



Peer Review on “Furthering quality and flexibility of Early Childhood Education and Care”

Copenhagen, Denmark, 13-14 December 2018

Peer Country Comments Paper - Malta

Malta’s developments to improve Early Childhood, Education and Care

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on Furthering quality and flexibility of Early Childhood Education and Care. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the Host Country and the situation in Malta. For information on the Host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper.

2 Situation in the peer country

2.1 Malta's Early Childhood Education and Care

In Malta, Early Childhood Education and Care covers the ages of 0 to 7. From the age of 0 to 3, children can attend childcare centres. From 3 up to 5 years, almost all children attend Kindergarten schools. The obligatory school age is between 5 and 16 years. While in Denmark, compulsory education starts from 6 – 16 years, in Malta, compulsory education starts from 5 – 16 years.

The National Curriculum Framework for All¹ (MEDE 2012) is a policy document that states:

The hallmarks of successful and quality Early Years programmes are those which:

- embrace the socio-cultural dimension surrounding children's learning;
- are concerned with promoting and encouraging positive learning dispositions;
- put children at the centre of the learning environment;
- allow child-initiated activities acknowledging that learning in the early years is a process of co-construction and collaboration;
- promote activities that are related to children's real-life experiences;
- offer children opportunities for hands-on activities;
- draw on a variety of pedagogies which address needs of particular learners.

(MEDE 2012, pp 33-34) The Ministry for Education and Employment "is committed to consolidate and build on the successes achieved in education and employment in the past, and recognises the challenges of an ever evolving and competitive world."² In this respect, it has issued an all-encompassing Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 with:

"four broad goals in line with the European and world benchmarks:

1. Reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increase student achievement;
2. Support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers;
3. Increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning;
4. Raise levels of student retainment and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training.

¹ Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) (2012) [A National Curriculum Framework for All](#).

² Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) (2014) [Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024](#)

(MEDE 2014, p.3)

It is becoming increasingly accepted that the early years' provision is pivotal in achieving the above goals and is the foundation of learning through life. As in the Danish system, Malta's policy documents consistently emphasise a child-centred holistic learning experience. The Educator's Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment – Using a Learning Outcomes Approach³ (DQSE, 2015) is a document which supports the National Curriculum Framework for All (2012) and specifies that "In the very early years, learning outcomes should be conceptualised as a compass not a map: they point in possible directions that children can learn and grow, but do not lay down templates that all children must follow."

3 Assessment of the policy measure

3.1 Policies to assess and improve quality of ECEC systems

In an effort to improve the quality and effectiveness of education in Malta, the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024 (MEDE, 2014), highlights the importance of carefully updating the existing learning programmes and modes of assessment. Like the Danish ECEC agreement of 2017, this Strategy recognises the importance of strengthening professionalism and leadership, in order to achieve the desired results.

As in Denmark, consultation with all stakeholders is pivotal for the Ministry for Education and Employment throughout the update process. A wide consultation process usually entails a series of consultation meetings with, amongst others, representatives from concerned authorities, entities, constituted bodies, unions, academic institutions, service providers, the general public, parents and students. Feedback is also collected through the submission of written responses either online or via post from all interested stakeholders. The document A National Curriculum Framework for All (2012, pp. 3-5) outlines a very clear example of such a process.

To provide a more coherent framework for governance through an integrated education system as of 1st of July 2016, the responsibility of external quality assurance of ECEC services (0-3 years) shifted from the Department for Social Welfare Standards within the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education and Employment. During 2017, a new External Review model has been developed by the DQSE to ensure adherence to the *National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities* (2006). An External Review report is issued and it refers to all the standards but it gives a clear direction to Centres to focus and manage their improvement process by indicating particular actions that need to be prioritised. This is all being done with the vision that improvement is a process which needs commitment as a result of ownership, appropriate guidance, training and time among other aspects. Consequently, the external review model employed by the DQSE is developmental rather than punitive and it seeks to create a balance between accountability and improvement. The aim is to ensure collaboration between those who are providing the service and the entity that is quality-assuring the service provision. Collaboration is ensured through consistent and effective communication not only through the External Review visit but also through the post-external review where time is dedicated to discuss and guide a way forward to each centre/school. Childcare Centres/schools have the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) as a point of reference to address effectively any query or concern. Furthermore, an annual seminar is organised by the DQSE for all Childcare Centres and a biennial seminar for schools. During these seminars, the DQSE exhibits trends in

³ Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (2015) *Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment: Using a Learning Outcomes Approach. Toolkit for the Early Years Cycle.*

strengths and areas for improvement in reaching the desired and established standards. During this seminar workshops are organised to further delve in collaborative discussion and reflection about concerns and different strategies on how they can be addressed. The DQSE works in close collaboration with a non-profit organisation: Early Childhood Development Association, Malta who organise monthly seminars that serve as upskilling sessions for the workforce employed in Childcare Centres. These monthly seminars target needs identified by the DQSE through the External Review visits. Collaboration is also ensured through a relationship built on mutual respect with the Childcare Centres Providers Association (CCPA). This is a recognised association of private service providers and which represent approximately 80% of the total number of childcare centres operating in Malta.

Danish ECEC centres follow a common pedagogical curriculum. Similarly, in Malta, all Childcare Centres are expected to abide by the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006)⁴ and follow the recently introduced Learning Outcomes Framework⁵ (DQSE, 2015) which came into force in October 2018. Currently, there is a wide, public consultation process underway to revise the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006). The main reasons for revising this document are the following:

- i. to update the National Standards for Child Day Care Facility (MFSS, 2006) based on recent research in quality ECEC theory and practice for children aged 0-3 years-old;
- ii. to reflect recent developments in the ECEC (0-3 years) field within a Maltese context. This document includes standards related to night ECEC service provision (0-3 years) (see section 3.2);
- iii. to develop and strengthen a more socially just and active labour market in the Maltese islands.

All standards are informed by the principles of the policy document *A National Curriculum Framework for All* (MEDE, 2012), as well as national and international policies and research that incorporate the key elements of best practice in ECEC. The standards in this document intentionally take into consideration structural quality (including the setting where the service is provided and the number and qualifications of the personnel providing it), process quality (focusing on the quality of the children's experience in the centre) and outcomes quality (the quality of cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and other developmental outcomes enabled through the provision). This corresponds with Denmark's vision that in the common pedagogical foundation, the learning environment is seen as an interaction between structure, processes and well-being/development of children.

These standards are intended to apply equally to ECEC services (0-3 years) operating both in the public and private sectors. The range of services include Centre-Based, Work-Based⁶ and Home-Based services.

The proposed standards are categorised under three broad Quality Areas:

Quality Area 1: Eligibility Criteria and Roles of Members of Staff

Quality Area 2: The Physical Environment and Organisation of the Centre that includes:

⁴ Ministry for Education and Employment, 2006. *National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities*

⁵ Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) (2015) *Learning Outcomes Framework*

⁶ **Work-Based** services are provided within a building occupied by an employer/group of employers and in which employees actually work. These centres are appropriately equipped, and only used, for the provision of ECEC services to children of workers employed/engaged by that same employer/group of employers.

- Physical Environment, Premises and Equipment
- Management and Organisation
- Health and Safety of Children
- Child Protection
- Food and Drink

Quality Area 3: Care, Learning and Play that includes:

- Care, Learning and Play
- Working in Partnership with Parents
- Behaviour Management
- Equal Opportunities and Children with Special Needs

Each Quality Area is accompanied with Quality Indicators that better guide the service provision to achieve the expected quality standard. Educators are further supported to better address the learning needs of the children by assessing them against five broad learning outcomes of the Early Years Cycle that guide the childcare educators' pedagogy:

Learning Outcome 1: Children who develop a strong sense of identity.

Learning Outcome 2: Children who have a positive self-image.

Learning Outcome 3: Children are socially adept.

Learning Outcome 4: Children who are effective communicators.

Learning Outcome 5: Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners.

3.2 Facilitating accessibility of ECEC facilities

Since April 2014, by means of what is known as The Free Childcare Scheme, ECEC services (0-3 years) are offered for free to parents/guardians who are in employment or are pursuing their education.

