academic qualifications, namely a minimum of four G.C.E. 'O' level passes. Maltese, English¹⁹ and Maths were compulsory. The qualifications were set by the then Director of Education (Muscat, 2005 personal communication). The director of Education had sent a letter to infant-school teachers inviting them to work with KG-aged children but all refused (Muscat, 2005 personal communication). Staff were to be chosen from among the qualified (ie having 4 'O' levels) people who were then employed in a workers' corps²⁰. Gozo was an exception since there were no personnel within the workers' corps who had the minimum requirements but had completed their secondary schooling only. By December 1975, applications were open to recruit people from among the general public. Prospective candidates had to be aged 18 or over. "*Prior to their being posted, selected candidates... undergo a crash training programme based on methods and techniques related to children of this age*" (Muscat, January, 1985). With the first recruitment from the corps and the second intake in December, the required complement of KG assistants was completed.

The first group of KG assistants who were recruited were given a course from March to summer 1975 to raise their awareness about the significance of working with young children; the aims of early childhood and the use of play. In 1976, KG assistants were given a 6 to 7 week summer course by a UNESCO consultant. The same person gave another course in 1978. The Education Officer in charge of KG centres used to give a minimum of 4 short courses a year. The content varied to include physical education, drama, music, first aid, special education as well as general courses on curriculum and children's development. Heads of school, university lecturers, medical doctors, paediatricians and psychologists were all involved in the delivery of lectures.

The need for formal training for KG assistants

The need for formal training for the sector has long been recognised. According to the minutes of the Faculty Board meeting of Wednesday 20th April 1988 held at the Faculty of Education, the "*Play Council requested the Faculty of Education to organise courses for play-school teachers*". Discussions had to be held in order to formalise what form the courses would take in order to avoid duplication of work being done by the Department of Education but nothing materialised (Farrugia, 2005, personal communication).

According to a planning paper submitted by Zammit Mangion (1988?) before KG provision was extended to three-year-olds, the need for pre-service training became

¹⁷ This has been checked against British NVQ curricula such as CACHE.

¹⁸ The Malta Qualifications Council [MQC] was set up by Legal Notice 347/2005. MQC's overall objective is to steer the development of the National Qualifications Framework and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which is not already provided for at compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies.

¹⁹ In 1977 the call indicated English as one of the subjects required. The Selection Board asked for a ruling to determine whether this meant English Language or English Literature. During the discussions leading to the signing of the Agreement, it was agreed that 'English' should mean either English Language or English Literature. In 1982 the requirements for the post of Kindergarten Assistants were four (4) GCE 'O' level passes or equivalent qualifications, including Maltese and English Language or Literature.

²⁰ Under the labour administration, workers' corps were set up in the late 70s/early 80s.



a more crucial issue since educating three-year-olds *'in many ways, requires a different educational approach and strategy than the education of the four-year-olds'*. Zammit Mangion insisted that *'the time has come to launch the pre-service training of Nursery Teachers and KG assistants on a sound and regular basis in order to give the right type of education to these children'*. Since the minimum qualifications required by the Education division (4 GCE 'O' levels) were below University requirements and also *'because the Faculty of Education did not have the necessary personnel, the training of KG/Nursery assistants was to be placed under the aegis of the Education Department'*.

Apart from a full-time two year course which would earn participants a KG/Nursery Teacher's Certification, the *KG teachers' training centre* was to combine a KG resource centre, in-service courses and up-dating and upgrading courses including administration and management of KG centres. None of these initiatives came to fruition.

In 1993, the education division started organising a two-year course for personnel who were interested in becoming KG assistants. At the end of this course, participants were awarded a certificate in early childhood education. This was recognised as the requirement for people who wanted to work with 3 and 4 year old children. Every year, 30 participants were accepted for this course. The course was run by the Education Division and continued until 2002 when pre-school education was passed on to the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST)²¹. Unfortunately the overwhelming majority of the students who completed this two-year course never found employment in the state sector since the latter was saturated. This claim is supported by data collected from among staff at KG centres (see page 34).

The limited opportunities for pre-service training for pre-school staff in Malta is in sharp contrast with what goes on in other countries. According to comparative data on education, in most European countries, initial teacher education for pre-primary provision occurs at tertiary level (European Commission, 2005b)²². In a number of countries, teacher education for those intending to specialise in pre-primary education is similar to or the same as initial teacher education for primary teachers. Whereas in most cases, the duration of the course is 3 or 4 years, generally including time for an induction period, in some instances, pre-school pre-service training is a five-year course. In comparison Malta is the only country which has a two-year course, making it the shortest course for pre-school staff training. Moreover, this course is done with the youngest students, that is, at upper-secondary level. Partly because of the duration as well as because of the fact that this is done at tertiary level, in European countries, students following the course would be older than 16 to 18 year olds.

The sector was saturated by the time potential staff earned formal qualifications

In Europe, initial teacher education for pre-primary provision mostly occurs at tertiary level.

Staff in Compulsory Education (5 – 8 year olds)

In mid 19th century, teacher training was still highly underdeveloped or organised²³. Teacher training in the 20th century, initially fell under the responsibility of nuns of the

From training colleges to University

²¹ MCAST is responsible for vocational training.

²² <http://www.eurydice.org/Documents/cc/2005/en/FrameSet.htm>

²³ The first teacher training courses were set up and run by Can Paolo Pullicino in 1850 (Camilleri, 1978). As the Director of Primary Schools, he closed all the village schools from October to December to enable teachers to attend the Model School for lectures and practical training. Pullicino himself instructed teachers in methodology (Camilleri, 2001). At the end of the course, teachers sat for the final examination and obtained certificates. This gradually gave rise to better qualifications of teachers. Teachers in the private sector were also obliged to attend courses and obtain the necessary certification

Sacred Heart and Christian brothers for females and males respectively²⁴. Following the 1971 elections won by the Malta Labour Party, the teachers' preparation course was extended to three years. In 1973, the entire teacher preparation programme was reorganised within a single institution, catering for both men and women. The course ceased to be residential and under the influence of religious orders. The College became the Malta College of Education. (Camilleri, 1978). In the meantime, a one-year post-graduate certificate course in Education (PGCE) for university graduates was also introduced. In 1975, the teacher education programme became part of the MCAST. This new structure for teacher education in Malta lasted only three years. In 1978, the Labour Government carried out reforms in the area of tertiary education as a result of which a student-worker scheme was introduced. As part of these reforms, the teachers' course was upgraded to first degree level and later the Bachelor's degree course in Education was upgraded to honours degree level. The setting up of the Faculty of Education in 1978 marks the beginning of the latest phase in a long history of efforts to improve the quality of teaching in Malta (Mayo & Darmanin, in press)²⁵.

Changes to the programme leading to a Bachelors degree in Education

In the early years of teacher training at University, students would qualify to teach at any level of the compulsory education sector. However, over the years, with an increase in the demands being made on practitioners, the need for specialisation was felt. Since 1999, students applying to join the B.Ed. (Hons.) programme must apply to follow the course which prepares them for teaching either in the primary or in the secondary schools. Within the primary programme, students have the opportunity to focus part of their studies on the early years sector. Currently, primary teacher-training in Malta is in line with the majority of other European countries. Four-year courses conducted at university are the norm for pre-service training of primary school teachers (European Commission, 2005b).

The Current Situation

Qualifications of practitioners

In order to obtain information about the qualifications and training background of staff currently employed in the early years sector, a survey was conducted among all institutions which offer some form of education and care for 0 to 8 year olds. These included child-care centres, KG centres and schools which cater for 2.5 to 8 year-olds. Details about eligible centres and the response rates are shown in Table 9.

	Total in operation	Response rate	%
State schools A & C	62	62	100%
Independent schools	29 ²⁶	21	72.4%
Church schools	41	37	90.2%
Child care centres	25	7	28%
Total	157	127	80.9%

Table 9 Centres eligible for the survey on staff qualifications

²⁴ The Mater Admirabilis Training College for women and St. Michael's Training College for male teachers were opened in 1944. Initially, training lasted one year. In 1955, a two-year residential training course was inaugurated (Camilleri, 1978).

²⁵ When the Faculty of Education was established in 1978 students were awarded a B.A (Educ.) degree. This was initially a four-year course but became a five-year course in 1979/80. By 1987, students were applying for a four-year B.Ed. (Hons.) programme.

²⁶ There are 30 independent schools with a license but currently one is not operating.



All participating state schools have a KG centre as well as the first three years of compulsory, primary education. Church schools vary in the provision available. Of the 37 church schools which responded to the questionnaire, 21 offer provision for KG-aged children only, 7 offer provision for KG and primary school children and 9 offer primary education or a combination of primary and secondary education. Of the 21 independent private schools which responded to the questionnaire, 8 offer provision for KG-aged children only, 8 offer provision for KG and primary school children; some even have secondary school provision; and one school offers provision for primary school children only. There are 2 private schools that offer child-care and KG facilities; another 2 private schools which offer child-care, KG and primary school facilities. Of the 11 independent schools offering primary provision, 2 did not return data for teachers in years 1, 2 and 3.

In state schools there are 975 members of staff directly or indirectly responsible for 3 to 8 year old children. These include 56 heads of school; 106 assistant heads; 179 KG assistants working with 3 year olds; 208 KG assistants with 4 year olds; 136 teachers with 5-6 year olds; 142 teachers with 6-7 year olds and 148 teachers with 7-8 year old children. Six schools have no head but an acting head of school whereas in 12 schools there is no assistant head.

Of the 159 administrative staff in state schools who replied to the questionnaire, 8.2% (13) report that they have never taught in a primary school; 53.5% (85) reported that they have taught exclusively in primary schools and 36.5% (58) have taught in both primary and secondary sectors. Within this last group, 22 members have nine years or less of teaching experience in primary schools but 11 to 30 years of teaching experience at secondary school level. Three members of staff gave no details about their years of service at primary and/or secondary level. The data does not reflect the years working solely in the early childhood sector and several staff that now hold administrative posts may never have had experiences of working with 5 to 8 year olds.

Within the 37 church schools that responded to the questionnaire, there are 152 members of staff working with young children. Of these 26 are assistant heads of school. There are 159 members of staff working with young children within the 28 independent schools that responded to the questionnaire. Of these, 8 are assistant heads. Not all private institutions have a specific head of school responsible for the early years. In very small KG centres, the service provider is also the one who cares/looks after the children. For example, in church schools that have just 2 KG classes, one of the KG assistants also has administrative duties. In all, 21 independent and 21 church establishments report having a specific head to manage the entire school or centre. From among the administrative staff at church schools who replied to the questionnaire, 74.4% (29) report that they have some teaching experience in the primary school. This ranges from 1 year to 55 years. Within the independent sector, 66.7% (8) administrative staff members report working in the primary sector with the range of experience being 3 to 40 years.

