

National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 Years)



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List of Abbreviations

ACCE	Assistant to the Childcare Educator
CCE	Childcare Educator
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
DSWS	Department for Social Welfare Standards
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
LRP	Legally Responsible Person
MFED	Ministry for Education
MFSS	Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
POMA	Protection of Minors Act
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability



List of Terms

The list of terms in this document are to be interpreted as follows:¹

assessment means the process of noticing children’s learning and development, holistically defined, recognising its significance, and responding in ways that foster further learning. It includes gathering and documenting key aspects of children’s learning in order to make learning visible and inform planning.

centres mean those premises used regularly for the education and care of children aged 0-3 years. These centres provide Centre-Based and Work-Based Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services. In the local context, centres are also referred to as ECEC centres (0-3 years), childcare centres, child day care centres and nurseries.

childcare educator means an adult who has a designated role of providing education and care to children attending ECEC centres (0-3 years).

curriculum means all the interactions, activities and events – both direct and indirect, planned and spontaneous – experienced by children in an ECEC centre.

indicators mean those features which can be measured and correspond to a particular standard to allow the evaluation of whether or not the standard is being met.

Legally Responsible Person (LRP) means the person who is legally responsible for the operation of the centre.

night ECEC service provision means the service which operates overnight between the hours of 10pm and 5am.

nurturing care means the set of conditions that provide for children’s good health, nutrition, security and safety, and opportunities for early learning through interactive, emotionally supportive and responsive caregiving.²

parent refers to the person/s or entity which is/are recognised by the State as being responsible for the care and upbringing of the child.³

philosophy means a statement that:

- outlines the fundamental beliefs, values, and ideals that are important to the people involved in the centre – management, adults providing education and care and parents;
- identifies what is special about the ECEC centre; and
- is intended to be the basis for decisions about the way the ECEC centre is managed, its aims and objectives, and its direction for the future.

policy means a statement, at national or centre level, intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters related to the services provided.

procedure means an established way of carrying out specific actions in the ECEC centre.

process means a goal-directed, interrelated series of actions, events, procedures, or steps.

service means the provision offered through the operation of an ECEC centre for 0 to 3-year-olds.

stakeholders means all those who are invested in the education and care of children in ECEC services, primarily the children themselves, parents, families, the Legally Responsible Person

¹ Some of the terms have been adapted from *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services 2008 and Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework (As amended June 2018)*, (pp. 5-7).

² World Health Organisation (2018). *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential*, p.18, 47.

³ Ministry for the Family, Children’s Rights and Social Solidarity (2017) *National Children’s Policy*.

(LRP), all members of staff and the broader community which benefits from the provision of ECEC.

standard means the required and agreed level of the service provision. It is also seen as a criterion or a defined specification to fulfil in order to reach the required level.

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



Consultation process

Reference Group

The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) in the Ministry for Education (MFED) appointed a reference group as part of the consultation process around the updated standards. The reference group provided initial feedback and independent advice on the draft proposed standards before going out for a wider public consultation.

The members of the reference group are practitioners and experts in the fields of ECEC provision for under 3-year olds. In line with the multi-disciplinary nature of high quality ECEC provision, the members also included representatives from other governmental ministries to ensure a multi-sectoral conceptual approach to planning.

The Reference Group membership will comprise one representative from each of the entities listed below in alphabetical order:

- Childcare Centre Providers Association (CCPA)
- Church Schools Association (CSA)
- Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)
- Commissioner for Children
- Early Childhood Development Association Malta (ECDAM)
- Foundation for Educational Services (FES)
- Happy Parenting Malta for Happier Children
- Independent Schools Association (ISA)
- Institute for Education (IfE)
- Jobsplus
- Malta Chamber of SMEs
- Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)
- Ministry for Education – Architect
- Ministry for Education
 - Department for Learning & Assessment Programmes (DLAP)
- Ministry for Education
 - Directorate for Quality & Standards in Education (DQSE)
- Ministry for Education – Legal Advisor
- Ministry for Education – National Literacy Agency (NLA)
- Ministry for Education – National School Support Services (NSSS)
- Ministry for Family, Children’s Rights and Social Solidarity
- Ministry for Health
- Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development
- UHM
- University of Malta

The Reference Group was co-chaired by Dr Jacqueline Vanhear, Director - Quality Assurance Department, and Prof Carmen Dalli, external expert.