The Free Childcare Scheme is catered for through a Public-Private Partnership Agreement between the Government and 117 private childcare centre operators and 14 Government operated childcare centres. Parents/guardians are given the opportunity to choose any childcare centre enlisted as a provider of the Free Childcare Scheme, according to their preferences⁷. Parents must then submit proof of employment or education to the Free Childcare Scheme office, through the childcare centre of their choice. If the scheme's eligibility criteria are met in full, then their application is accepted and the cost for their child to attend childcare will be covered in full directly by the Government by means of a monthly payment to the respective childcare centre.

The main objective of this scheme is to facilitate the retention of mothers in the workforce or encourage them to join the workforce and/or improve their employability through education. This scheme offers flexibility to parents/guardians as to the amount of time they decide to make use of ECEC services in order to help them strike a work-life balance. Children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose parents are not eligible for the Free Childcare Scheme are provided access through childcare centres, administered by the State, through the Foundation for Educational Services. In these state-administered childcare centres, free childcare is available for children coming from families where the household's income is lower than EUR 10 000/year.

⁷ Education.gov.mt. (2014). *Free Childcare Scheme*. [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.mt/en/Pages/Free-Childcare.aspx> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2018].

Due to a greater demand in supporting children with disabilities and children hailing from disadvantaged families, the Maltese Government is committed to creating an inclusive environment in all of its childcare centres. In this regard, Malta is currently endeavouring to implement practical and strategic changes so that barriers to the creation of inclusive environments in its childcare centres are eradicated. Additionally, the 2000 National Legislation Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Chap.413)⁸ will be reflected in the upcoming future National Policy for Early Childhood Education and Care⁹ and the proposed revised National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006)¹⁰ which will both recognise the right of the child to education and should guarantee the right to inclusive education at all levels, regardless of age, without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Moreover, the Maltese Government has taken several measures such as extending the Free Childcare Scheme to parents who are not in employment or education due to severe illnesses and improving the scheme to cater for a child's absence over and above the allotted 25 % absence entitlement due to hospitalisation.

Prior to the introduction of the scheme only *circa* 1 500 children were making use of childcare services across the Maltese Islands. As at end of October 2018, administrative data in Malta indicated that throughout 2018, 6 287 children benefitted from free childcare, 4 000 of which attend on a daily basis. To date, over 15 300 children benefitted from the free childcare scheme at some point since its inception. Furthermore, in the case of parents/guardians who do not qualify for this scheme, tax deductions of up to EUR 2 000 apply for every child attending Childcare.

The number of childcare centres has almost doubled from 69 in April 2014 to 131 in November 2018. To date, the Maltese Government has fully-funded childcare services on behalf of over 20 000 parents with an investment of over EUR 60.5 million.

The overall objective of the Free Childcare Scheme was to increase the opportunity costs of inactivity for mothers. Prior to the introduction of the scheme, on average one (1) childcare hour cost €2.50, compared to a minimum wage of €3.65 (net of taxes) or an average wage of €5.96 (net of taxes). The childcare cost vis a vis the wage income led to a low demand of childcare services, with only *circa* 1,500 children making use of childcare services across the Maltese islands. Since the introduction of the Free Childcare Scheme in April 2014 to October 2018, 15,360 children have made use of free childcare services at one point in time.

The affordability spared by the scheme was one of the contributing factors¹¹ amidst other Active Labour Market policies¹² which led to a significant increase in female participation in the Maltese labour market, increasing from 47.9 % in 2012 to 60.6 % in 2017 (20-64 age cohort). An increase of 12.7 percentage points.¹³

⁸ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disabilities) Act (2000, Chap.413) Malta

⁹ This is still works in progress through a working committee which has just recently been established.

¹⁰ It is currently being proposed that the name "National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities" will be changed to "National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3)". This is currently undergoing a wide consultation process.

¹¹ European Commission (2014), Draft Joint Employment report from the commission and the council accompanying the communication from the Commission on the Annual Growth Survey 2015, COM(2014) 906 final, 28.11.2014.

¹² Education.gov.mt. (2014). The National Employment Policy. [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.mt/employment/Documents/EMPLOYMENT%20POLICY%20DOC%20sml.pdf> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2018]

¹³ National Statistics Office – Malta (2018). [online] Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_C2/Labour_Market_Statistics/Documents/2018/News2018_165.pdf [Accessed 19 Nov. 2018].