In state schools 975 members of staff are responsible for 3 to 8 year old children

Some administrative staff have never had experiences of working with very young children



	Church schools		Independent schools		State schools	
	N (39)	%	N (12)	%	N (159)	%
MATC/SMTC	13	33.3	4	33.3	92	57.9
MCAST	0	0	0	0	9	5.7
B.Ed.	12	30.8	1	8.3	34	21.4
B.A./B.Sc etc	9	23.1	3	25	34	21.4
PGCE	3	7.7	1	8.3	7	4.4
DEAM	13	33.3	2	16.7	90	56.6
M.Ed.	2	5.1	1	8.3	12	7.5
M.A./other Masters	3	7.7	2	16.6	5	3.1
Other diplomas	7	18.0	3	25	29	18.2

Table 10 Qualifications of administrative staff

Staff in an administrative role never had theoretical or practical preparation for working with the early years

With regards to qualifications, across the three school systems, most administrative staff had obtained their teacher training qualifications at the training colleges. Within the church and independent sectors, there are several members in administration who have post-graduate degrees (12.8% and 24.9% respectively). In all school systems, there is a rather high number of staff who are now in an administrative role but were either never responsible for a KG centre prior to their headship or are only responsible for a KG centre as part of their current duties. In fact, only 15.4% (6) administrative staff members in the church schools, 40.9% (65) in state schools and 50% (6) in independent schools reported that they had been responsible for the KG centre in their school prior to their headship or are currently responsible for the KG centre as part of their administrative duties in their role to support the head of school.

Practitioners in the field of early childhood need adequate support from their superiors

This result raises concern since it is essential that practitioners in the field of early childhood have adequate support from their superiors. The latter should be aware of appropriate practices in the field of early childhood in order to advise, monitor and support practitioners. Several respondents who reported that they were or are responsible for the KG section described their duties in terms of purely administrative roles. This includes duties of registering newcomers to the school, giving out resources to staff and routine matters related to day-to-day matters. Hardly any respondents referred to monitoring or supporting practices or assisting with the professional development of the staff in the early years.

The most qualified teachers working with 5 to 8 year-olds are in the state sector

A total of 551 teachers responded to the questionnaire: 95 respondents were from church schools, 43 were from independent schools and 413 respondents came from state-schools. The state school respondents represent 97% of state-school teachers working with year 1, 2 and 3 children whereas the church and independent school respondents represent 97% and 78.2% of teachers working with year 1, 2 and 3 children respectively. Table 11 illustrates details of the age groups respondents were teaching at the time of data collection.



Working with age group	Church schools (16/16 schools)		Independent schools (9 out of 11 schools)		State schools (62/62 schools)	
	Population	Responded	Population	Responded	Population	Responded
Year 1	32	32 (100%)	18	14 (77.8%)	136	134 (98.5%)
Year 2	32	32 (100%)	19	13 (68.4%)	142	137 (96.5%)
Year 3	34	31 ²⁷ (91.2%)	18	15 (83.3%)	148	142 (96%)
Total	98	95 (97%)	55²⁸	43 (78.2%)	426	413 (97%)

Table 11 Actual number of teachers employed in early years & response rate by schools

Status of employment	Church schools		Independent schools		State schools	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Instructor	5	5.3	0	0	93	22.5
Regular	80	84.2	34	79.1	312	75.5
Supply	1	1.1	1	2.3	5	1.2
Temporary	2	2.1	3	7.0	2	0.5
No response	7	7.4	5	11.6	1	0.2
Total	95	100%	43	100	413	100%

Table 12 Distribution of teachers in schools by employment status

Teachers' Qualification	Church schools		Independent schools		State schools	
	N (95)	%	N (43)	%	N (413)	%
B.Ed.(Hons.)	40	42.3	8	18.6	200	48.4
MATC	11	11.6	4	9.3	87	21.1
MCAST	2	2.1	0	0	2	0.5
Other first degrees	12	12.9	5	11.6	19	4.5
PGCE	8	8.4	5	11.6	17	4.0

Table 13 Distribution of teachers in schools by qualifications

Staff working with 5 to 8 year-olds seem to be the most qualified in the state sector and least qualified in the independent sector (Table 13). However, it has to be noted that within the group of state school teachers who are qualified with a B.Ed.(Hons.) degree, not all would have specialized or followed University courses which were specifically targeted towards working with young learners.

²⁷ One church school did not send the data of its Year 3 teachers.

²⁸ One respondent did not indicate the age group s/he is currently working with

KG Assistants in State Schools: Background and Qualifications

49.7% of state KG assistants are between the ages of 50 and 60

Of the 387 KG assistants employed in state schools, 382 (98.7%) completed the questionnaire. At the time data were collected, 182 were working with three-year-olds whereas 194 were working with four-year-olds. As a cohort, state KG assistants tend to be advanced in age and 49.7% of KG assistants are between the ages of 50²⁹ and 60 (Table 14).

Many (63.6%, N = 243) reported being in possession of 6 to 8 GCE 'O' levels and 1 'A' level qualification. Whereas 72.5% do not have an A level qualification, of the 27.5% (N = 105) who do have such a level, 14.4% (N = 55) have 1, 8.4% (N = 32) have 2 and 2.9% (N = 11) have 3 'A' levels. Popular 'A' level achievements were in Maltese, Religion and Italian. Typing and Shorthand were also very frequently listed at 'O' level standard.

Age bracket (in years)	Frequency	%
25 to 30	10	2.6
30 to 35	10	2.6
36 to 40	50	13.1
41 to 45	31	8.1
46 to 50	115	30.0
51 to 55	84	22.0
55 to 60	79	20.1
No information given	3	0.8
Total	382	100

Table 14 Distribution of KG assistants in state schools by age

KG assistants have a wide range of years of employment: 20 (5.3%) KG assistants have been employed as such for 13 years or less (this includes 3 who were employed eight years ago and 7 who were employed nine years ago). As seen in Table 15, the majority have 14 to 21 years of service; 46 (12.1%) have been on the job for 29 or 30 years.

Years of service	Frequency	%
14	18	4.7
15	8	2.1
16	60	15.7
17	93	24.3
18	31	8.1
19	16	4.2
20	20	5.2
21	36	9.4
Total	282 of 382	73.8%

Table 15 Years of service as KG assistants

²⁹ There are 27 50-year-olds included with the 115 46 to 50 year olds in the table.



Most KG assistants have worked with both 3 and 4 year olds. Only 7.1% (27) have not worked with 3-year-olds whereas 6.8% (26) have not worked with 4-year-olds. The range of years of service with 3-year-olds is one to 17 years; the range of years of service with 4-year-olds is one to 30 years (Tables 16 and 17 respectively).

Only 14 (3.7%) of the 382 KG assistants in the state sector are in possession of the two-year pre-school certificate

Years of service	Frequency	%
1 to5	119	31.2
6 to 10	143	37.4
11 to 15	80	20.9
16 to 17	13	3.4
None with 3 year olds	27	7.1
Total	382	100

Table 16 Years of service as KG assistants with 3-year-olds

Years of service	Frequency	%
1 to5	91	23.8
6 to 10	97	25.4
11 to 15	71	18.6
16 to 20	48	12.6
21 to 25	23	6.0
26 to30	26	6.8
None with 4 year olds	26	6.8
Total	382	100

Table 17 Years of service as KG assistants with 4-year-olds

Data shows that 14 (3.7%) of the 382 KG assistants in the state schools are in possession of the two-year pre-school certificate course organised by the Education Division between 1993 and 2003. The historical development of the service and recruitment procedures applied in the 70s and 80s as documented earlier, are to be attributed to the current state of affairs, that is an insignificant number of KG assistants have had formal training prior to employment. Rather than invest in students who were not going to find employment in the sector, it would have been wiser to gradually train employees and ensure they have the basic qualifications. This is especially true in a system where there is very little, if any, monitoring of practices.

Rather than invest in students, it would have been wiser to gradually train employees

There are 79 (20.7%) KG assistants who had followed in-service training courses between 1975 and 1979 with the first in-take of KG assistants as described earlier in this document; 74.9% (286) have attended in-service courses in the 80s; 83.2% (318) have attended courses in the 90s and all have attended some in-service course since 2000. The duration of in-service courses referred to by KG assistants varied from a matter of hours, to a number of mornings or a number of weeks. The subjects/focus of the courses varied. Most of the courses were organised and run by the Education Division. Some were done by other entities such as the University of Malta. Table 17 provides a list of in-service training courses which has been collated from responses given by the KG assistants. Although possibly not exhaustive, it captures most of the courses directly related to early childhood education that have been followed over the years by practitioners.

KG assistants attend short in-service courses mostly run by the Education Division

Apart from courses related to early childhood education, several KG assistants mentioned

a variety of other courses such as child abuse, organised by an NGO, courses related to Debono’s thinking skills with children and first aid courses. Some KG assistants listed courses which are not related to early years or even primary education. These included ECDL, other computer-related courses and TEFL. A handful of KG assistants listed courses they have followed for their own personal enrichment (e.g. beauty therapy, cooking, yoga, theology and flower arranging).

Title of course	Date	Duration/Details
Training programme for KG assistants	5 th May to 31 st July, 1975	full days
Training programme for KG assistants	1 st to 18 th September 1975	full days
Training programme for KG assistants	8 th Jan to 13 th February 1976	Evenings
Kindergarten Education	16 th July to 31 st August 1976	6 weeks
Kindergarten Special Primary	4 th to 12 th December 1979	12 hours
Nursing for KG	1983	17.5 hours
Problems of speech and language	February 1984	
Pre-school education	20 th to 30 th July 1987	30 hours
Pre-school education	October to December 1988	30 hour
Pre-school education	1989	20 hours
KG education	September to December 1990	75 hours
Toy making with children	April – May 1991	MUS, University of Malta
The contribution of physical activity to development in the early years	1991	MUS, University of Malta
Reading and writing in the infant classroom	May – June 1992	MUS, University of Malta
Creativity in the KG class	Sept 1995	In-service course; 12 hours
Learning in the KG	4 th to 8 th July 1997	
Science in Early Childhood	7 th to 14 th July 1998	24 hrs
Early Childhood Education	15 th to 23 rd Sept 1998	In-service course; 20 hours
Early learning – make it easy, make it fun	15 th to 22 nd Sept 1999	In-service course; 20 hours
Putting play on the KG agenda	6 th to 10 th November 2000	
Implementing a high quality curriculum	4 th to 6 th June 2001	
The way forward	29 th & 31 st October 2002	Focus group NMC
Towards an ECE curriculum	26 th – 29 th November 2002	Focus group NMC
Thinking is fun for everyone	15 th – 17 th September 2003	In-service course; 12 hours
Sharing nature with children	7 th to 9 th July 2003	12 hours (BirdLife, Malta)
Art through creative play	2004	In-service course
Cooking is fun ...for everyone	2004	In-service course
Putting fun in Maths (Abacus)	27 th to 29 th September 2004	In-service course; 3 days
Starting from the child: Observation & assessment in early childhood education	30 th – 31 st August 2004	8 hours, University of Malta
Cooking – a tool for better learning	2005	In-service course

Table 18 Selected list of in-service courses followed by KG assistants



KG Assistants in Church and Independent Schools: Background and Qualifications

There were 57 KG assistants working in 28 church schools and 71 KG assistants employed in 20 independent schools who responded to the questionnaire. Whereas the youngest KG assistant in the state sector is 27 years old, the youngest are 19 and 20 year olds in the independent and church sector respectively. On the other hand, whereas 60 is the retirement age in the public sector, there are 13 KG assistants who are 60 to 71 years old in the church sector and 3 KG assistants between the ages of 60 and 67 in the private sector (Table 19).