Introduction

Background Context

It is internationally acknowledged that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is the most important time in the life of children and directly impacts on how a child approaches future learning and social-emotional challenges. Furthermore, research shows that investing in the early years is one of the most cost-effective interventions a country can make to yield the highest economic return in human capital when compared with investments made at later stages in life.

As from the 1st of July 2016, the responsibility for external quality assurance of ECEC services (0-3 years) shifted from the Department of Social Welfare Standards (DSWS) within the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education (MFED). The vision behind this shift is to provide children with a more comprehensive and seamless learning and care experience, while ensuring a coherent and coordinated framework for governance. The shift also reflects a commitment to achieve a balance between accountability and improvement through enhanced collaboration between the DQSE as the quality assurance body and service providers. DQSE's role is to provide appropriate guidance and professional learning during the regulation process and service providers are key to implementing quality improvement standards. The vision of a quality ECEC sector requires commitment by all stakeholders.

Quality is a complex phenomenon. In 2018, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems, which aims to support Member States in their efforts to improve access to and quality of their ECEC systems. This proposal includes a Quality Framework, which identified 5 key components:

- access to early childhood education and care;
- training and working conditions of staff in charge of early childhood education and care;
- definition of appropriate curricula;
- governance and funding;
- monitoring and evaluation of systems.

After negotiations between the Commission and the EU Member States, the Council Recommendation was adopted by the Education Ministers at the Council on 22 May 2019⁴.

Despite the contested nature of the notion of quality, recommendations which help to produce and assure high quality, have been identified. These include measures which affect the quality of the structure, the process and the outcomes of ECEC provision. The standards in this document intentionally take into consideration these recommendations:

- Structural quality⁵ consists of aspects which consider how the ECEC centre is designed and organised. This includes staff qualifications and skills, group size, the ratio of staff to children, health and safety requirements, and the policies, procedures and practices which bear a direct impact on the organisation of the centre. Structural quality is addressed in Quality Area 1 of this document.
- Process quality⁶ considers aspects which have a direct influence on children's experiences, wellbeing and development within an ECEC centre. These include the relationships between staff members and children, the integrated approach to care and learning, day-to-day pedagogical practices, and parental involvement. Process quality is addressed in this document in Quality Area 2.
- Outcomes quality⁷ includes cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and physical/health developmental outcomes. The standards in this document are all intended to contribute towards the achievement of outcomes quality.

⁴ Further information available online: [Early childhood education and care | Education and Training \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

⁵ See Taguma, Litjens, and Makowiecki, 2013.

⁶ See Taguma, Litjens, and Makowiecki, 2013.

⁷ See Taguma, Litjens, and Makowiecki, 2013.

Following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Cap. 413), these standards recognise the right of the child to inclusive education at all levels, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, beliefs and skin colour. This is in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights which underscores that children have the right to affordable early childhood education and good quality care.

Furthermore, at the international level, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emanating from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, calls on Member States to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. This is reflected in Malta’s Sustainable Development Vision for 2050⁸ which calls for “lifelong learning opportunities from early childhood education and care to adult learning, to ensure that all children, young people and adults have the opportunity to obtain the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens and to succeed at work and in society.”

To advance progress towards SDG 4, the global community adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action (2015)⁹, which amongst other provisions, highlights the importance of:

- “design[ing] and implement[ing] inclusive, accessible and integrated programmes, services and infrastructure of quality for early childhood, covering health, nutrition, protection and education needs, especially for children with disabilities, and support [guardians] as children’s first caregivers”; and
- “devis[ing] clear policies, strategies and action plans for the professionalisation of ECCE personnel by enhancing and monitoring their ongoing professional development, status and working conditions assessment of ECCE policies and programmes in order to improve their quality.”

With the above in mind, these national standards are therefore permeated with commitment to an inclusive education vision as established in the National Inclusive Education Framework for Malta (MEDE, 2019)¹⁰ where inclusive education has been defined as:

“the valuing and acceptance of diversity, to its value and the rights of learners to not only attend mainstream schools, but also to belong as valued members through active participation and the elimination of barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, respect diverse needs, abilities and characteristics.” (MEDE, 2019 p.6).

