



# Good Quality In Early Childcare - Ideas, Goals And Strategies In Europe

European Expert Meeting of the AGF,  
Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Familienorganisationen (AGF) e.V.  
25 June 2015, Berlin



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## Background

At the moment about 2,6 million children under the age of six are looked after in kindergartens or day-care in Germany. Especially the number of children in care between the first and third year has clearly risen during the last years. About every third one-year-old child attends a kindergarten or children's day-care. Among the children under three years, more than half of them spend 35 hours per week or more in early childcare facilities.<sup>1</sup> These developments have further intensified since each child has been entitled to a day-care place from its first year onwards on August 1st in 2013.

Political reactions to the growing demand are focused on considerable efforts to further expand the number of children's day-care places. However, the quantitative expansion was not followed by an advancement of the quality of care. Research such as the NUBBEK-study heavily criticise the quality of German childcare: The pedagogic work only reaches medium level. There are only few care facilities that provide good or very good work; many more achieve only insufficient quality. In Germany, up to now there is neither a systematic record of the quality of education and care services nor a standardized method for quality control.

Together with experts from different European countries, the AGF discussed what good quality in early childcare means and how to achieve it.

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1) See Federal Statistical Office: Kindertagesbetreuung regional 2013, Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder.





*„High quality early childhood education and care provides a wide range of short- and long-term benefits for both individuals and society at large. (...) By helping to close the achievement gap and supporting cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development, it can help to break the cycle of disadvantage and disengagement that often lead to early school leaving and to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next.“*

Council Conclusions on early childhood education and care, 15 June 2011

Childcare and its quality have been discussed also on a European level, even though the political and legal responsibility always remains with the member states. The European Commission started with the Network on Childcare, which was also responsible for other measures to reconcile family and work and concluded its work in 1996. After that, the expansion of care facilities for very young children became the main focus of the EU. Therefore, at the Council Meeting in Barcelona in 2002 it was decided, in reference to the European economic growth, to raise the care rates to at least 90 percent for those from three up to school age and 33 percent for the under three-year-olds, respectively. Most recently, in 2012, the EU Commission appointed the Working Group “Early Childhood Education and Care” in order to develop guidelines for a quality framework on early childhood education and care, promote peer-learning between the states and to offer policy guidance.

Taking these developments into account the AGF invited experts from different fields of politics, organizations and European countries to discuss about what is needed to achieve good quality in childcare. Keynote speeches provided insights into current situations of childcare in Finland, Scotland and Germany. Practical examples highlighting single aspects of quality added to these perspectives and revealed further country specific insights. Also the systematic monitoring of childcare on European and international levels and its possible effects on quality development were discussed. During two panel discussions, the participants reviewed their experiences and findings so far, the transferability of measures and methods between countries as well as the definition of quality standards. The focus of the professional exchange was on two questions: what does good quality in childcare mean and how can it be achieved and assured in the long term.

## Main Conclusions Of The Expert Meeting



Specific Features of Germany	Childcare in Germany is very heterogeneous because of German federalism and the different handling of childcare in East and West Germany. The massive expansion of childcare constitutes a radical change.
Current Discussions in the Countries Represented	Education and care in early childhood are seen mostly as important tasks in the considered countries. The examples Finland and Scotland show, however, that good quality is mainly the result of a discussion of pedagogic processes and their content and structure, and is not alone due to an introduction of certain measures, rights and controls. Despite being a good example there are discussions in Finland, too, that hardly differ from the situation in other countries. This most of all concerns the workload of the staff, the female dominance in the profession, the professional-child-ratio and the qualification of the staff.
Definition of Goals	It is absolutely necessary to define clear targets for the quality of care. It remained open whether the similarity of the educational programmes of the German Federal States already suggests that there is a consensus on goals here or whether there has to be a further process of negotiations.
Guidelines and Standards	Finland, Scotland and the Netherlands already have national guidelines for childcare. However, the majority of countries report difficulties with their implementation into practice. In the Czech Republic there are only few standards for childcare, while many professionals wish they had a quality guideline for their work as an orientation.
Overregulation	Too closely-knit definitions and continuous quality control can turn out to be counterproductive as experiences from Scotland have shown.
Quality Assurance in Daily Care	Good childcare requires quality assurance on a daily basis. Special attention needs to be directed towards the qualification of professionals but also towards further education and accompaniment during daily work and evaluations.
Measuring Good Quality	Systematic monitoring and evaluation are preconditions to guarantee and develop quality. It remained open whether good quality can be measured mainly based on structures and processes or whether rather the effects on the child have to be checked (or whether they can be checked on the child at all).
Support From Politics and Society	Sustainable efforts in quality assurance require a broad consensus on the importance of early childhood education and care and their appropriate financing.

## Good Quality For Children And Families



„Parents want to know that their children are well and that they get the best possible care and support.“

Christel Riemann-Hanewinkel, Chairwoman of the AGF (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Familienorganisationen e.V.)

In her introduction Christel Riemann-Hanewinkel underlined the great importance the topic of childcare has for families and hence also for family organisations. The availability of childcare services influences a number of fundamental areas of daily family life: the reconciliation of family and work, the economic stability of families, the shared time and of course the growing-up and well-being of the children. Therefore, it is all the more important that there are not only enough care services on offer but, also that the quality of childcare is adequate. Parents need to be sure that their children are well and that they get the best care and support possible. Everybody agrees that high quality services not only include care but also education. But what exactly does that mean?