In the private sector, some KG assistants are between 60 and 70 years of age

Age bracket (in years)	Church		Independent	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
19 to 24	6	10.5	6	8.6
25 to 30	5	8.8	5	7.1
30 to 35	5	8.8	5	7.1
36 to 40	3	5.3	10	14.3
41 to 45	4	7	14	20
46 to 50	7	12.3	17	24.3
51 to 54	1	1.8	4	5.7
55 to 60	16	28.1	7	10
61 to 71	10	17.5	2	2.9
Total	57	100%	70 ³⁰	100%

Table 19 Distribution of KG assistants in private schools by age

Similar to state schools, KG staff in church schools tend to be relatively advanced in age with 49.2% (N=28) of staff aged over 50. However, this trend is not found in independent schools where 45.7% (N=32) are between the ages of 40 and 50.

Only 47.4% of respondents working in church schools gave details of 'O' level achievements. Of these, 17.5% (N = 10) have 6 or 7 'O' levels whereas 14.1% (N = 8) have 8 to 12 qualifications.

In comparison to state schools, church schools are the ones which have most staff with the two-year qualification (Certificate in pre-school education): 26.3% (N = 15) in comparison to 9.9% (N=7) in private settings and 3.7% (N=14) in state school KG centres. Within the church and private sectors, there is also a significant number of staff who claim to have followed Montessori courses: 19.3% (N=11), 16.9% (N=12) in the church and independent sectors respectively. Only 1 KG assistant working in the state sector mentioned a Montessori diploma. There were variations in the duration of the Montessori courses reported with some respondents claiming a one-year diploma and others reporting a two-year course. Half of the service providers/administrators who run small, private KG centres are in possession of the Montessori training (5 out of 10) as their basic or only qualification.

26.3% of KG assistants in church school are in possession of the two-year pre-school certificate

³⁰ One respondent gave no answer



Church and independent schools tend to have their own in-service courses. Data obtained from the questionnaires indicate that a number of these establishments have their own professional development days or short in-service courses which usually take place at the beginning of a scholastic year.

Qualifications of Staff at Child-Care Centres

Most heads of child-care centres have no particular training either in child-care or in the management of a childcare centre

Among the 7 childcare centres which sent in the completed questionnaire, there are 22 members of staff employed. They vary from centres where there is one person who is both the service provider and carer to child-care centres where there are a number of people employed to look after children in addition to the provider or head of the service. Of the 21 respondents, one head of service is a qualified teacher with a B.Ed.(Hons.) degree but others have no particular training either in child-care or in the management of a childcare centre. For example, one service provider used to be a machine operator; another one use to input data and a third headed an office department. Four people employed in these centres have the two-year certificate as a result of the course in early childhood education which used to be offered to KG assistants. Several are currently following the ETC course in child-care. The fact that to date both the service-providers as well as their employees are not formally qualified or trained in sectors which are relevant to the field of early childhood education is symptomatic of the low-status attributed to this crucial phase of life-long learning as well as to the lack of regulations which have so far governed the sector.

CURRICULA AND LEARNING PROGRAMMES

KG assistants have never been involved in developing a curriculum for the pre-school children

When state KG centres were opened, a curriculum was drawn up on the basis of Council of Europe recommendations (Muscat, 2005). The Education officer in charge of the KG centres translated the curriculum into schemes of work for the practitioners. The consultant had spelt out the aims and curriculum and the Education Officer turned this into practical knowledge and practical experiences for the KG practitioners to put into practice.

Since the late 80s and early 90s, periodically, the education officers responsible for the early years sector have given KG assistants guidelines. The latest guidelines available were sent to schools in January 2002 and these were drawn up as a result of the publication of the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) in 1999. With the publication of the NMC, there was the first realisation and explicit acknowledgement of KG education since the setting up of state KG centres in 1975. The NMC claims that the main aim of the curriculum at KG is “to enhance the holistic development of children” (1999). This can be achieved through:

- Intellectual development
- Socio-emotional development
- Physical development
- Moral development

The curriculum appropriately advocates for a pedagogy of play since this is an effective tool in promoting children’s holistic development.

The children’s desire and enthusiasm for play, their eagerness and concentration during this activity and the intrinsic motivation involved guarantee an educational process that generates both enthusiasm and learning. For this reason, the curriculum recognises this natural process as the main pedagogical approach during early childhood education.

(NMC, p.76, 1999)



Monitoring of what is actually done with the various groups of children is rather limited and the experiences provided are very much based on personal initiative or a group attempt, depending on the interest taken by the school's administration (Sollars et al. 2000). The process of translating a curriculum to classroom practice appears to be shaped, among other factors, by the practitioners' philosophies, training and ideas and if rigorous training is absent, it becomes difficult for practitioners to provide quality service.

Small, private church and independent schools develop their own programmes with many admitting that their main focus is on preparing children for formal education. KG centres which are directly or indirectly linked to primary schools feel directly responsible for "getting the children prepared" and unfortunately, this has led to methodological practices which are more suitable for older children rather than three, four and five-year olds.

Once children are admitted to formal education, school becomes a very serious matter, even at the age of 5 and 6. Curricula and syllabi in some school systems are particularly rigid and demanding. Rather than learning through play, exploration, discovery, on-site inquiries and hands-on activities, children in classrooms are formally taught mostly factual information. At times children are challenged to work at an abstract level when their mental capabilities are not suited for this. In this regard, practitioners would do well to reflect on how children understand and internalise learning rather than encouraging memorisation.

Work-books for core subjects are abundant and where parents have invested directly in textbooks and such materials, they obviously expect children to use them to the full. Unfortunately, within the early years classrooms, fun activities such as story-telling, art and craft activities, water and sand play, cooking, music, drama, poetry and songs, all of which offer a rich potential for learning in a meaningful and relevant context are often absent. Children generally engage in fun-activities when preparing for a concert or an exhibition. This implies that these activities are squeezed in for a concentrated period of time during the scholastic year rather than offered as part of the regular programme of activities.

METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICES AND RESOURCES

Given the curricular demands in formal schooling and mistaken parental expectations, several practices in a range of centres do not promote child-centred activities although the service providers and practitioners would pay lip-service to such methodologies. Anecdotal evidence repeatedly highlights this fear of local practitioners from allowing or indeed hindering children from learning through their own experimentation and discovery through the creation of stimulating areas of interest. For example, if children are invited to do masks of a character from a fairy tale they would have shared in class, it is not surprising to see 15 or 20 identical masks on display. Similarly, with art and craft activities, impeccable works have been duplicated and multiplied in classrooms strongly suggesting that the work was actually done by the adult rather than the children. Undergraduate students conducting observations in early childhood settings have reported that when doing collage, some adults have been the ones to paste the glue and meticulously instruct individual children where and how to stick a piece of paper (Agius & Debono, 2005, personal communication). Such practices are not specific to a particular education system but can be found in state, church or independent schools.

How adults work and interact with young learners is an issue that needs to be addressed. Once children start formal schooling, but at times even at KG level, the adult responsible

Limited pre and in-service training coupled with no monitoring of practices makes the provision of quality services an ideal rather than the norm

Within the early years classrooms, fun activities with a rich potential for learning are limited

Curricular demands and parental expectations affect daily practices

Meeting individual needs among children

The way in which adults work and interact with young learners is an issue that needs to be addressed. Once children start formal schooling, but at times even at KG level, the adult responsible for the group of children normally works with the whole class and everyone is expected to be doing the same activity or task simultaneously. Given the number of children in a class, it has to be acknowledged that adults may face a challenging situation but efforts have to be made to meet the individual needs and learning styles of young learners. Schools and centres should have a policy which enables staff to find out about individual children's strengths and achievements at the beginning of the scholastic year. This is especially imperative when children are being admitted into a new school for their first year of formal schooling and there has been no communication with the KG centre or playschool the child used to attend prior to starting school.

Space restrictions & children's mobility

One of the difficulties concerning resources is related to the buildings and physical space available for early years groups and classrooms for young children. Many of the centres, especially state schools but also several private establishments have not been purposely built. Consequently, in several settings there is not enough room for children to move about freely. Also, KG centres, whether state or private put children in same-age groups so that each group has its own 'classroom' space. This tends to restrict children's mobility as well as limit several activities which one would think of as imperative for the holistic development of young children. Several private centres lack outdoor play areas where children can engage in gross motor play or take part in free-play activities. A number of facilities have inadequate play areas: what makes them inadequate is their size in comparison to the number of children attending the centre. In some instances, the location of the play area, if not the centre itself is inadequate – basement locations of entire centres or play areas imply that children are in artificial light or possibly in damp situations for the duration of their stay at the centre. In state schools, some difficulties with space arises when the KG centre has to share the available outdoor space with the rest of the school. Thus equipment suitable for very young learners is not accessible or accessible for restricted time-periods.

Supply of resources

Another difficulty concerning resources is the limited availability of a range of resources in several centres. Results from a questionnaire sent by the Early Years Focus Group³¹ and to which 81 KG centres responded confirm this. The responses came from 64 state KG centres, 4 of which are located in buildings which are separate from the main school; 9 independent private KG centres or schools and 8 were returned by staff working in small, Church KG centres. In all, 450 Kindergarten assistants or heads of services returned the questionnaires.

KG assistants were asked to provide approximate indications of the quantity of resources available in their room. Data were collected for various items of equipment including:

- *Essential table top toys* (wooden blocks of various shapes, sets of graded jigsaw puzzles, bricks, wooden beads, pegboards, sorting trays, sorting cards);
- *Essential outdoor equipment* (large/small balls, hoops, plastic cones, beanbags, ropes);
- *Books* in English and in Maltese (big books, concept books, picture books etc.);
- *Essential consumables* (paper, poster colours, paint, glue etc.) and
- *Essential classroom resources* (scissors, brushes, fine/thick paint brushes, various items for cooking, items for cleaning etc.)

Results indicate that overall, there needs to be substantial investment in resources.