Relevance of the standards

The Ministry for Education has signalled ECEC as one of the priorities and drivers in its ongoing efforts to achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and in particular target SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG 4.2 intends for all girls and boys to have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

In this context, the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006) have provided a robust basis for ECEC provision. However, the Ministry for Education has committed to update these national standards in order to:

- i. reflect recent developments in the ECEC (0-3 years) field within a Maltese context. Consequently, this document also includes standards related to night ECEC service provision (0-3 years);
- ii. be in line with ongoing ECEC research and practice for children aged 0-3 years;
- iii. develop and strengthen a more socially just and active labour market in the Maltese islands, by sustaining availability and accessibility of quality ECEC services;
- iv. to ensure that these standards, focused on ECEC services for 0 to 3 year olds, are consistent with the overall framework for Early Years pedagogy (0 to 7 years) within the National Curriculum Framework (2012).

All standards are informed by the principles of the policy document *A National Curriculum Framework for All (MEDE, 2012)*, as well as national, European and international policies and research that incorporate the key elements of best practice in ECEC. These standards are

8 Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopmentcms.gov.mt/en/Pages/National-Strategy/Vision-2050.aspx>

9 Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>

10 A National Inclusive Education Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019) available at: https://education.gov.mt/inclusion/Documents/MEDE_Inclusion_Framework_Sep2019web.pdf

intended to apply equally to childcare ECEC services operating both in the public and private sectors.

Using the National Standards

This document focuses on what all stakeholders should expect from a regulated ECEC service to ensure the overall wellbeing of all children.

Service providers should refer to this document to find out what is expected when providing ECEC services and take the necessary steps to reach the national standards. These standards will also inform parents about what to expect from a regulated centre. The document provides the framework for monitoring and assuring quality and outcomes of ECEC service provision.

Monitoring the implementation of the National Standards

The DQSE is responsible for operating a regulatory system for the ECEC sector (0-3 years). It promotes this document to maximise good practice in ECEC service provision.

DQSE officials monitor and regulate these services through an external review visit followed by a written report grounded in the quality standards presented in this document. This process helps providers to reflect, focus and manage the centre's internal review exercise, and guides them to meet the expected standards.

Types of ECEC provision

The range of ECEC services includes Centre-Based and Work-Based services.

- **Centre-Based** services are presently the most common type of ECEC service provision. Their premises are solely equipped and used for ECEC provision. In those cases where a centre is adjacent to the service provider's home, the centre needs to have a separate entrance. The same applies when the centre forms part of, or is adjacent to, a school.
- **Work-Based** services are provided within the building/premises occupied by an employer/group of employers, where employees actually work and where the building is exclusively used as a work hub. 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. Work-Based centres need not have a separate main entrance but must be situated within the building/premises where employees actually work.

The nature of the work operation/s and/or other factors in the vicinity must not present any hazards to children using this service or in some way limit the provision of the service. Such centres must meet all the criteria applicable for Centre-Based services, with the exception that they need not have a separate entrance.

Night ECEC Service Provision

Unless otherwise specified, the same standards and indicators in this document apply for the night service provision.

Providers of Centre-Based and Work-Based childcare centres may opt to provide night ECEC service for children aged 0-3 years. This is in response to recent developments in the Maltese economy in general and the role of women in the labour market. Therefore, the introduction of this service is aimed to further increase and sustain an equitable and active labour market in the Maltese islands. Following this principle, the night ECEC service provision aims to cater for families, where either both parents in the case of families with two parents or the parent in the case of single parent families, are in regulated employment which overlaps with night service provision hours and who have no other suitable arrangements for the care of their children.

For registration purposes, night ECEC service provision shall be deemed as that service which operates overnight between 10pm and 5am¹¹.

The provision of night ECEC service is a particular service that must nurture a calm and restful environment that meets the needs of all children. Centres providing this service are to ensure that the natural everyday rhythms of children, such as sleeping, eating, and playing, are respected.

Recommendation

*In the best interest and wellbeing of the child, the time spent with parents should always be maximised. Infants and toddlers aged 0-3 years should not spend more than 45 hours a week in ECEC service.*¹²



11 Operating hours may vary due to exigencies and as agreed upon by the centre, keeping in mind the wellbeing of every child and the exigencies of the working parent/s.

12 Lowe Vandell, D. (2004). Early child care: The known and the unknown. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 50(3), 387-414. Irvine: University of California.