At the moment, there is a rather passionate debate about the quality of pre-school childcare in Germany. The former private matter of early childcare has turned into a public task with the effect that childcare facilities have been massively expanded over the last few years. It cannot be clarified without doubt which developments caused this social change. But it is likely that both an increased desire for reconciliation of family life and work as well as the shortage of professionals becoming gradually noticeable played a significant role in this. However, despite the political expansion programme there are still not enough places for all, so further efforts are necessary.

However, while this quantitative development is moving forward, developing the quality must not be forgotten. With the ongoing expansion of childcare services their quality gets questioned more than before. Additionally in Germany, since 1st August 2013, each child is entitled to a place in early child care facilities from the age of one, which makes the question of quality even more urgent. However, current studies clearly criticise the quality of German childcare and evaluate the pedagogic performance as mostly mediocre. In addition to that there is no systematic recording and development of quality. Still, there are no answers to important questions about good quality such as: What is 'good childcare'? What are important characteristics of high quality? And an important question especially in Germany: Should there be uniform quality criteria – or does every federal state or every facility get to decide upon those themselves?

The expert meeting can show which paths other states take in assuring good quality childcare and it can clarify whether – or how – binding standards help to establish high quality. At best this will lead to finding answers to the open questions in childcare quality for Germany, too.



# Focus On Quality?

## A Summary Of The Current Situation In Europe

The presentation of Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kalicki focused on the work done by the EU Commission with the European Working Group on quality of early childhood education and care as well as on the international monitoring of quality. It shows that not only in Europe but also beyond very similar debates are taking place when it comes to child-care and about children's needs and how to deliver.

### International Monitoring

An assurance of quality and a corresponding monitoring of quality necessarily require the systematic observation of quality in order to allow comparisons and improvements of early childhood education and care. The international comparison is useful to identify common tendencies and differences between countries, to be better able to evaluate and locate one's own path and to help recognizing achievable goals through indicators and benchmarking. In regards to contents, the monitoring addresses very diverse aspects of childcare. This for example includes the question, which children participate in care. In Germany there is a legal entitlement for all children which is a strong instrument and yet selective access or hidden obstacles could still contradict the law. Structural quality is subject to monitoring, too, and includes aspects such as group size, professional-child-ratio, the important topic of qualification of professionals and their working conditions or educational programmes and their underlying ideas of good education and care. In doing so, not only defined standards get recorded but also their implementation within the observed pedagogic practice. Subject is also the aspect of child development and ability and therefore, the question whether goals like the wellbeing of the child or the pleasure and motivation for learning are actually achieved.

So for example the qualification of the professionals in the field of early childhood education and care shows that there are great differences in Europe, ranging from a bachelor's degree to secondary school level. In fact, at the moment the question asked in many countries is: What is the right place for educating and what are the important requirements for pedagogically qualified staff and how can the necessary competences be successfully gained? However, in regards to the expenditures in the sector of early childhood education the monitoring has led to the known international benchmarks for the recommended amount of education expenditures<sup>2</sup>. As an example for concrete results of country comparisons regarding early childhood education and care, the publications of the OECD „Education at a Glance“ or the publications of the „Starting Strong“ programme can be recommended.

Examples for good practice can be gained from the systematic monitoring, which then can be used to learned from. It has also become clear that as many actors as possible should be included, not only children and parents but also the professionals and those responsible such as providers, politicians specialized in the area,

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2) The OECD recommends expenditures of at least one percent of GDP.



"We have to define goals for the quality of childcare as well as for its systematic observation."

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kalicki,  
International Center Early  
Childhood Education and  
Care (ICEC)

municipalities and the administration. Additionally, the monitoring helps to clarify even more the responsibilities in the area of early education and care. However it is important to start by defining goals for the necessary quality of childcare as well as for monitoring it. According to these preconditions the aim must be to develop an "implemented monitoring system", which assists the assurance and development of quality.

## European Framework For Quality

On the European level the EU Commission has recently developed a framework for quality. It is based on conclusions of the Council on early childhood development titled "The best possible Start for all our Children into Tomorrow's World". The Commission's Working Group "Early Childhood Education and Care" has completed its work after the two-year mandate ended in spring 2014.

With this process the Commission aims at supporting the national efforts for quality through exchange among political experts, peer learning between states and the identification of good practice. The developed framework has become a broad framework but it goes beyond a mere collection of ideas and also builds on scientific knowledge. The framework tries to take into account various cultures of childcare and children's education in the EU, however in doing so it is based on commonly shared, fundamental orientations and values. For example in France's école maternelle a model of early education prevails that is very close to school and focuses on cognitive-linguistic development, whereas, in Germany, where the 175th anniversary of the founding of the kindergarten is coming up in a few days, there is a rather socio-educational orientation in childcare. Hence the care systems in the EU states differ according to traditions and political as well as economic framework conditions. The goal of the framework is to find a common understanding of quality and to support national reflection and debate. Hence it is an instrument for an open process, not binding but rather offering orientation.