³¹ The Early Years Focus Group was one of 15 Focus Groups set up by the National Curriculum Council in 1999/2000 in order to draw up plans on how best to develop the area following the publication of the National Minimum Curriculum.



FINANCING

Currently child-care centres operate solely on the basis of fees which they charge and receive from parents. There is no system of subsidy, grants or tax rebates either for the centre or for parents who make use of centres. Parents’ fees are totally unregulated and none of the service providers adopt a system where fees are means tested (Sollars, 2002). Table 20 indicates the fees parents were charged at 10 child-care centres in 2002. Depending on the duration and frequency of use of the service, parents chose to give information according to hourly, weekly, monthly or term rates. There were 33 parents who were paying 35c to 50c an hour; 7 parents who reported paying Lm50 or more a month and 9 parents who claimed that they were paying Lm100 to Lm130 a term.

Currently child-care centres operate solely on the basis of parents’ fees

Good quality service is expensive. Qualified and trained staff expect higher wages. When reasonable adult-child ratios are adhered to, there are more expenses to be dealt with. Resources and consumables necessary to develop activities and a stimulating environment for young children contribute to further costs. Without subsidies or some form of support, low-income parents may have difficulty accessing quality services.

Without subsidies or some form of support, low-income parents may have difficulty accessing quality services

Payment in Lm per hour	No of parents	Percent
0.25	2	1.4
0.26	6	4.3
0.27	1	0.7
0.28	3	2.1
0.35	17	12.1
0.40	3	2.1
0.45	1	0.7
0.50	12	8.5
0.60	1	0.7
0.70	4	2.8
0.75	1	0.7
1.50	1	0.7

Payment in Lm per week	No of parents	Percent
3	1	0.7
5.60	1	0.7
10.00	2	1.4

Payment in Lm per term	No of parents	Percent
63	1	0.7
75	7	5.0
85	15	10.6
90	4	2.8
98	1	0.7
100	5	3.5
108	1	0.7
112	1	0.7
118	1	0.7
130	1	0.7

Payment in Lm per month	No of parents	Percent
8	1	0.7
12	1	0.7
16	1	0.7
23	1	0.7
25	3	2.1
28	5	3.5
30	7	5.0
33	2	1.4
35	11	7.8
36	2	1.4
38	2	1.4
40	6	4.3
45	2	1.4
50	1	0.7
52	3	2.1
55	1	0.7
60	2	1.4

Table 20 Fees paid by parents making use of child day-care centres



Fees paid by parents at private KG centres in 2002 ranged from Lm50 to Lm190 a term (Table 21). A few parents included the transport bills they pay in addition to the fee but in most cases, the amount specified by parents were confirmed by the service providers.

Small, private KG centres open from 9.00am until 12.30pm. Some offer extended hours against extra payment. Extended hours are offered in an attempt to complement parents’ working hours. However, one cannot maintain a part-time job with restricted opening hours.

At present my child goes to school from 9-12.15pm. After travelling to drop and pick up, one only has about 2.5-2.75 hours to work – less than a part time job requires

(Parent participant, Sollars, 2002)

Payment in Lm per term	Frequency (N = 377) ³²	Percent
50 - 65	3	0.9
70 - 75	39	10.4
80 - 85	91	24.2
90 - 95	80	21.2
98 - 100	72	19
115 - 120	17	4.5
125 - 145	7	1.9
150 - 190	20	5.4

Table 21 Fees paid by parents making use of small private KG centres

KG centres attached to schools should have a separate budget

There are no fees for state school KG centres or primary schools other than funds given by the government. The Head of school who is responsible for the administration of school funds is also the person who determines how the available funds are distributed among the classes to meet the needs of the various age-groups. Some KG centres may not be on the priority list for funding if there are other needs in the school or if the administration is unaware of what resources are required for staff to work effectively with young learners. KG centres whether state or private, should have their own budgets in order to facilitate the operation of the centre. There are specific needs in these centres that can influence the quality of the service provided.

TRANSITION ISSUES

Clear policies about welcoming parents and new entrants are required

The opening of state KG centres within existing school premises, was considered beneficial for children as this set-up enabled them to “make a smooth transition from Kindergarten to Primary” (Muscat, 2005). A survey conducted among Year 1 teachers some years after state KG centres had started operating indicate that one advantage of KG was the relatively smooth beginning teachers and children had with the on-set of compulsory education (Muscat, 2005).

³² The total does not add up to 377 because a few parents reported payment on a weekly, daily or monthly basis.



The disadvantages that could result from such a set-up seemed to be ignored or unforeseen: bringing KG so close to compulsory education facilitated the view that KG is an extension of primary schools. Over the years, there has had to be and still needs to be emphasis given to appropriate pedagogical practices for very young children. What is promoted and acceptable for older children may not be suitable for younger groups. Secondly, by virtue of having centres within school premises, children were grouped and assigned to “classrooms” with their “teacher”. They largely follow the school time-table as regards opening and closing times; break-times and school holidays.

Centres and schools follow very different practices where transition issues are concerned. Rather than a regulated policy, it is very much an independent matter with centres and schools choosing their own ways of welcoming parents and assisting children to adjust to the new environment.

Measures also need to be taken by schools when they offer primary services only and are therefore in a position to welcome new entrants to formal education. Such schools should have clear policies in place where they have meetings with the parents and prospective students in an attempt to find out about the achievements and particular needs of their clients. Going to a new school for the first time can be a daunting experience for both the children and the parents and very often, much stress and misunderstandings arise from the fear of the unknown: not being aware or familiar with the procedures or demands of the school.

Going to a new school for the first time can be daunting for both children and parents

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT & TRAINING/PARTICIPATION

When state KG centres were opened in 1975, parents resisted learning through play (Muscat, 2005). KG services in church schools already existed and parents’ mentality therefore was, ‘I am now sending my child to school early’. Parents thought this was an opportunity for an extension of school. It was also difficult for parents to understand the layout and organisation of the classroom. Sand pits and water play were being promoted and this jarred with the practices of a more traditional approach to primary schooling. Courses for parents’ participation were organised as well as radio programmes but the idea of parental involvement really caught on in one or two centres only.

Parental involvement, education and expectations

Recent research in one large state KG centre suggests that parents are not very well informed of the programme of activities their children are experiencing at KG (Hili & Mallia, 2005); 60% of parents responding to a questionnaire reported that they were not informed about the programme of activities their child would be following; an additional 4% did not reply to the particular question. Moreover, 34% of the parents claim that they know what happens at KG only because they had older children attending the centre. Some parents did suggest that they would like to be better informed about the events at school.

Parents’ lack information about the programme of activities

Local research also suggests that there is still a great need for parental education about appropriate expectations for early childhood education (Sollars, 2002).

I am very grateful I have chosen this playschool ... For me it is quite a satisfaction hearing a 2.5-year-old boy saying all the alphabet and the numbers and singing new songs everyday. He even learned how to play with the toys; before ...he used to turn to the utensils and the plastic containers.

(Parent of a 29-month-old child)

I agree that they start to learn in these kind of play centres but then when the children start kinder in Government schools, they stop teaching

them whereas in Church and Private kinder schools the children still continue to learn.

(Parent of a 32-month-old child)

Educating parents about the value of learning through play

One of the wide-spread impressions of the public is that learning goes on in centres where homework is assigned and where children are engaged in the mechanics of reading and writing as early as possible. Schools/KG centres where such activities are either kept to a minimum or are virtually absent, are somehow considered of inferior quality. Such reasoning clearly suggests that there has to be explicit information transmitted to all concerned, highlighting the learning processes children go through and how these processes can be achieved through a context of play. Parents, and some practitioners need to be informed that this is not a matter of explicit dictating what should be done at KG or the specific grades at primary school but rather explaining and showing adults that depending on the way activities are organised and presented, children can learn more effectively than if they are engaged in mechanical and rote learning.

Parents need to know and be informed about best practices

One fundamental issue that can promote successful early childhood experiences is parents' involvement. Parents need to know and be informed about best practices in early childhood which they can promote within the home and which would help their children for their KG and early school years. There is a variety of ways in which parents can be involved and encouraged to take a more active role (Lombardi, 1992). Parents should also be better informed about factors which contribute to quality early childhood services. There is much which can be done, especially through media campaigns and publication of brochures which could direct parents to look for quality criteria when they are visiting potential child-care and KG centres for their children. Somewhat surprisingly, research has shown that many parents use one criterion when choosing a suitable centre for their children: friends' and relatives' recommendations (Sollars, 2002).

Impact of parents on state KG centres

One area where parents have had an impact on state KG centres concerns the opening hours and the children's duration at such centres. Initially, the idea was to have KG-aged children attending centres between 9.00am and noon. As mentioned earlier, one of the aims of offering these services was to relieve working mothers. However, in reality, the 9 to noon opening was a relief for the grandparents who would be responsible for taking care of the young ones while parents were at work. On the other hand, opening KG centres within school premises was helpful for parents who accompanied their older children to school. While the KG centre and school's opening hours differed parents complained that they would be coming and going to school too many times in one day with the result that in a relatively short period of time, parents had the option of leaving their children at KG for the entire school day (Muscat, 2005).

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Evaluation & monitoring in early years settings are lacking

Evaluation and monitoring of what goes on in child-care centres, KG facilities and in the early years of primary school are sadly lacking, verging on the completely absent. This situation has arisen owing to a number of factors. First of all, there is a lack of trained staff/personnel who could monitor and evaluate early childhood programmes and practices. The individuals responsible for early childhood education at the Education Division, as the regulatory body, have had very little time to monitor practices. Due to the multiple roles a head of school has to fulfil, the monitoring of the KG centres or early years classrooms tends to be given lesser priority. Administrative members of staff who, in their own teaching experience had minimal or no contact with the early years are unaware of what to expect of the early years section. In spite of the fact that heads and assistant heads of schools are expected to have a qualification in administration and management, early childhood education



appears to be a neglected area. Thus, practitioners cannot look to their immediate administrators for support or advice.

Where there are practitioners who are poorly trained or lack the necessary qualifications to work in the sector, reflection and evaluation of their own practices does not take place. Members of staff working with very young children need to be educated and made aware of how and what to plan, how to articulate objectives, how to work towards achieving the set objectives and ultimately how to evaluate and assess whether these objectives have been met and how a programme can be improved. Since there has been no monitoring, several early childhood centres, irrespective of whether they have toddlers, infants or young school learners do not even have a clear programme to be followed. Staff works on their whims or are led by children's moods and interests. This means there are no shared objectives towards which the staff is working. This raises difficulties in obtaining sound, empirical and objective evidence that reflects the children's achievements as well as the improvements of the centre as a result of the work being done. There are difficulties of accountability: in the absence of a clear programme of activities with well-defined objectives, it becomes difficult to involve parents and share with them the philosophy, beliefs and practices of the centre. Further difficulties arise when issues of transition are concerned: if there is no formal/recognised monitoring of children's work and achievements in the early childhood centres, it becomes basically impossible for teachers in primary school to have a picture of children's achievements to the detriment of continuity across the early childhood years.