Free Kindergarten (4-5 years eventually extended to 3-5 years) has been available since 1975. Nowadays, free access to Kindergarten is available through State and Church schools. Parents opting to send their children to independent Kindergartens receive up to EUR 1 300 in tax deductions for every child.

In State schools, the free breakfast club enables parents to drop their children (3 years and older) to school early on their way to work. Children are provided with a healthy breakfast under the supervision of educators.

Another initiative facilitating access is 'Club 3-16'. Against a small fee (EUR 0,80/hour), supervised activities are organised after school for children (3 years and older). Furthermore, the service is free for those who fall under scheme 9 (which includes those children identified by the head of school/teaching staff as financially deprived).

During the summer holidays, children of three years and older can attend summer schools organised by the Foundation for the Educational Services (FES) for a minimal fee of EUR 25 for the whole season.

In a bid to address and offer a better opportunity to parents whose working hours are not conventional, it is envisaged that the free childcare scheme will be extended to night provision so that the requirements of single parents or parents who both work night shifts are addressed. The revised draft standards for ECEC services cater for this upcoming development. Unlike the Danish system, this service is envisaged to be provided within ECEC centres that are licensed to do so.

3.3 Setting and achieving pedagogical and educational aims

Malta, as Denmark, recognises the importance of solid professionalism of the staff employed in ECEC centres. This requires appropriate training rooted in both theory and practice. Nevertheless, the significant increase in the number of children attending the 131 ECEC (0-3 years) registered service providers is leading to a situation where centres are facing a challenge to find enough appropriately qualified members of staff to respond to the ongoing increase in demand. Educational training institutions that support pedagogical staff to obtain the necessary qualifications are offering options that allow staff who are already employed in ECEC centres (0-3 years) to become qualified through for example work-based learning training programmes.

The developmental approach adopted by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) in the External Reviews of ECEC centres, has led to a marked increase in the participation of ECEC practitioners in continuous professional development sessions, especially those organised on a monthly basis by the Early Childhood Development Association Malta (ECDAM), a non-government, registered, voluntary organisation that aims to strengthen the knowledge, skills and abilities of all those involved in the early childhood education and care, to ensure a high-quality programme for young children.

The Educator's Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment – Using a Learning Outcomes Approach – Toolkit for the Early Years Cycle (0-7 years)¹⁴ (DQSE, 2015) complements the National Curriculum Framework and provides the guidelines for the pedagogical approach and assessment strategies to be implemented in ECEC centres (0-3 years) as well as in schools (3-7 years). Pedagogy with under-three-year olds is more intimate and requires higher levels of emotional nurturing than with older children. Focus on listening and responding to the child as an individual with own needs and interests is essential. In ECEC school settings (3-7 years), high quality child-centred pedagogy requires continuing emphasis on children's interests and choices. Nurturing environments where children can safely test out their developing skills within set

¹⁴ Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (2015) Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment: Using a Learning Outcomes Approach. Toolkit for the Early Years Cycle.

boundaries are necessary. In the Early Years (0-7 years), authentic assessment¹⁵ provides a holistic and genuine picture of the child's learning and enables further development. It is integral to learning and teaching and should include observation of children while they are engaged in spontaneous behaviours. External Reviews in both ECEC centres (0-3 years) and schools (3-7 years) seek to encourage the implementation of this vision by engaging in professional dialogue with leaders who are then expected to take the necessary action.

A number of practice consultants pertaining to the Department for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning and Employability are established but currently they are supporting ECEC settings in schools (3-7 years). Action has been taken to extend this service to ECEC centres (0-3 years).

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

The Danish paper focuses on the importance of:

1. the involvement of a wide range of key professional staff in the day-care field;
2. the content of the curriculum, including the pedagogical learning environment and the six curriculum themes;
3. the EU's quality framework;
4. the policy measures taken aiming to provide families with children increased flexibility and free choice.

Their transferability to the Maltese context will be tackled in the upcoming sections.

4.1 The involvement of a wide range of key professional staff in the day-care field

To an extent, the Nordic ECEC tradition based upon the principle that children must be allowed to be children is also considered important in Malta. The yearly external review visits carried out by the DQSE promote this important principle. National policies, regular training and the Learning Outcomes Framework, are all contributing for this principle to gain further ground. This effort is essential as the cultural mindset of many parents and even some educators, is still grounded in a competitive examination-oriented system. This often leads parents to expect numeracy and literacy "lessons" even in ECEC settings. In the case of school-based ECEC settings, professional learning opportunities are available to help educators perform the needed mindset shift and implement corresponding pedagogies. The concept of continual professional development is being instilled in ECEC centres (0-3 years) and is gaining momentum which needs to be sustained by more opportunities. However, a need is felt to reach more to parents/guardians.