Judged by its contents the framework stands for a child-oriented view. Yet all relevant actors, such as parents, professionals, the management, informal networks and local actors, are also included and the procedural dimension of quality is underlined as well by a demand for more attention to relationships, interaction and attitudes. The European framework precisely contains statements about a universal approach to childcare, qualifying the professionals, educational programmes, financing and management, an integral curriculum and a transparent and relevant quality check through evaluation and monitoring.<sup>3</sup>

At the moment the framework adopted by the Commission's Working Group comes as a recommendation to the EU states and is therefore, for now, not binding. Unfortunately its further application has not been decided yet.

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3) The European Framework for Quality in early education and care is available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

# Quality Standards and Current Policy Developments – Insights Into EU-Member States



## Finland

Providing an insight into childcare in Finland Päivi Kupila made clear that a political consensus on high-quality education and care in early childhood is a prerequisite for good quality. Finland already has far-reaching legal regulations in regards to structural framework conditions and curriculum guidelines for childcare. Yet in the light of current political and social developments this Scandinavian country too, is facing new challenges.

### Benchmarks of Childcare in Finland

The Ministry of Education and Culture carries the responsibility for childcare but responsible for the actual childcare services on-site are the Finnish municipalities. About ninety percent of all childcare services are publicly organized but at the moment the amount of private childcare services is growing significantly. Eighty percent of the costs for childcare are paid by the state, five percent by the municipalities and fifteen percent are provided by the families themselves, depending on income and family size.

Currently about every third child at the age of one year is looked after in day-care services. With increasing age the care ratio grows to about eighty percent among the five-year-olds and to almost a hundred percent among children of the age of six years. After that the Finnish preschool offer in the last year before entering school takes effect, which is for free and takes place mostly in childcare services, or alternatively in primary schools.

### Framework Conditions and Legal Standards

In Finland a lot of childcare framework conditions are regulated centrally and fixed by law, such as group size, adult-child-ratio, professionals' qualification and also a maximum care time of ten hours per day. There are national curriculum guidelines for the early childhood education. The guidelines in the national curriculum have to be transferred into own curricula by the municipalities, which then have to be implemented into own practice guidelines by the services up to an individual educational plan for every child. This actually does not always work out though. The individual adjustment to each care level demands an in-depth engagement with the contents of the national curriculum, so that it sometimes is just transferred unmodified into the curriculum of the municipality or the facility. The curriculum itself is not designed as a demand for preschool education but it aims at the personal development of the child and the acquisition of basic skills.



„Good quality childcare needs political support as well as the support of the whole society.“

Päivi Kupila PhD, University of Tampere

Qualifying employees to become pedagogic personnel (teachers) takes place as a three-year university programme, ending in a bachelor degree, or as equivalent polytechnic degree. Educators (care staff) have to have at least two years of professional training ending in a degree within the field of social work and health. A five-year course with a master's degree was to be introduced as norm for leadership roles, but it did not prevail. Therefore, the same requirements for teachers also apply to leadership roles. In total, more than ninety percent of personnel in childcare are women.

The adult-child-ratio is regulated, and depends on the age of the children. For children under three years the calculation key is 1:3 (one professional for three children), for the three- to six-year-olds it is 1:7 (one professional for seven children). The quota for children in their preschool age is just being debated at the moment and probable changes are being prepared. The plans of the government, which has newly formed after parliamentary elections in April 2015, are to increase the adult-child-ratio from the current 1:7 up to 1:8. This would then also entail a change in the maximum group size of this age group, which would then become 24 kids instead of 21 kids now. The policy also questions whether a university degree is further necessary for pedagogic personnel or whether their qualification should be lowered. These government plans are highly controversial.

At the moment in every ECE-center in Finland at least one third of the staff have to have a university degree. In practice this means that at least one specialist per group has to have a bachelor or master's degree. Usually two other educators support him or her, so that three practitioners and professionals regularly work together in one group. In the event of illness an equally qualified substitute employee has to be able to step in.

A lot of research has been done for the development of a qualitative evaluation model that can ensure quality by recording the processes and effects of pedagogic work in minute detail. Examined factors are, apart from the functionality of the rooms and the overall wellbeing of the child, for instance the interaction among the children themselves as well as between children and specialists, but also the development of the single child, his or her positive experiences or the contentment of the parents. Such a detailed evaluation very clearly shows where exactly further action and development is needed.

## Where Action Right Now Is Needed In Finland

Despite the good conditions and a fundamentally high quality of Early Childhood centers in Finland Päivi Kupila considered further measurements as necessary. For instance an explicit definition of quality, which does not yet exist, is needed. The various curricula define the requirements for good childcare only indirectly. Especially in light of the current political debates about the probable lowering of existing standards the question for Finland appears to be whether the old political consensus over high-quality education and first-class social services from early childhood on actually still exists. This shows how much childcare depends on general developments in society.



## Scotland

Marion MacLeod's input on the quality of childcare in Scotland focussed on inclusion and equality of opportunity. In the light of an enormously high rate of childhood poverty of around 25 percent policies in Scotland aim at improving children's living conditions and future chances. Scottish Government policies are intended to provide early support and to prevent problems through a mix of universal offers and additional, targeted support. Yet the outcomes often do not live up to expectations, especially for disadvantaged families.