Practitioners with minimal training or qualifications do not reflect upon or evaluate their own practices

Monitoring is also essential for setting and maintaining standards. For example, currently there is no established policy for the ratio of children to adults with the under threes. The legal ratios for older children are one adult to 15 children for three-year-olds and one adult to 20 children in the case of four-year-olds. However, in the private sector, there are even classes of 14 two-year-old children with one adult. In comparison to countries where good practice is promoted, these ratios are rather high. There are several disadvantages of having such large groups: less opportunities for interaction with the group as well as within the group; less opportunities for extended communication between the adult and individual children. It is also more taxing to manage a group in a creative way.



SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS & GUIDELINES

FINANCING

- Generous leave benefits for mothers and fathers may help reduce the need and demand for investment in costly infant provision. This could facilitate more equitable sharing of work and family responsibilities. If well-administered and backed up by early childhood services, the measure would be helpful in retaining the attachment of young women to the labour market and in encouraging male partners to invest more time with their children.
- Tax rebates, funding and/or subsidies are to be provided for accredited day-care centres and small, private KG centres. This guarantee of affordable, quality provision is of paramount importance especially for low and middle-income parents.
- Fees which parents are eligible to pay should be means tested.
- Within the state sector, there needs to be sufficient funding channelled towards the KG classes. This should enable staff to purchase essential resources to assist in the development of quality programmes for young children.

PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

- The introduction of family-friendly benefits (leave benefits for mothers and fathers, part-time work, flexible working hours) especially if after-school activities are not available.
- Educating employers to promote and encourage partnerships with centres which offer child-care facilities. Support of workplace-friendly policies is an investment that affects the bottom line of all businesses. Employee absenteeism, low morale, indifference, and turnover carry significant costs to employers. In contrast, employee commitment, high morale, enthusiasm, and a personal investment in their work translate into significant benefits for employers and their customers.
- Encouraging fathers to avail themselves of family-friendly benefits. If mothers are the partners who continue to make use of family-friendly benefits it can damage their career prospects as well as perpetuate gender inequalities.
- Informing and educating employers and employees to change their attitudes towards men who make use of family-friendly policies.
- For some, the needs of children and working parents have to be addressed via provision which is in line with working hours. Out-of-school provision has to be considered as an option which covers the working day. If such provision is to be introduced there have to be strong administrative and conceptual links between such activities, early childhood education and care as well as schools.
- Centres should have clearly published literature with specific statements about their centre's philosophy, policies and practices.
- Parents should be encouraged to visit different centres to find out about the services available.
- Parents should be encouraged to spend time at centres to be comfortable with the way children are dealt with at centres, to find out what activities children will engage in, to familiarise themselves with the functioning of the centre. This implies that parents will be in a better position to choose an



early years setting which is appropriate to the needs of their child, rather than choose on the basis of recommendations of friends and relatives.

- Early childhood centres & settings should promote good quality care by ensuring that the ethos of the centres is based on positive relationships, responsive care and respect. Positive relationships are at the basis of effective learning, healthy development and emotional well-being. Responsive care evokes a feeling of belonging. Through mutual respect, children thrive, participate, make contributions and are happy.
- Participation and access are promoted with an inclusive policy. Inclusion recognises diversity and children and families have many different and changing needs. Everyone, particularly the child and parent have an important contribution to make.

TRANSITION ISSUES

- Parents need to be supported and encouraged to visit different centres before selecting the specific centre.
- Parents should be informed/educated about quality issues they need to look out for when visiting early childhood settings. Specifically, parents should consider that the premises they will be choosing offers:
 - clean and safe buildings and playgrounds;
 - an appropriate number of trained personnel;
 - routines that are flexible;
 - calm, friendly adults who are interested in children;
 - a wide range of accessible materials and experiences;
 - a place where children's family values and customs are considered;
 - adults who are knowledgeable about children's learning and development;
 - opportunities for parents to find out about the centre.
- Parents ought to be given literature about the centres they visit in order to make an informed decision about early childhood centres appropriate for their children.

RATIOS

- Child staff ratios should be reviewed to aim for: maximum three (ideally two) babies under the age of 12 months with one trained adult; four children aged 12 to 24 months with one trained adult and a maximum of eight children aged 24 to 36 months with one trained adult.
- KG centres should have a maximum of 15 three and four-year-old-children in any one group.
- With each group there should be one qualified teacher and one assistant.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND NETWORKS

- Staff working with 0 to 8 year olds should be appropriately qualified irrespective of whether they are employed within the state, church or private sector.
- Personnel with an administrative role in an early years setting, especially KG centres should have a tertiary degree in Education as well as a diploma in administration. The diploma in administration should have a strong component for the management of early years settings, including working with parents, other adults and children.
- Administrative staff already in possession of some qualification will be given



- the opportunity for make-up courses on the basis of a *recognition of prior learning* assessment.
- Staff directly responsible for a group of 3 to 5-year-olds should have a tertiary level qualification.
 - Over a period of time, current staff qualifications have to be upgraded until a situation is attained where all members of staff employed in the early years sector have a minimum qualification.
 - KG assistants who are in possession of the two-year certificate for pre-school education and currently working with 3 to 5 year olds, will be offered additional courses at university if they choose to be upgraded to teachers.
 - KG assistants who are in possession of the two-year certificate for pre-school education can choose not to do make-up courses but will assist qualified teachers and not be solely responsible for a group of children.
 - KG assistants who do not have any accredited qualifications will be given the opportunity for an assessment of their prior learning. Whereas this recommendation raises an issue of who will be doing the assessment, it is crucial to have procedures to assess the skills and knowledge a person may have developed as a result of formal and informal learning. Recognised prior learning looks for evidence of learning that may have taken place as a result of life and work experience and compares it with the requirements of formal training courses.
 - The above recommendations would be staggered over a period of years.
 - Staff working with under threes should be reasonably qualified with a qualification and/or experience which shows that they have an in-depth understanding of child-development and how to care for and educate under threes through appropriately planned activities which take into consideration children's real involvement and interaction with the world around them.
 - Within centres, there should be incentives to train, employ qualified staff or continually improve expertise. These incentives could also be linked to financial remuneration/subsidy for the centres themselves.
 - For staff at child-care centres, rather than working independently and in isolation, forming networks or clusters would facilitate issues related to administration, organisation of training, negotiating with the authorities re issues related to salaries, training, holidays, insurance and setting of parental fees.

PROGRAMMES

- Programmes should be pedagogically sound and conducted by appropriately-trained professionals. A high quality programme in early childhood implies child-initiative, play and involvement. If a programme is over-focused on formal skills, it is more likely to provide opportunities for children to fail, and to develop a higher dependency on adults, promoting in them negative perceptions of their own competencies (Stipek et al, 1995, as cited in *OECD thematic review of ECEC policy in Ireland, 2004*).
- For disadvantaged children, good quality ECEC programmes are especially beneficial if occurring in a context which is strong on family engagement. To break the poverty code and protect the socio-emotional development of young children, wider issues such as employment and job training, social support, housing policies, substance abuse and community resources need to be addressed (Kagan & Zigler, 1987; Morris et al., 2001; Sweeney, 2002, as cited in *OECD thematic review of ECEC policy in Ireland, 2004*).
- An appropriate early years curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences. The content and implementation of the curriculum builds on children's prior individual, age-related, and cultural learning, is inclusive of children with

disabilities, and is supportive of background knowledge gained at home and in the community. The curriculum supports children whose home language is not English in building a solid base for later learning (NAEYC, NAECs/SDE, 2003).

- An early years curriculum should be comprehensive to include critical areas of development, namely physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; cognition and general knowledge; and subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies, and the arts (NAEYC, NAECs/SDE, 2003).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Monitoring and evaluation of practices in day care, KG centres & first two years of primary schooling should be introduced.
- External monitoring and evaluation of practices at early childhood centres should be the responsibility of appropriately qualified staff.
- Where KG centres form part of schools, a specific person has to be designated as the person responsible for the curricular programme at the centre.
- Each KG centre and early childhood institution should provide an annual report based on self-evaluation, reports from parents and children.
- When an application for a new centre is put forward and more importantly, once a license is given there should be careful scrutiny of premises, of staff and their qualifications and good standing.
- Once a centre earns a license, unannounced inspections should be conducted periodically.
- The license can be revoked if premises or practice are not according to established standards. Transition periods may be allowed in order to allow for the service providers to upgrade premises, facilities or practices.
- The license should be renewed periodically.
- The license should be displayed in the main entrance of the building. Should there be a temporary license pending up-grading of premises or improvement in any sector, this should be clearly indicated together with a time-frame by when the situation is to be rectified.

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

- At a local level (centre/school-based) research ought to be undertaken in order to find out what immediate, short and long-term effects early childhood settings are having on the children in a range of skills one expects children to develop.
- Practitioners in the field should have substantial skills, partly acquired in their personal and professional training to carefully observe, evaluate and alter the programme of activities being offered to children attending their centre in order to provide high quality experiences.
- Centres should be encouraged to work in collaboration in order to find out more about appropriate and best practice. Such sharing of positive experiences could help to disseminate good practice across centres.