The Danish system builds upon having a solid pedagogical staff as well as sound and clear professional leadership in ECEC centres who together realise the ambitions of the curriculum and a range of initiatives launched to support its implementation. Currently, in Malta, childcare educators employed in ECEC centres (0-3 years) need an MQF Level 4 qualification and leaders require an MQF Level 5 qualification in ECEC. Malta is acknowledging an ambitious aim where all ECEC (0-3 years) educators have a relevant higher qualification. A way forward would be to explore the development of more accredited training that is flexible and revolves around the concept of blended

¹⁵ Assessment is considered authentic when it occurs as part of children's everyday learning experiences within their natural environment where they feel comfortable. This will maintain the children's own participation in the assessment being conducted. Authentic assessment provides a broader, more holistic and genuine picture of the children's learning (DQSE, 2015 p.26).

learning and work-based learning so that the upskilling of the current workforce is implemented gradually and consistently.

The Danish system provides funding for the employment of pedagogical staff to support children in vulnerable positions. In Malta, the National Student Support Services (NSSS) within the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) within the Ministry for Education and Employment, provides free services to vulnerable children from a wide range of key professionals such as psychologists in ECEC school settings (3-7 years). The next step would be to extend these services to ECEC centres (0-3 years).

4.2 The content of the curriculum, including the pedagogical learning environment and the six curriculum themes

Comparing the content of the Maltese Curriculum in Early Childhood Education and Care to the six themes of the Danish pedagogical curriculum, one notes that the second Danish curriculum theme (Nature, outdoor life and science) does not feature among the five Maltese learning outcomes. However, it has to be noted that Nature and outdoor life are central to the cross-curricular theme 'Education for Sustainable Development' which is intended to permeate throughout the different levels of education and across subjects. Furthermore, Science and Technology feature as one of the Learning Areas. Nevertheless, since educators are expected to embed the cross curricular themes, not putting direct emphasis on this particular theme in the Early Years (0-3 years) learning outcomes risks its side-lining.

The EU Quality Framework recognises the importance of self-evaluation in ECEC settings. This is also reflected in the Danish Curriculum. In Malta, schools are expected to carry out self-reflection leading to the elaboration of whole school priorities. The need to extend these practices to ECEC centres (0-3 years) is acknowledged. In fact, the draft National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 years) refer to the need of carrying out an effective internal review that informs improvement in the quality of service being provided. As soon as the National Standards are finalised and launched, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education will embark on a process of strengthening the childcare centre's capacity to perform an effective internal review exercise to inform continuous improvement. The vision is to refer and include the recently proposed Inclusive Early Childhood Education Environment Self-Reflection Tool as indicated by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

4.3 The EU's quality framework

The Danish paper focuses on Standard 5 and 6 of the European Quality Framework. These two standards are at the core of the above-mentioned Malta's Quality Area 3 (Care, Learning and Play) of the newly proposed National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006)¹⁶.

4.4 The policy measures taken aiming to provide families with children increased flexibility and free choice.

In Denmark, parents with unusual working hours can choose a "combined day care", which consists of part-time enrolment in a day-care combined with a grant that can be spent on flexibly hiring a child-carer, for example in the evening or at night. Although Malta's free childcare scheme already addresses flexibility in hours, the Danish measure offers another perspective which could be explored to see whether it would

¹⁶ It is currently being proposed that the name "National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities" will be changed to "National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3)". This is currently undergoing a wide consultation process.

address the local contextual needs. It should also be noted that Malta will be providing night care services.

5 Questions

Malta would like further information/clarification on the aspects listed below:

- What level of education do pedagogical staff and leaders have in Danish ECEC centres?
- How is the new curriculum helping the pedagogical staff express their professionalism?
- How is this new curriculum helping pedagogical staff reflect on their own practices and how are ECEC centres evaluating their practices?
- How are transitions between facilities carried out to create coherence and continuity?
- How are ECEC centres quality assured to ensure high-quality service?
- How are ECEC centres involving the local community in establishing a pedagogical learning environment for children?
- How are ECEC centres implementing the involvement of a wide range of key staff in the day-care field to support vulnerable children?