### Benchmarks of childcare in Scotland

Based on the "Children and Young People Act" from 2014, a comprehensive law to improve services and outcomes in education, care, health and general wellbeing for children, there is a universal entitlement to 600 hours of free pre-school education per year<sup>4</sup>. Children are entitled from their third birthday onwards. According to the law the offer can be utilized on whatever days and in whatever hours needed, to reflect parental employment patterns. In practice this flexibility has been very difficult to deliver particularly within the public sector. This kind of pre-school education has historically taken place mostly within nursery classes attached to schools in classroom type settings, led by elementary school teachers, and operating only during school hours and terms. This means that in reality flexible use of childcare, which matches actual working hours, is almost impossible. Few local authorities have been able to deliver, in practice, the theoretical entitlement to early and flexible support. For example, very few are offering any provision during school holidays. The entitlement of 600 hours also applies to two-year-olds if they come from families at risk or if their family already receives public support for instance in case of unemployment. In the light of the poor economic situation of many Scottish families which more often arises from very low paid jobs and not only from unemployment this arrangement has to be viewed critically. Private sector childcare providers are generally able to provide services that correspond better with working hours, but the cost to parents is very high.

„Good quality has to aim at creating equal opportunities for all children. Against this outcome childcare needs to be measured.“

Marion MacLeod, Children in Scotland

### Early Support Does Not Reach Disadvantaged Children And Families

The Scottish measures for an early support of children's development are often insufficient and many hardly reach especially families at risk and families with low income. Many universally available services and benefits, such as community based parent and child groups and family learning activities in public libraries are used mostly by middle-class families and not by families with a special need for support. Often very long waiting times occur for specialised education, care and health services, which makes on time support and adequate aid especially for very young children even more difficult. The same is true when it comes to the introduction of an individual contact

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4) Note: this corresponds to a duration of care of about 16 hours / week, not counting times of school holidays.



person for every child until they are eighteen years old. The contact person, most of the time an educational or health service specialist who knows the families, is meant to be a point of contact for the child or the family in case of difficulties or when help is needed. But for some parents it feels as if they are being watched and scrutinised by the state. Another problem is the funding of the support costs. The part of the funding given by the state gets paid out through the tax system, which means a considerable amount of bureaucracy for families to deal with. This is especially complicated for families that do not have a predictable, regular family income.

## Quality Framework Conditions in Scotland

To achieve good quality - apart from other important aspects – secure knowledge is needed about what supports children in their development. Yet the question remains whether the answer to that is the same in different European countries. But good quality can be measured most of all by how successfully and on a high level it creates equal opportunities among children.

Childcare in Scotland is highly regulated by laws and political guidelines. For instance there is a reference framework for education, there are plans for further training personnel, rules for the approval of care facilities, comprehensive reports with regular publication of results and the attempt to define the goals of early education and care. The Scottish government determines all these standards while the municipalities and local authorities are responsible for their concrete implementation on site. All in all, the Scottish system of childcare experiences extensive monitoring by official bodies and comprehensive national definitions of quality.

## Where Action Right Now Is Needed In Scotland

Nevertheless Marion MacLeod advised not to replicate in entirety the Scottish model. While it is of course important that basic safeguards are in place, tight monitoring and strong regulation of childcare by public authorities cost a lot and, importantly, bear little relation to the achieved results. A Scottish longitudinal child cohort study involving 14,000 children study has shown that the quality of childcare as evaluated by the regulatory bodies bears little relation to the impact on the wellbeing of children in Scotland. Making the overall environment for learning and living attractive is clearly more important for their development than going to a day nursery whose main focus is to allow parents to work. But that is why it all depends on the quality of the services: it is not only the promised amount of hours alone but the quality of the pedagogic work and its framework conditions that make the difference, not some training of the personnel but their right, adequate qualification is necessary. Despite the good intentions of government policies the Scottish quality measures are not achieving the most effective outcomes for children.



## Germany

Germany is in a very special situation when it comes to early childhood education and care, Prof. Dr. Susanne Viernickel underlined in her presentation. The recent political paradigm shift towards the expansion of care services for children under three meant a radical change and in addition to that there are sometimes significant differences within Germany due to the federal responsibility in childcare and its very diverse developments in the former GDR and FRG, which, until today have led to great differences in the structure and usage of childcare.



### Benchmarks of Childcare in Germany

Childcare in Germany is provided either as children's day-care or in kindergartens, parents prefer the latter. Kindergartens are funded either by municipalities, non-profit or private/commercial organisations. Private services only have a small share; almost two thirds of all facilities are funded independently, about one third is publicly owned. However there are considerable differences between the Federal States. This division of tasks complies with the principle of subsidiarity which demands that care should be offered by independent providers and that a variety of providers as diverse as possible should be guaranteed.

Almost all children from the age of three up to school entry visit a kindergarten (94 percent); they are still considerably less among the children under three years old. However, their share is continuously rising, most of all in the west of Germany. There the care rate lay between 24 and 43 percent in 2015; in the east of Germany it lay close to 50 up to 58 percent.