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APPENDIX

The details from each country in the following appendix offer an overview of how different countries deal with a variety of issues in the field of early childhood education and care. The information from each country was made available through the contributions of colleagues from various universities, as detailed at the top of each country note. Information was sought about the following issues:

- The cultural climate: Purposes for the setting up of early childhood centres; social climate; labour market forces;
- The types of provision available: Home-based, specifically-built centres; license & regulations requirements;
- Ratios;
- Finances: Funding available; government intervention; assistance to schools and early childhood settings; tax rebates;
- Staff qualifications;
- Curricula: Prescriptive or descriptive curricula; guidelines; content emphasised;
- Pedagogical practices and monitoring: What ways of working are encouraged with children? Who is responsible for monitoring & evaluating? How is it done?
- Responsibility for ECEC;
- Parental involvement: Policy vs a vs parents – transitions; parents in centres; parent visits etc

Appendix A: Early childhood education and care in Sweden

Appendix B: Early childhood education and care in Germany

Appendix C: Early childhood education and care in Finland

Appendix D: Early childhood education and care in Singapore

Appendix E: Early childhood education and care in Scotland

Appendix A: Early Childhood Education and care in Sweden
Maelis Karlsson-Lohmander, Göteborg University

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>In 1999, 81.5% of women aged 25-34 years participated in the labour force. 32.1% worked part-time. <i>Parental leave</i>: 360 days paid 80% of earnings for a year and 60 SEK daily for 90 days. There is great flexibility about taking this leave full or part-time. A further pregnancy benefit of 80 % of earnings is paid for expectant mothers in employment who are unable to go on working from 60 to 11 days before birth.</p>	<p>Pre-school (full time) ages 1-5. Open all day 5 days a week all year round (maximum fee; 75 % of all children). Most pre-schools are closed during one month – July, since the majority of parents have their summer vacation then. However, for those children who still need pre-school provision the municipality has to offer provision for that child even during the month of July. Family day care provision (7% of all children)</p>	<p>National statutory requirements for child-staff ratios do not exist, but monitoring of the actual ratios is compulsory and ongoing. In the pre-school class (6/7 year olds), the average ratio is 13 children per adult. However, child/staff ratio in pre-schools has increased since the end of eighties from a mean of 15 children and 3 teachers to a mean of 17,5 children and 2,75 teachers according to a recent national evaluation (National Agency for Education, 2003)</p>	<p>For children from bilingual backgrounds, a free three-hour session every morning is available from the age of 3. Fee variability across municipalities, sometimes hindered low-income parents from using services. Introduction of a low flat, parental fee for services. The municipalities compensated for loss of revenue by central government.</p>	<p>Each centre must have a director, with a university teaching or pedagogue qualification. Educational pedagogues (pre-school teachers) require a three and half-year tertiary degree from a higher-level college or university. The pedagogues are assisted by child-minders who currently, are given a senior secondary, three-year vocational formation in "Children and Leisure-time Activities". Some older staff have fewer formal qualifications. However, since 2003, there is a new programme aimed at upgrading the level of qualification for the older</p>	<p>A <i>Curriculum for Pre-school</i> was issued in 1998, linking into the curricula for primary and secondary schools, and providing a common view of knowledge, development and learning. It sets out the foundation values for the pre-school, and the tasks, goals and guidelines for pre-school activities. The means by which goals should be attained are not prescribed. The curriculum for pre-school is goal-oriented. Goals to strive towards not to achieve and not by the individual</p>	<p>Play and theme oriented approach. The child's perspective as the point of departure. Care and Education are inseparable. The importance of peers</p>	<p>Responsibility for central policy, for the goals, guidelines and financial framework of ECEC lies solely with the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science (since 1 January 2005 the name has changed to Ministry of Education, Research and Culture). Distinctions between day-care and kindergarten were removed by the 1998 School Act, which defines all services for young children from 1-5 as "pre-school" and for the 6-year olds as "pre-school class". The School Act also devolves major responsibilities to municipalities.</p>	<p>According to the Curriculum for pre-school the pre-school should "supplement the home by creating the best possible conditions for ensuring that the each child's development is rich and varied. ... Parents should have the opportunity within the framework of the national goals to be involved and influence activities in the pre-school. The work team should maintain on an ongoing basis a dialogue with parents on the child's well being, development and learning, both in an outside the pre-school in addition to holding the personal development dialogue take due account of parents' viewpoints when planning</p>



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>Parental leave - 480 days, 60 days exclusively for the father</p> <p>Pregnancy benefits</p> <p>Temporary parental leave: Parents can take up to 120 days leave of absence from work to take care of their sick child (under age 13) in their home.</p>	<p>Open pre-school for parents and their children and family day care providers – the child does not have to be registered</p> <p>Pre-school class age 6 (98 % of all children). Located in schools. Open during school terms- free of charge (3 hrs daily)</p> <p>School-age childcare ages 6-12 (74% of children 6-9, 10% of children 10-12) (National Agency, 2003)</p>			<p>staff. This programme seems to be very flexible in many ways. Applicants can include: (a) anyone who has finished upper secondary education (gymnasium) without necessarily being a trained child- minder (barnskötare); (b) trained child-minders (two year programme at upper secondary level and the existing three year programme - Children and Leisure Time, which in some sense of meaning at least focused on children and young people) (c) some of those working in the pre-schools and who have worked for a very long time. They may come from a variety</p>	<p>child but by the work team.</p> <p>I. Fundamental values and tasks “Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school. For this reason all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with the fundamental democratic values.</p> <p>The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people. Equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school</p>			<p>and carrying out activities and make sure that parents are involved in assessing activities“ . (Curriculum for pre-school, p 15-16) When the child first enters the pre-school there is an introduction period that lasts about two weeks. During that time parents accompany their child to pre-school and spend time with her/him. Successively they spend less time till the child feels comfortable and has adjusted to the new setting. Parents are always welcome to visit the pre-school and since they bring and pick up their children every day that provides a good opportunity for dialogue and discussions about the child. There are planned parents’</p>

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
				<p>of educational backgrounds (with regards to length and level - anything from 6 months to two years and more) and want to upgrade their education and get new skills and competencies. This qualification is necessary to get access to university education.</p> <p>About 75% of the courses are compulsory (600 credits) and 200 are optional. The entire programme comprises 800 credits.</p> <p>However credits for previous work experience are assigned reducing the full 800 credits.</p> <p>The entire programme is practicum oriented - a lot of time is spent in placements under qualified</p>	<p>shall actively promote in its work with children" (Lpfö 98, p 7)</p> <p>2. Goals and guidelines: Norms and values; Development and learning; Influence of the child; Pre-school and home; Co-operation with the pre-school class, the school and the leisure time centre.</p> <p>Means and methods are not overtly expressed but are to be interpreted by the members of staff.</p> <p>The curriculum was issued as a Government decree in 1998</p>			<p>meetings and so-called drop-in meetings, which are less structured and other activities like outings where parents can take part.</p>



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
				<p>supervision. Family day-care providers are not required to have a qualification but 50-100 hours of mandatory training from their municipal employers. Many are qualified since they may be pre-school teachers or educated child-minders. The National Agency for Education recommends family day-carers should receive training and certification equivalent to the child-minders in pre-schools. In-service training is well developed for centre-based day-carers and leisure-time staff, but less well for family day-carers.</p>	<p>and unlike previous programmes it is mandatory. The whole school system is now covered by three curricula linked to each other by a shared view on knowledge, development and learning.</p>			

Appendix B: Early Childhood Education and Care in Germany
 Dr Mathias Urban, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Institut für Pädagogik

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>With a population of app. 80 million Germany is the most populous country of the European Union. It gained its present form of statehood only recently after the 1990 re-unification of the former Federal Republic of Germany (west) and the German Democratic Republic (east). This affects the ECEC system not only because of merging two different economic systems but also because of the different <i>cultural scripts</i> (notions of child rearing, maternalism, private vs. public responsibility for education etc.) that had arisen in west and east since 1945.</p>	<p>Krippe (Crèche) for children from birth to three. <i>Kindergarten</i> / <i>Kindertagesstätte</i> integrated day-care/pre-school settings for children 3-6. <i>Hort</i>, out of school provision for children up to the beginning of secondary education. Most services offer places for children with <i>special needs</i>. There is a wide range of service providers, according to the guiding principle of <i>subsidiarity</i>. Non-statutory welfare organisations that represent churches, charities and social groups provide the majority of places, although municipalities do provide places too.</p>	<p>Child-staff ratios vary because the 16 <i>Länder</i> set standards for ECEC in their territory and there is no federal responsibility. Average ratio is 1.5 adults for a group of 20 to 25 children 3 to 6. It varies from 1 to 2 adults in a group of 8 to 10 children under 3.</p>	<p>Although there is a federal legislation (child and youth welfare act), funding of the services is in the responsibility of the municipalities and to a minor amount of the <i>Länder</i>. All services are fee-paying for parents and the providers are expected to contribute to the costs. Fee varies widely across municipalities</p>	<p>The 'core worker' in German early childhood care and education is the <i>Erzieherin</i>, a social pedagogue trained on a vocational level below tertiary level of education. Because the <i>Erzieherin</i> is not trained at university level, the reputation is low and there are considerable gaps between early years' and primary school professionals. The reform of the initial professional education has been an ongoing issue for many years but any changes have been averted by the standing conference of the <i>Länder</i> ministries for education in order to avoid an increase of cost (salaries would have to rise if</p>	<p>There is no national ECEC curriculum, due to the responsibility of the 16 <i>Länder</i> for standards and regulations. Other than in western Germany, the <i>Kindergarten</i> in eastern Germany has been part of the education system. A national curriculum had to be applied in all centres but was abolished after the 1990 re-unification. Recently, curricula or education plans have been produced or drafted in all of the 16 <i>Länder</i>. They vary in terms of content, form, and length. Most of them are recommendations or agreements, only some <i>Länder</i> (Bavaria, Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin)</p>	<p>Guiding principle is the triad of <i>Bildung</i>, <i>Erziehung</i> and <i>Betreuung</i>, which might best be translated as a concept of <i>social pedagogy</i> which integrates education, upbringing and care in the broadest sense. Due to the principle of <i>subsidiarity</i> and the lack of a national curriculum, a wide range of pedagogical approaches have been developed in the past. The most influential concept is referred to as <i>Situationsansatz</i>, (contextual appropriate approach), a pedagogical approach that aims at fostering children's development and learning in relevant</p>	<p>Responsibility for ECEC lies with the ministries of either welfare or education in the 16 <i>Länder</i>. State regulations apply to all settings and age groups. The federal child and youth welfare act describes overall purposes and tasks (<i>Bildung</i>, <i>Erziehung</i>, <i>Betreuung</i>) and guarantees an entitlement to a part time Kindergarten place for children from age 3. In recent years, the <i>Länder</i> tend to hand over more and more responsibilities to the municipalities.</p>	<p>In general, parental involvement is guaranteed by the federal child and youth welfare act. It states that parents are to be involved in decisions concerning major matters in early childhood centres. According to <i>Länder</i>-regulations (which vary!) most centres will have parents' councils. Parents' rights may vary from a right to information at one end to decision-making rights at the other. There are a significant</p>



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>Institutionalised early childhood education and care in Germany dates back to the early 19th century. The <i>Kindergarten</i> as first designed by <i>Friedrich Froebel</i>, for example, integrates care and education in a way that the recent OECD report on ECEC policy refers to as the concept of <i>social pedagogy</i>. Although the triad of <i>Bildung</i>, <i>Erziehung</i> and <i>Betreuung</i> has always been the guiding concept for the sector, and public childcare and education is widely accepted by families, there is a remarkable lack of public discourse on the tasks of the early childhood institutions. This, in consequence, leads</p>				<p><i>Erzieherinnen</i> were qualified at tertiary level). Only recently a small number of university colleges have begun to run B.A. programmes as pilots to qualify early year's practitioners at university level.</p>	<p>have already introduced mandatory curricula for 0-6.</p>	<p>real life situations. Basically, pedagogical practices all over Germany are play-based. Due to the absence of national curricula and only minimal quality standards, systematic monitoring and evaluation is not taking place yet. From 2000 a national pilot (the <i>National Quality Initiative</i>) has developed sets of quality criteria and evaluation procedures. They are being used by service providers but again are not mandatory.</p>	<p>There is ambivalence to this process of <i>municipalisation</i>. It may facilitate local autonomy and greater flexibility in order to create services that meet the needs of the local community. On the other hand it brings with it the risk of undermining general professional and quality standards.</p>	<p>number of parent-led services, most of them in urban areas in western Germany.</p>



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>to a marginalisation of the sector in the political debate, a lack of public investment (app.0.4% GDP compared to 2.0% in Sweden and an OECD average of 0.6%) and a lack of recognition of the ECEC professionals (<i>Erzieherinnen</i>). Germany today has one of the lowest birth-rates in the world. Numbers of elderly people are increasing; children's share of the population is falling. The recent OECD report states: "Germany, in short, is aging more rapidly than most other countries." Per capita GDP is about EU average and slightly above OECD average. Germany has a rather low-</p>								



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>income inequality compared to other western countries, but a considerable poverty among children (14%) with the most important source for child poverty being unemployment. There is a significantly higher unemployment rate in the eastern Länder (up to 25% in some de-industrialised areas). Although there is an entitlement to a part-time kindergarten place for children aged three to six years (federal child and youth welfare act), there are still significant differences in provision between east and west. Provision for children from birth to three, for</p>								



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
example, is very low in the western Länder, but up to 100% in the east.								