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- Malta provides a coherent framework for governance through an integrated education system.
- The ECEC curriculum places children at the centre of the learning environment.
- The Maltese Educational System addresses an all-encompassing Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024.
- The Learning Outcomes approach points in possible directions that children can learn and grow and allows for flexibility to better address learners' individual preferences and needs.

Assessment of the policy measure

- For the Ministry for Education and Employment, consultation with all stakeholders is pivotal throughout the change process.
- The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education conducts external reviews in all ECEC centres and schools and it seeks to create a balance between accountability and improvement.
- In Malta, all Childcare Centres are expected to consistently thrive to achieve the established National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities and implement the recently introduced Learning Outcomes Framework.
- Malta offers free ECEC services (0-3 years) through the Free Childcare Scheme.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- In the case of school-based ECEC settings, professional learning opportunities are available to help educators perform the needed mind set shift and implement corresponding pedagogies. A way forward for Malta is to explore further the development of more accredited training that is flexible and revolves around the concept of blended learning and work-based learning so that the upskilling of the current workforce is implemented gradually and consistently.
- The extension of National School Support Services (free services to vulnerable children from a wide range of key professionals) to ECEC centres (0-3 years) is foreseen.
- The need to extend self-evaluation practices to ECEC centres (0-3 years) is acknowledged.
- Following the upcoming implementation of Night Care services, an evaluation exercise would be in place so as to establish whether this service is appropriately catering for the needs of families with unusual working hours.

Questions

- How is this new curriculum helping pedagogical staff reflect on their own practices and how are ECEC centres evaluating their practices?

- How are transitions between facilities carried out to create coherence and continuity?
- How are ECEC centres quality assured to ensure high-quality service?
- How are ECEC centres involving the local community in establishing a pedagogical learning environment for children?
- How are ECEC centres implementing the involvement of a wide range of key staff in the day-care field to support vulnerable children?

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	External Review
Year of implementation:	2016 – ongoing (in ECEC settings 0-7 years)
Coordinating authority:	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
Objectives:	Conducting a developmental rather than punitive approach as it seeks to create a balance between accountability and improvement.
Main activities:	Conducting yearly external reviews in all ECEC settings (0-7 years), issuing a written report highlighting areas of strengths and areas for development, developing a post-review action plan owned by all the teaching staff and conducting a follow-up visit.
Results so far:	External reviews are leading to a marked improvement in all the established quality standards for the benefit of the overall well-being of the children.

Name of the practice:	The Free Childcare Scheme
Year of implementation:	2014- ongoing
Coordinating authority:	Jobs+ within The Ministry for Education and Employment
Objectives:	To facilitate the retention of mothers in the workforce or encourage them to join the workforce and/or improve their employability through education. The scheme offers flexibility to parents/guardians as to the amount of time they decide to make use of ECEC services in order to help them strike a work-life balance that best suits their situation.
Main activities:	The Free Childcare Scheme.
Results so far:	The scheme led to a significant increase in female participation in the Maltese labour market, increasing from 47.9% in 2012 to 60.6 % in 2017 (20-64 age cohort). Increase in children (0-3) participation moving rapidly towards achieving the Barcelona target.

Name of the practice:	An integrated, comprehensive curricular approach throughout compulsory schooling (from 0 – 16 years)
Year of implementation:	2018 - onwards
Coordinating authority:	The Ministry for Education and Employment - Department for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning & Employability
Objectives:	A curriculum built around children's interests with an integrated approach to teaching and learning which scaffolds children into higher levels of competence.
Main activities:	A pedagogy of care where the educator approaches the child from a stance of the one caring, open to the child's needs, and willing to respond to them without trying to make the child fit a particular mould. A learning environment rich in resources that offer opportunities for exploration; regular self-review practices; and assessment practices that notice, recognise and respond to children's learning, thus identifying possible next steps in learning within identified priorities.
Results so far:	This has just started to be implemented in October 2018 and therefore one cannot state the results so far.