Yet still up to now early childhood education and care are underfinanced in Germany. Despite risen expenditures the invested sum lies below the OECD target figure of 1,0 percent of GDP. In Germany the financial and content-related responsibility for childcare lies with the Federal States and the municipalities. This raises considerable problems for the finance structure because the municipalities carry the highest share of the cost for childcare but they only have low tax revenues at their disposal. The majority of these go to the Federal Government that solely contributes to the costs through a special asset, which has been especially created for the expansion of facilities.

### Main Points of the Current Debate on Quality

For the last few years there has been a consensus that next to a care mandate childcare also has a clear educational mandate. However in Germany it is still under discussion in which direction such education should point – either towards an elementary didactic or rather to a school-like didactic – and which level of professionalization of the personnel this requires. The main question is: is the current qualification still an adequate preparation for the much higher requirements in education and care, espe-

„Good quality can be defined as getting good results: a kindergarten is good if the development and the educational results of the child are good. However, one also has to look at the factors that increase the chances of such good results.“

Prof. Dr. Susanne Viernickel,  
Alice Salomon Hochschule  
Berlin



cially with regards to scientific insights, reflection capability and “basic researching approach”. The quantitative expansion of childcare was seen as an important tool for the participation in education, which offers good chances for an early support. There is a far-reaching consensus that early childcare significantly contributes to create fairness in education and to even prepare those children well for school, who do not experience appropriate support in their families. However, to achieve this, visiting a facility alone is not enough. Scientific research, organisations and practical experience have all pointed out early that most of all the quality of services must be right. Their calls for quality improvement aimed at the framework conditions as well as the pedagogic processes in childcare.

## Recommendations for Quality Assurance in Germany

A first nationwide initiative to ensure quality in childcare began in 1999 with the National Quality Initiative. Started by the Ministry of Family Affairs a research alliance was founded that aimed at naming quality criteria and developing tools for quality assessment, for example by a mixture of internal and external evaluations. It is a legal requirement to develop and implement “appropriate tools for evaluation” but what these tools look like lies solely in the responsibility of the providers and the facilities. Up to now there is no systematic survey of quality and the combination of internal and external evaluation is currently only being used in Berlin.

At the moment quality assurance through the application of binding standards in the form of a Federal Quality Law is discussed. A passage for the introduction was deleted at short notice from the last coalition agreement; however the Ministry of Family Affairs has commissioned scientific expertise on framework conditions, such as group sizes, staffing ratio or time contingents for leadership roles, which have been published recently in the book “Quality For All”<sup>5</sup>. Proponents see the law as an opportunity to reliably align quality at a level of scientific standards, opponents most of all fear the establishment of a minimum consensus and constitutional hurdles.

## Current Need for Action in Germany

Fundamentally childcare quality is measured by the inputs as well as by the outputs or outcomes. A kindergarten can be called good if the children feel good, if they make progress in their development and learning and if the parents are happy. To achieve such results it is important to look at the relevant factors in greater detail. Therefore, an adequate quality model has to include framework conditions such as professional-

child-ratio, qualification of personnel and group size as well as the guiding ideas and values of the facilities and the ways the professionals implement their educational and care mandate.

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5) Viernickel et.al., 2015



So far there are too many differences in the quality and the results of childcare in Germany. Therefore, a Federal Quality Law is absolutely necessary. What is also needed is a consensus on minimum pedagogic standards, which should also be applied generally and checked externally. However, external evaluations are not enough to develop quality further. The assurance and development of professional acting is needed too. Therefore, the qualification and further training of professionals must be of high quality. There are already good approaches in methods and materials in Germany, not only within the already mentioned National Quality Initiative.

## Questions And Debates:

In the following discussion interested inquiries were made most of all concerning quality related aspects of childcare in Finland and Scotland. Päivi Kupila added that Finland is experiencing a shortage of professionals and that to some extent the personnel in childcare facilities suffers from difficult working conditions. The salary of professionals is rather low. Many feel often left alone with the challenging task of education and care. Therefore it is necessary to accompany professionals better especially in the beginning of their career. Those in leadership roles, too, see themselves exposed to bigger challenges. Often they are responsible for more than one facility simultaneously, which means considerable efforts not only in regards to personnel management. Therefore, leaders hardly get in touch with the daily practice in facilities. Still their salary is similar to that of other staff. Additionally, the quality of childcare has to remain the task of public authorities and research, politics and practice have to work even closer together. The question is how to achieve this. In general, so Päivi Kupila, appreciation for the work in early childcare in Finland is declining at the moment.

In Scotland, Marion MacLeod explained, most childcare staff have the lowest qualification inside the EU with only the equivalent of upper secondary level qualification. This is usually gained by attending a two-year vocational college course after leaving school aged sixteen. Those in leadership roles may have a university degree though many are in business related rather than child focused disciplines. The low qualification status and the low pay mean that childcare staff professionals are often among the lowest income quintile themselves. They frequently do not have the knowledge base that would enable them to intercept the lower start-off chances of disadvantaged children so that they have not already fallen back further within the first years up to primary school. Yet quality not only means the qualification of the personnel or other framework conditions but also what actually happens inside the facilities. In order to achieve better results in early education and care the children have to be reached usually before they are three years old and problems of the children and families have to be responded too much more strongly. This needs adequate funding and at least in Scotland a different approach to taxation. Without sufficient basic funding similar results as those in the good example Nordic countries are not achievable. When it comes to the question of quality in Scotland then it is not the insights of theory and



practice that are missing but rather what is lacking is most of all the actual implementation of those known results.