Appendix C: Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland
Päivi Lindberg, Senior Planning Officer at the Health and Social Services
STAKES - National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, Helsinki, Finland

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>Early childhood policy is intended to support the development and learning of young children & enable them to become ethically responsible members of society. Policy is built on clear understandings by all stakeholders that a creative cohesive society depends on social justice and concern for the rights & responsibilities of all, including children.</p> <p>In 2003, 72.5% of women participated in the labour force. 15% of them in part-time employment, (8% of men in part-time work). 53.3% of women in full-time employment with 11% in part-time</p>	<p>The municipalities have the obligation to organise day-care for all young children whose parents choose to have it. Provision, operating hours and the annual duration of services vary according to service type. Municipalities opt for a mixed system of provision, combining public & private provision. Municipalities may provide services directly through municipal day-care centres (<i>päiväkoti</i>), family day-care homes/places or pre-school groups (the main forms of provision), but they may also outsource to private providers (about 5% of total provision).</p>	<p>1 trained adult for 4 children under 3; 1 child nurse or KG teacher for every 7 children over 3. In family day-care ratio is 4 full-day children & 1 part-time pre-school or school child per day-care parent. In part-day services for 3-6 year olds, ratio is 13 children per one child nurse or KG teacher. In pre-school class (6 year olds), ratio is 13 children per KG teacher. There is a recommendation for a maximum of 20 but if there are more than 13 children, the teacher needs an assistant.</p>	<p>Affordability not an issue: client fees cover 15% of costs; rest subsidized by state and local authority taxes. Parents pay 11 months only per annum although their child's place is available during holidays also. No fee for low-income families; highest fee cannot be more than €200 per child per month. Pre-school for 6 year olds is free.</p>	<p>Multi-professional staff: includes heads of centres; KG teachers who have 3 or 4 years study for a Bachelor degree in ECE or Social Sciences; practical children's nurses have a post-secondary professional diploma of 3 years; day-care assistants & family child-care minders. Latter must have appropriate training. National Board of Education presented a recommendation for a new vocational training for family child minders (40 credits). At least 1/3 of staff must have a tertiary degree (Bachelor or Master).</p>	<p>The National Research & Development Centre for Welfare & Health (STAKES) has provided the National Curriculum Guidelines in ECEC for children 0-6 years of age. <i>The Core curriculum for preschool education</i> (2000) initiative began a holistic process of curriculum reform in Finland. Since August 2000, local curricula for pre-school education for 6 year olds are drafted for each municipality (day-care centres &</p>	<p>The government <i>Resolution Concerning National ECEC Policy</i> proposes an action program for the development of ECEC, including the <i>Project on Quality and Steering in ECEC (2000-2005)</i> aimed at strengthening the local, regional and national systems of steering and assessment. Research on quality continues to expand, with clear cohesive links between several universities, the Ministry and STAKES. A tool to support ECEC staff across Finland is a comprehensive data base (http://www.stakes.fi/varttua) with latest ECEC information on development projects and studies being conducted. This portal has a central role in the implementation of the curriculum guidelines. Since 2002 the information systems work has been guided by the Social Welfare &</p>	<p>Government responsibility for ECEC from 0-6 years rests primarily with the Ministry of Social Affairs & Health. Ministry is responsible for the National Policy definition concerning ECEC; allowances to parents & service providers; maternity grant; health care; child & family counselling; child welfare & home help services. The Ministry of Education has responsibility for pre-school education for six-year olds as well as morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren. The National</p>	<p>Parents have a crucial role in ensuring responsiveness of services to child interests and needs. Finland's Government resolution concerning the national ECEC policy definition strongly raises the issue of parent involvement. <i>The Educational Partnership project (2003-5)</i> ensures staff training that enhances capacity to support parenthood & the <i>Early Support (2004-5)</i> project developed the role of parents in early intervention. An individual ECEC plan is drawn up for each child</p>

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>have at least one child below 6 years. 42.7% of women (of whom 8.5% work part time) have a child who is younger than 3. The relatively low participation rate may be a result of the three-year child-care leave that may be taken by a parent after the birth of a child. 18 weeks maternity leave, plus 26 weeks paid parental leave. Level of payment determined according to income earned, approximately 66% of an employee's pay & includes a minimum set rate of 11.46EUR/day for 6 days per week (2004). Paternity leave of 3 weeks maximum</p>	<p>There are two types of private services in municipalities: the fully private services that parents can choose for their child (and access a private child care allowance); and the outsourced services where municipalities buy the services from private providers and thus, also partly administer them, e.g. managing the delivery of places. Likewise, municipalities, voluntary organisations and the Church organise various open part time or seasonal ECEC services. Every child in Finland under compulsory school age has an unconditional right</p>	<p>1 trained adult for 4 children under 3; 1 child nurse or KG teacher for every 7 children over 3. In family day-care ratio is 4 full-day children & 1 part-time pre-school or school child per day-care parent. In part-day services for 3-6 year olds, ratio is 13 children per one child nurse or KG teacher. In pre-school class (6 year olds), ratio is 13 children per KG teacher. There is a recommendation for a maximum of 20 but if there are more than 13 children, the teacher needs an assistant.</p>	<p>Affordability not an issue: client fees cover 15% of costs; rest subsidized by state and local authority taxes. Parents pay 11 months annuum although their child's place is available during holidays also. No fee for low-income families; highest fee cannot be more than €200 per child per month. Pre-school for 6 year olds is free.</p>	<p>Some heads have further training. Teachers in pre-school education must have at least a tertiary level training.</p>	<p>schools) in consultation with providers, including private providers from whom local authorities have purchased services.</p>	<p>Health Care Data and Information Reform 2005 strategy. This is designed to prepare a national social welfare and health care data information system comprising statistics, corporate data and information on regularly repeated studies and separate surveys.</p>	<p>Board of Education has responsibility for the curricular orientation of pre-school education. The Ministry of Labour is responsible for parental and care leave. Municipalities are fully responsible for the implementation and steering of the services in their own localities. In turn, Provincial State Offices monitor and supervise the activities of municipalities (& provide a basic evaluation of services each year). The subjective right of each child to day care,</p>	<p>in collaboration with parents. The implementation of the plan is assessed annually. This is a statutory obligation based on the Act on the Status & Rights of Social Welfare Clients (2000).</p>



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC	Parental involvement
<p>is also granted. Can be taken by fathers during maternity and/or parental leave. If the father also takes at least two weeks of parental leave he gets two extra weeks of paternity leave, which he can have after the parental leave period.</p>	<p>to early care and education, to be provided by the local authority once parental leave comes to an end. This right is scrupulously respected in Finland. Family and centre-based day care offer full day, full year service, including round the clock care if needed.</p>						<p>following the parental leave period and until entry to primary school at age seven, is a powerful catalyst underpinning legislative and policy developments. Unconditional right to day care includes right of parents to choose a home-care allowance instead of municipal day-care for their child until the youngest child in the family turns 3.</p>	<p>in collaboration with parents. The implementation of the plan is assessed annually. This is a statutory obligation based on the Act on the Status & Rights of Social Welfare Clients (2000).</p>

Appendix D: Childhood Education and Care in Singapore
Dr Pamela J Sharpe, Associate Professor, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
 The information in this appendix was made available by Linda Gan from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC
Preschool education in Singapore has been established for a number of years & currently provides full and half day care and education programmes for children from 2 months to 6 years in child care centres and 2 to 4 hour education programmes for children from 3 to 6 years in kindergartens. Historically, this provision was for the care and education for some children of working parents, and, to promote the development of English and mother tongue for those attending	There are places in 593 childcare centres for 49,443 children, into which 35,373 were enrolled in 2004, with ages ranging from 2 months to 6 years old, in either half or full day government subsidised childcare programmes for five and a half days per week. In addition there are 98,096 preschool children, aged between 3 and 6 years old, attending 433 Kindergartens for between 2.5 and 4 hours per weekday. Of these, 74,456 children attend 318 non-profit making kindergartens with 23,640 children attending 115 private kindergartens.	For licensing purposes, staffing ratios require: 1 staff to 5 infants aged from 2 to 18 months; 1 staff to 8 toddlers (12 maximum) aged 18 to 30 months; 1 staff to 12 playgroup children (15 maximum) aged 30 months to 3 years; 1 staff to 15 nursery children (18 maximum) aged 3 to 4 years; 1 staff to 25 KG1 or KG2 children (25 maximum) aged 4 to 6+ years.	Full child care fees for families range between S\$380 and S\$1000+ per month per child. A subsidy of S\$150 per child is available for up to three children in any one family for full-day care. This subsidy is available to mothers and single fathers who work more than 56 hours per month, irrespective of income. A subsidy of S\$75 per child per month is provided for half-day care for working and non-working mothers or for mothers requiring full-day care who work less than 56 hours per month. Nevertheless, even with the provision of government subsidies, there are a number of families for whom even this is unaffordable, and further subsidies are available for hardship cases. The Centre-Based	In order to support the implementation of the new curriculum from 2003 in non-profit kindergartens, which are the major providers of preschool education, assistance will be provided in the form of annual recurrent grants of S\$15,000 per staff who is diploma trained and S\$7,500 per staff who is certificate trained. These grants may be used to modify salary structures in order to attract and retain suitably qualified staff, to encourage upgrading, and to support the kindergartens' administration and teaching resources. In line with these initiatives, new requirements for teacher qualifications will be introduced from January 2008, thus requiring centres to comply before this date. By 2005, all preschool principals and supervisors will	Individual childcare centres are required to follow guidelines provided by the Ministry of Community Development and Sport for licensing purposes. These guidelines include provision for age appropriate learning activities in language arts, manipulative and constructive play, music and movement, art and craft, maths, sand and water play, dramatic play, science, and social studies. Also stipulated is provision for learning corners for experiences in role play/dressing up, block play, science/nature, library/books, and a corner to compliment the current theme. Age appropriate activities to develop the use of English and mother tongue must	Guidelines stipulate criteria for the centre environment including provision for nutritional meals and nap-time arrangements, equipment and materials, safety, health, nutrition and hygiene, teacher- child interaction, record keeping, staffing ratios, and staff development. Although primary school education for children aged 7 to 12 years of age became compulsory in January 2003, there is no formal link with preschool education, which is not compulsory. Reports on children's progress are provided for parents	The Ministry of Community Development and Sport, has responsibility for promoting and regulating childcare centres and for provision of information and operations. This involves regular monitoring of educational programmes, physical facilities, child health, welfare and management, staff - children ratios, and centre administration. Together with the Ministry of Education, it is also responsible for the accreditation of staff qualifications and training courses. The Ministry of Education, licenses



Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC
<p>kindergartens. More recently, the provision has been extended and is available for all children. Singapore is a multi-racial country with few natural resources and a rapidly expanding economy. There is therefore an awareness of the importance of social cohesion, the promotion of family values, national identity, and of an educated workforce. As such, the government invests heavily in education. The provision of government financial support for preschool</p>			<p>Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care, administered by the Community Development Councils, provides an additional monthly subsidy for low-income families. Further subsidies are available in centres run by voluntary welfare agencies, a number of which also employ social work staff. These subsidies range from S\$10 to S\$250 per month. In January 2003, the ministry introduced the regular flexible child care scheme and pro-rated subsidies for children attending child care centres. The purpose of the scheme is to increase the options available to parents with flexible work arrangements. To be eligible for the scheme the child has to attend at least 12 hours of childcare per week.</p>	<p>be required to obtain diplomas in preschool education – leadership. By 2008, the minimum requirements state that one in four teachers with 5 GCE ordinary level passes including a credit in English or mother tongue for mother tongue teachers, will need to obtain diplomas in preschool education-teaching. Other teachers will need to obtain certificates in preschool teaching, where the minimum qualifications remain at 3 GCE ordinary level passes including English, or mother tongue for mother tongue teachers. Training is conducted at the National Institute of Education and at a number of accredited profit and non-profit training agencies. Currently the training is mostly in-service with preschool centres sponsoring fees, 80% of which can be recovered</p>	<p>also be provided. Furthermore, the daily schedule must provide for a balance of indoor and outdoor activities involving individual and group work, child initiated and teacher initiated activities, quiet and active activities, free choice and structured activities, and provision for gross and fine motor skill development. Before the provision of the new curriculum framework for kindergartens, the Ministry of Education provided curriculum guidelines for the education of children between the ages of 3 and 6 years.</p>	<p>and there is no requirement for these to be passed on to primary schools. The new curriculum provision will continue to require preschool teachers to monitor progress however. This will be an informal process including a number of approved methods of observation, providing centres with the flexibility to select the most appropriate means to reflect children's progress.</p>	<p>kindergartens, monitors the physical standards and is responsible for the registration of teachers.</p>

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Ratios	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC
<p>education has resulted in more women being encouraged to rejoin the work place, improvements in physical and curriculum provision, and improvements in teachers' benefits and training opportunities</p>			<p>Fees at private kindergartens range from S\$70 to S\$60 per child per month, depending on the programme content, philosophy, and facilities. Private Kindergarten programmes are not subsidised, unlike those operated by community or non-profit making groups where fees for these programmes range between S \$25 and S\$120 per child per month depending on duration and provision of certain physical facilities such as air-conditioning and extra recreational provision and computer facilities. Recently, the government has promised means-tested financial assistance of S\$600 per child per year from 2003 to low-income families whose children attend qualifying non-profit kindergartens.</p>	<p>from the Government's Skills Development Fund. Trainees over 40 years of age are funded 100%. In addition, the Skills Re-development Programme provides funding of S\$6.15 per hour to trainees over 40 years who have GCE "A" levels or below attending during office hours, or S\$5.10 per hour for attendance after hours. In general, preschool teachers receive salaries based on structures devised by individual centres and neither ministry regulates these. In general qualified teachers may earn up to S\$2, 051 per month and principals and supervisors may receive up to S\$3,500 per month.</p> <p>A new framework for teacher training and accreditation is already in place. The Ministry of Community Development & Sport and the Ministry of Education jointly administer it. The two-</p>			



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				<p>tier diploma training for staff in both childcare centres and kindergartens is 700 hours initially for teachers and enables them to train subsequently as supervisors or principals. The core components of this diploma include child development, curriculum pedagogy, health nutrition and safety, personal and professional development. The second level diploma of 500 hours incorporates an expansion of the core elements and includes management and administration. Teachers with a minimum of 3 GCE “O” levels are eligible for the 470-hour certificate course, which parallels the diploma course albeit with less rigorous assessment and coverage.</p>			

Appendix E: Childhood Education and Care in Scotland
 Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow) provided the references and a short write-up on the basis of which this appendix was produced.

Cultural climate	Types of provision	Finances	Staff qualifications	Curricula	Pedagogical practices & monitoring	Responsibility for ECEC
<p>Key existing policies and programmes in Health, Education and Social care focusing on the early years include the Childcare Strategy, Pre-school Education, Sure Start Scotland, and Starting Well. In addition, mainstream services such as health visitors, learning disability services, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy are key to effective early years provision, although they do not focus exclusively on young children. All contribute to one or more of a broad set of objectives which are to: improve children's health; improve children's social & emotional development; improve children's ability to learn; strengthen families and communities; reduce barriers to</p>	<p>Parental care is complimented by a range of other services. Some, such as parent and toddler groups, family centres, one o'clock clubs and toy libraries focus on meeting the needs of children with their carers. They provide valuable developmental opportunities for children as well as the chance for parents to share experiences and resources. Local authority day centers, family playgroups; Local authority nursery schools. All three and four year olds are entitled to 12.5 hours of free pre-school education per week for the two years prior</p>	<p>Sure Start Scotland was introduced in 1999 to target support at families with very young children (0-3 years), particularly the most vulnerable and deprived. £61 million has so far been distributed to all local authorities to work in partnership with health services, voluntary organisations and parents to identify local need and deliver services to meet that need. A diverse range of provision is provided through Sure Start Scotland funding including centre-based support, outreach services, nursery and day care services, + various forms of support to parents. It focuses on trying to deliver integrated services to meet the range of needs of families and their children, and builds on existing</p>	<p>Initial teacher education (ITE), stretching over four years for those entering higher education or for one year for those already holding first degrees, prepares those entering the primary school sector to teach children from 3 to 12. It incorporates theoretical and practical elements of pre-school education (all students must be able to develop and apply the <i>Curriculum Framework for Children aged 3 to 5</i>. Placement in a pre-school education centre is one of the options that students may select during their studies). These are set within a broader framework of study of child development, theories of learning, curriculum principles and practice, and responses to the particular needs and aptitudes of individual children.</p>	<p>In October 2004 government announced its intention to revisit curriculum in Scotland. By 2007 A Curriculum for Excellence (3-18) will be underway. For early years the important aims include providing more coherence and continuity between the previous 3-5 and 5-14 curricula to ensure a smooth transition in what children have learned and also in how they learn. This will mean extending the approaches which are used in pre-school into the early years of primary, emphasising the importance of opportunities for children to learn through purposeful, well-planned play. A <i>Curriculum for Excellence</i> (3 to 18) applies to all children and young people from their earliest contact with the education system through to the time they leave school as young adults. It applies to the</p>	<p>The early years services of the future will be more flexible and user-oriented than in the past. They will engage a wider range of staff, with different backgrounds, qualifications and experience. More and more, groups of nursery nurses and teachers, complemented by social & community workers, health visitors and other specialist practitioners, will function as a team to provide services. They will offer new opportunities for multi-disciplinary working, team-building, and team management. They will call for individuals who are motivated to share knowledge and skills, who value and respond to the contributions offered by those differently qualified, and who are prepared to play a variety of roles.</p>	<p>The Government's vision is that childcare and pre-school education are interlinked and inter-dependent. Therefore they should be grown together and planned together. Thirty-two Partnerships have been created to support this process, bringing together local authority, private and voluntary providers. Childcare services are not a matter for Government, or the public sector, alone. The successful development of childcare services in line with parental demand requires a co-ordinated effort on the part of public, private and</p>



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<p>employment, especially for lone parents, since work is the best route out of poverty.</p>	<p>to their entry to school. New announcements from the Scottish Executive indicate that the aim is to increase the hours of free provision for this age group from the present 12.5 hours per week to 20 hours per week in the next few years.</p>	<p>provision. Funding will rise by £31 million by 2005-06 - a total of £50 million will be available that year. <i>The Childcare Strategy for Scotland</i> aims to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for all 0-14 year olds by raising quality standards, supporting parents' purchasing power, expanding childcare places and improving information. The strategy has been implemented since 1998. Childcare is universal, but must meet the needs of disadvantaged families. From 2002 £16.75 million per year has been distributed to local authorities for project support, partnership & information services to support the aims of the strategy. This will rise to £40.65m by 2005-06. Local authorities, in conjunction with</p>	<p>A key feature of initial teacher education is its emphasis on the child as developing learner, whose progress in learning should be supported, nurtured & encouraged to build self-esteem, competence, knowledge and achievement. As <i>higher education</i>, ITE is also designed to foster skills in critical thinking – in the quest for evidence, and in the sifting, analysis, comparisons and weighing evidence and arguments.</p>	<p>experiences provided in the different places where they go to learn: early years centres and nurseries; schools; and to colleges and others working in partnership with schools. It recognises the wide range of educators working in these sectors. Because children learn through all of their experiences - in the family and community, pre-school centre, nursery and school - the curriculum needs to recognise and complement the contributions that these experiences can make. The curriculum aims for all children and for every young person to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work. By providing structure, support and direction to young people's learning, the curriculum should enable them to develop</p>	<p>The early years services of the future will be more flexible and user-oriented than in the past. They will engage a wider range of staff, with different backgrounds, qualifications and experience. More and more, groups of nursery nurses and teachers, complemented by social & community workers, health visitors and other specialist practitioners, will function as a team to provide services. They will offer new opportunities for multidisciplinary working, team-building, and team management. They will call for individuals who are motivated to share knowledge and skills, who value and respond to the contributions offered by those differently qualified, and who are prepared to play a variety of roles.</p>	<p>voluntary sectors.</p>

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		Childcare Partnerships, are responsible for identifying local childcare needs & facilitating development of services to meet these.		these four capacities. The curriculum should complement the important contributions of families and communities.		

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