The Legally Responsible Person (LRP)

The responsibility for ensuring structural, process and outcomes quality in an ECEC centre rests with the Legally Responsible Person (LRP). The LRP may delegate responsibilities at a day-to-day level to the centre manager.

The LRP must be 18 years or over,¹³ and in possession of a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate. The LRP is to:

- ensure that the functions of the centre are in line with national strategies, policies, and legislations and subsequent updates;
- ensure that the physical premises are in compliance with national standards, legislations and any subsequent updates;
- ensure that members of staff recruited meet the eligibility criteria;
- assume legal responsibility for the provision of children's learning and care, as prescribed by the national standards, national strategies, policies, legislation and any subsequent updates;
- represent the registered childcare centre and has the power of attorney;
- assume accountability for the proper management of finances;
- oversee that the centre performs effective internal review processes;
- oversee that the recommendations identified by the DQSE are being implemented;
- it is desirable that the LRP has some knowledge about ECEC theory and practice.

¹³ If the LRP is also the centre manager, he/she is to be 21 years or over.

The Quality Areas

This document categorises the ten standards of the *National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities* (MFSS, 2006) under two broad quality areas (refer to Table 1). Each quality area is underpinned by a number of standards and indicators (refer to Table 2).

- Quality Area 1: The Quality of the Learning Environment
- Quality Area 2: The Quality of Learning and Care

Table 1: The 10 Standards (MFSS, 2006) categorised in two broad Quality Areas

From the <i>National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (MFSS, 2006)</i>	To the <i>National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 years)</i>
<p>Standard 1: Suitable Persons Standard 2: Physical Environment, Premises and Equipment Standard 4: Health and Safety of Children Standard 8: Child Protection Standard 9: Food and Drink</p>	<p>Quality Area 1 The Quality of the Learning Environment</p>
<p>Standard 3: Management and Organisation Standard 5: Care, Learning and Play Standard 6: Working in Partnership with Parents Standard 7: Behaviour Management Standard 10: Equal Opportunities and Children with Special Needs</p>	<p>Quality Area 2 The Quality of Learning and Care</p>

Table 2: The updated standards categorised in two broad areas

The Quality of the Learning Environment	
Standard 1.1	The centre manager and members of staff meet the respective eligibility criteria and possess the required personal attributes and competences for their specific roles and responsibilities.
Standard 1.2	All employees working with children are to have the official Protection of Minors Act (POMA) clearance.
Standard 1.3	Appropriate child-to-childcare educator ratios are maintained, and the maximum number of children allowed as per required status for operation, is not exceeded.
Standard 1.4	The premises are suitable for the service provided.
Standard 1.5	The premises and equipment are safe, secure, clean and regularly maintained.
Standard 1.6	The health, wellbeing and safety of children, including children’s right to be protected from any abuse, are promoted and ensured at all times.
The Quality of Learning and Care	
Standard 2.1	The effective leadership skills, knowledge and abilities of the centre manager support the provision of education and care that meet regulated standards.
Standard 2.2	All children are welcomed and included in a child-friendly and play-based environment that nurtures their learning and development.
Standard 2.3	The curriculum helps children to progress in their learning and achieve the desired learning outcomes at their own pace.
Standard 2.4	The environment and resources support children’s play, learning and development.
Standard 2.5	Childcare educators nurture meaningful relationships and engage in high quality, enjoyable and stimulating interactions to enhance children’s wellbeing, learning and development.
Standard 2.6	The centre welcomes parents and fosters collaborative partnership to support children’s wellbeing, learning and development.

Quality Area 1: The Quality of the Learning Environment

Standard 1.1

The centre manager and members of staff meet the respective eligibility criteria and possess the required personal attributes and competences for their specific roles and responsibilities.

Centre Manager

The responsibilities that define the role¹⁴

Overall organisation and management of the Centre

- responsible for the organisation and smooth day-to-day running of the Centre;
- co-ordinates and implements effectively the Centre's policies, procedures and practices, ensuring that these reflect national legislation, policies, standards and strategies;
- leads the implementation of systems, procedures and practices that support the provision of a high-quality education and care experience for children;
- ensures that the Centre's policies, procedures and practices are regularly reviewed and updated;
- ensures that any changes and/or modifications to the Centre's policies and procedures are reflected in its Manual of Policies and Procedures;
- safeguards health and safety across the centre;
- leads an effective internal review process to evaluate the quality of practices of the centre, identifies and addresses areas that may require improvement;
- contributes to the selection and recruitment of members of staff as required;
- liaises with LRP to ensure effective planning for and use of the budget for the day-to-day running of the Centre.