Cultural diversity as an aspect of childcare or probable cultural differences in its utilisation is hardly a topic in Finland because Finnish society is very homogenous and few families with migration background live there. In Scotland and in the whole of Great Britain respectively there is a problematic situation mostly for illegal refugees and their children. Their family status often remains unclear as well as whether they are using services like childcare at all. They are also very difficult to reach. In general the transfer of the legal right to social services for refugees exceeding childcare is challenging. For Germany Prof. Dr. Kalicki saw barriers in regards to childcare resulting mostly from the socio-economic status of families and less per se in a migration background.

The dominance of women in early childcare was confirmed to exist in all countries. For Germany, Prof. Dr. Kalicki reported that no significant increase in male professionals can be registered despite some special support programmes. This is probably caused by the men's demands to their employment model. Up to now no research results exist on the effects of female dominance on developmental possibilities for children. Singular results tend to show that the interaction processes of men and women hardly differ.

# Practical Examples – Aspects Of Quality In Everyday Life

## Quality And Cultural Diversity

Ana del Barrio Saiz works as a trainer and advisor in the Netherlands in day-care centres to improve quality. Her focus lies on respect for diversity, professional team development and the daily implementation of a practice based on democratic values and social inclusion in childcare settings. In her practical example she showed that social engagement and a clear vision on what it means to work on diversity (with children, families and professionals) is absolutely necessary in order to achieve high quality. In this regard cultural or ethnic diversity is only one of the many different aspects in which people differ and in how they give form to their lives.

In the Netherlands, every ECEC centre decides itself if and how it engages with diversity in childcare settings.<sup>6</sup> To deal with increasing contexts of diversity childcare centres have to develop as meeting places for democratic practice. And professionals need to explore new forms of cooperation and be supported to put in practice equal opportunities and participation of children and families. This includes promoting open communication and dialogue as well as critical team reflection and self-reflection of one's own perspective and experiences. Yet these necessary competences are not just the result of training. They develop rather through interactions in daily praxis. To support this process, Del Barrio Saiz uses the model 'Permanent learning in teams'.<sup>7</sup> One important tool of this model are critical questions regarding the everyday work of ECEC professionals, like: Are we alert to the needs and wishes of all parents? Do we only cooperate with parents or colleagues who share our ideas – or do we cooperate with all the families? What do we know about the parents/children/colleagues in our setting? Which are their strengths? The aim of these critical questions and of other tools of the model is to create space for dialogue and reflection, to learn to appreciate the value of diversity and to actively work on social inclusion. By using this model professionals are often more committed in daily praxis, the cooperation in teams improves, the critical reflexion on own role and practice increases and the existing diversity in the centre is more appreciated.

Diversity of children, families and professionals is a core characteristic of all childcare settings. Therefore, to improve quality in these settings it is necessary to develop a vision and a practice on respect for diversity and social inclusion. In this regard Del Barrio Saiz mentions two important challenges that need to be addressed: The implementation of structural conditions, for example time for observation, reflection, documentation, coaching and monitoring, and the recognition of respect for diversity as a right, included in article 2, UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, instead of seeing diversity as "a problem in need of treatment". The belief of a unique and superior perspective harms all children'.

6) Example of pedagogical frameworks on Diversity in ECEC: 'Together different' (Van Keulen, A. & Singer, E., 2012). And the brochure 'Exploring competences for professional practice in Early Childhood Education and Care' (2011) from DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training) and ISSA (International Step by Step Association)

7) 'Permanent learning. From self reflection to team reflection' (Van Keulen, A. & Del Barrio Saiz, A.; SWP, 2010, Amsterdam)



„Actively working on Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion is a crucial approach for assuring quality in early childhood centres“

Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting, Voorschoten



## Assuring Quality „Bottom-up“

The sociologist Hana Hašková reported on an initiative by pedagogic and care specialists in the Czech Republic, who developed their own childcare catalogue of quality in response to current political decisions. This citizens' initiative tries to formulate the necessary framework conditions for good childcare in order to improve the quality of facilities.

In the Czech Republic after the collapse of the socialist regime there was also a collapse of the old care system, which was divided into two parts according to age groups. The day nurseries for the under three-year-olds, which were the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, disappeared. Therefore, with only about four percent very few children under the age of three years visit care facilities now. On the other hand more than three quarters of preschool children from three years on go to kindergartens. This type of care is covered by a White Paper that the Czech government published in 2001, which sets goals for the whole system of education in the country, from kindergartens to education in adulthood. It underlines the aspect of preschool education in early childcare and the need to follow a Framework Educational Program for Preschool Education, which formulates goals for skills that need to be developed. However, with up to 28 children the group size in kindergartens is predominantly very big. Additionally, there are usually only two educators who work in only partly overlapping shifts in one group, so that an attention to children's individual needs is hardly possible. As a reaction to the lack of available kindergarten places and disappearance of nurseries, various for-profit and non-profit subjects also started to provide childcare in the country operating out of any transparent system, which would control childcare quality.

Not only in order to support employment of mothers in 2014 the Czech government introduced a new model of care: the mixed age children's groups for preschool children from one year on. In contrast to the existing kindergartens for the mixed age groups, no pedagogue-led pre-school education is required nor any control of the achieved educational and care work is provided. For these children's groups also the space requirements were loosened compared to the valid regulations for kindergartens. The government wanted to react quickly to the demand for care and to support the employment of mothers which is why low standards were set. The low requirements did indeed provoke criticism. Some argued that the children who visit children's groups and not a kindergarten will be disadvantaged due to lack of pedagogue-led preschool education. Others saw even these lowered standards as difficult to fulfil. The legislative proposal had a chance to introduce minimum standards for all providers of regular daily care of preschool children from one year on. After long political negotiations, the Act entered into force in 2014 and then was amended in 2015, resulting in introducing the mixed age children's groups as a type of regulated childcare but not setting minimum standards for all childcare providers.



Mostly childcare specialists founded a sort of citizens' initiative because of the insufficient quality development in Czech care facilities. One of its aims is to formulate standards for the operation of a facility, for the personnel and for their work. In the resulting document, trainings and supervision for the employees as well as regular evaluation and quality audits of facilities play an important role. Central for children's training are the demands for an official programme of training and care and its individualisation for every child. As well as that there is another condition, which is that enough freedom remains for an individual support of children.

To sum up, there are currently rather contradictory developments in the Czech Republic: the measures of the government emphasize the aspect of preschool education for children from three years on in kindergartens, care for toddlers on the other hand is being expanded mostly quantitatively. Therefore, the specialists' initiative tries to raise awareness for the necessary quality of care and to enforce improvements in daily care for all children.

## Coaching As Strategy To Solve Quality Problems

Until his retirement Prof. Dr. Tassilo Knauf<sup>8</sup> has lectured elementary education and primary level pedagogy at the University of Duisburg-Essen. In various practice-based projects he carried out concept and quality development in day-care facilities for children on the basis of coaching.

Kindergarten coaching has become a lot more important over the last couple of years as is evident from the variety of commercial services available. These services cover different sections of the whole area of professional work in a kindergarten. They are especially aimed at leadership and management competences of kindergarten management, team building and the culture of interaction in regards to the educational partnership with parents.

His own coaching practice grew, according to Knauf, during the mid-nineties, in times of an increasing demand for consulting services addressing early childhood pedagogic work, which could link theory and practice. Since 2001 a quality management (QM) based on coaching was tested with smaller and mid-sized financing organisations in about 45 facilities of various financing organisations in the North of Lower Saxony, in Lower Bavaria as well as in the Western Ruhr Area. Implementation followed the concept of organizational development. Based on a situation analysis time limited rounds of discussions took place in the team to identify objectives and to plan their achievement, then several months of implementing prioritized goals in daily kindergarten life followed and finally there was another situation analysis to evaluate the process. In practice the whole process of quality management continued over approximately one and a half years.



"Many employees would like standards and guidance in their work."

Hana Hašková, Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology, Prague

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8) Prof. Dr. Tassilo Knauf had to cancel his participation in the expert meeting at short notice. This summary was authored on the basis of his prepared script.



“The quality of coaching a kindergarten highly depends on the competence of the coach.”

Prof. Dr. Tassilo Knauf, University Duisburg-Essen

The process included observing and questioning the professional work of the team in form of:

- Patterns of interaction between persons present in the kindergarten (adults as well as children)
- The organization of temporal and spatial structures
- The selection and presentations of materials
- The forms of documenting education.

The process ended each time with a Quality Day to summarize the process of quality development and to make it public as well as to develop perspectives for a continuing quality assurance.

An evaluation of the experiences made between 2001 and 2007 led to a reorientation of the QM method with the following shifts in emphasis:

- A clearer reference to the specific educational programmes of the Länder (German federal states) which have emerged since 2003
- A stronger consideration of the expectations of the financing organisation
- An orientation on the pedagogic profiles of the facilities involved
- Work on the pedagogic core processes of education and learning, wellbeing and security, intersections and networks, quality development and qualification in the team

A discussion of these four points is always the basis for the Quality Manual, which relates to the financing organisation as well as to the facility and which is created through dialogue between the teams involved in a process that lasts at least one year.

This re-profiled QM concept has been used since the second half of 2008 under the name of “Children’s Education” in total in 145 kindergartens of mid-sized and bigger-sized financing organisations from five Federal States. However, the model is also suitable to be used in single kindergartens.

However, the quality of coaching a kindergarten always highly depends on the competence of the coach. The coach must know the most important approaches of defining quality criteria and has to have experiences in working with kindergarten teams plus an open-minded communication style. It is also important for coaching to be successful that the whole team sees itself as a working group and that everybody takes responsibility for the quality of the facility. The team should experience the QM process as an appreciation and an enrichment of their own work. Therefore, long theoretical discussions should be avoided and instead the professional experiences of the participants should be included.

## Final Discussion

The following discussion made clear that in order to achieve a higher quality childcare an agreement is needed regarding the goals of early education and care. Reference frameworks to define quality criteria were deemed absolutely necessary but they are no automatic guarantee for high quality care practice. The practical implementation has to be better addressed as an important aspect of quality assurance. Therefore, better qualification and support of professionals is needed, as well as an understanding of childcare facilities as learning organisations. Of course the main focus in achieving higher quality should lie on the children. But other actors who are also important for the education and care, like the parents, professionals and the whole social environment, need to be considered, too. Under no circumstances should the definition of quality criteria create an over-regulation of early education and care.

### Sharing Quality Frameworks

Despite the fact that in Germany the Länder are principally responsible for education there have been shared quality processes between the federal and the regional level since the end of 2014, which were assessed very positively by the participants. The result of these processes so far is the Bund-Länder-Communiqué „Improving And Financially Securing Early Education“. Further talks between politicians, local authorities and organisations from the field of childcare are to follow and the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs has set up a working group. The aims of the process set in motion are commonly shared quality goals and funding principles.

From Flanders was reported on the existing experiences various actors have made with shared quality frameworks. These, so the report, not only take the children into consideration but also the families and the community as their living environment. The quality check relies on scientific research and monitoring procedures.

Marion MacLeod of Children in Scotland expressly warned against over-regulation. In Scotland there are some regulations, which completely miss their target, the welfare of the child. This is not the way to achieve defined quality goals. In any case the children have to be the subject of quality definition and evaluation. The “output” of childcare facilities is important, not the rules as concrete as possible for their interior design and process organisation. A key aspect in successful childcare “output” is equal opportunity and reduction in the gap in wellbeing between the richest and the poorest children.

Ana del Barrio Saiz reported that in the Netherlands there are several pedagogical frameworks for very different target groups and items, but there was until now no research on how they are utilized.<sup>9</sup> Yes, frameworks are necessary as reference but in order to actually achieve higher quality, childcare centres have to develop as “learning organisations” based on democratic values and a democratic practice. Quality criteria naturally have to be oriented on the welfare of the children and their families,

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9) The results of a first survey on how they are utilized by practitioners will appear in the end of 2015.



but professional development on the job must be taken into account as well, so that professionals can better respond to the needs of children and the family contexts they are working with. Therefore, a stronger focus on interactions and process and on structural support of staff should be taken into consideration in the definition of quality standards.

So far, in the German debate it seems to be relatively clear what high quality in education and care means, because the contents of the educational programmes of the sixteen Federal States are very similar. What is missing in Germany then is not so much the knowledge of what good quality is, but rather and most importantly the actual achievement of that quality. There has to be a stronger focus on the developments after having completed the training as care staff/teacher and after probable evaluations. This cannot be reached alone by improving the framework conditions for early education and care but instead also needs the best use of the given staff and personal possibilities and to provide accompanying support for staff.

## Evaluation And Further Development Of Quality

Prof. Dr. Viernickel asked whether it is at all possible to measure quality by the “output” alone, which means by the results for the children and hence on an individual level. In such a case it also has to be proven that the measured effects for the child can in fact be ascribed to the childcare facilities. Quality then can also be improved by measurable framework conditions. The necessary qualification of the personnel already mentioned, the time for working with the children – all of these are structural characteristics and hence framework conditions. It is still unclear why some already existing procedures for quality development are used so little and why initiated quality processes stagnate again and again. It seems that individual skills and the leadership role are central for the implementation of good quality. Marion MacLeod affirmed the importance of pedagogic leadership and its professional action.

In addition the funding institutions were also mentioned as important actors in quality development. Furthermore individual good structural characteristics do not lead automatically to good quality. In the Netherlands professional standards are requested for the workforce in order to ensure good quality, but structural monitoring on the job is needed as well. Regarding the lack of time, often used as argument to not implement structural quality changes, Ana del Barrio Saiz argued that willingness to work on respect for diversity and social inclusion cannot be ‘a matter of choice’, it has to be the base and fundament of a vision on good quality in childcare. A systemic approach on quality where all relevant stakeholders are involved is necessary. An approach that actively takes children into account within their context, because children are not only citizens in the future, they are citizens living in the middle of our society now.

Also important for achieving high quality is the respect for the professionals’ work and a solution for the problems of transition. There has to be a fundamentally positive attitude towards the professionals in childcare and the work they have done so far, so



that they can experience changes as something positive and get emotionally involved. Quality development should respectfully build on what is already there; true to the motto: we have competencies but we can even get better. Furthermore every transition poses an obstacle most of all for disadvantaged children and leads to an even wider gap to the children who are better off. Therefore, the search for high quality results also has to consider the transitions between institutions, like day nursery and school.

The discussion left open whether or not there should be a uniform law for quality in Germany. With its planned steps the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs is first of all looking for an actual improvement of quality and not only for an agreement based on the lowest common denominator among all parties concerned. But it still is completely open whether the initiated process will lead to a law for quality. The Ministry still sees the need to first develop a common quality concept of all involved – despite the seeming clarity in similar educational programmes. Who will pay in the end for the better quality has to be negotiated too. According to Prof. Dr. Viernickel the development of the last years means a great chance for the qualitative improvement of childcare in Germany. That such quality processes exist at all between the Federal Government and the Länder means great progress. They should continue step by step. Of paramount importance is first how “good quality” is defined. It needs to be seen what follows afterwards.

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