Oversees children's learning and wellbeing

- guides and ensures the implementation of a holistic child-centred curriculum;
- safeguards and promotes the rights and wellbeing of all children at all times;
- ensures inclusion of all children and equitable opportunities for all;
- monitors children's learning experiences to ensure attention to each child's overall development, guiding parents and members of staff, and liaising with any specialist services as required;
- identifies and minimises risks for children and handles health and safety issues appropriately;
- interacts with, listens and talks to all children.

	<p>Parents and other stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • builds and maintains positive relationships with all stakeholders, including with the Legally Responsible Person, Childcare Educators and other staff members, parents, children and external professionals/agencies; • supports parents from enrolment of their child and during transition phases; • communicates the Centre’s policies, procedures and practices to parents and ensures that they are followed; • consults with parents and staff in regular reviews of the Manual of Policies and Procedures and for internal review purposes; • establishes and maintains effective, regular communications both within the Centre, with parents and other external stakeholders; • collaborates with parents and encourages their active engagement; • communicates regularly with parents on their child’s progress and development. <p>Managing staff members and professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensures that roles and responsibilities of members of staff are clear to all; • ensures that new members of staff are guided towards good practice and their progress is monitored; • monitors and guides the progress and quality of work of members of staff; • provides and/or facilitates continuous professional development opportunities for staff members on a regular basis; • is a reflective practitioner who participates in regular continuous professional development relevant to the role.
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 years or over
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum of one year work experience as an educator in the early years.
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum of MQF Level 5¹⁵ in Early Childhood Education and Care, including pedagogy, leadership and management,¹⁶ or comparable; • A pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English;¹⁷ • valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid; • valid Food Handling Certificate.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate to be presented annually; • Self-Declaration Form.¹⁸

15 MQF Level 5 with a minimum of 60 ECTS

16 Based on National Occupational Standards: Centre Manager.

17 Refer to A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2015). Already employed centre managers who require further training in either Maltese or English, or in both languages, are highly encouraged to enrol in an accredited and recognised language course to gain proficiency.

18 LN 206/2016

Childcare Educator (CCE)

The responsibilities that define the role¹⁹

Working within the Centre

- meets regulatory requirements in the Centre;
- contributes to the day-to-day running of the Centre;
- implements policies, procedures and practices that reflect the provision of a high-quality education and care experience for the children;
- contributes to the regular review and update of the Centre's policies, procedures and practices;
- be prepared to act as a point of reference in the event of emergencies in the absence of the Centre Manager;
- follows and maintains a healthy, safe and secure environment within the Centre;
- contributes to the internal evaluation of the quality of practices of the service and areas that may require improvement;
- contributes to and follows on the Centre's planning.

Working for children's learning and wellbeing

- follows and implements a holistic child-centred curriculum and according to the National Curriculum Framework;
- provides physical care that promotes the health, wellbeing and development of all children;
- creates an environment that promotes and encourages positive learning and behaviour;
- plans for and facilitates each child's holistic learning and development;
- monitors each child's holistic progress in learning and development;
- assesses each child's holistic learning and development;
- recognises and responds to the different individual needs of every child, ensuring inclusion and participation in the full range of learning experiences taking place;
- actively listens, talks and interacts meaningfully with all the children;
- monitors children's learning experiences to ensure attention to each child's overall development, guiding parents and members of staff, and liaising with any specialist services as required;
- identifies and minimises risks for children and handles health and safety issues appropriately;
- interacts with, listens and talks to all children.
- provides a language-rich environment, ensuring the balanced provision of both Maltese and English;
- supports children and their families who are bilingual, multilingual or whose preferred language is not Maltese or English.

¹⁹ Based on National Occupational Standards: Childcare Educator.

	<p>Collaborating with parents and other stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is accessible to all stakeholders, developing and nurturing positive relationships with parents, children and external professionals/agencies; • supports parents in the educational journey of their child and during transition phases; • guides and supports parents to follow the centre’s policies, procedures and practices; • communicates, guides and supports parents in the learning and development progress of their children; • establishes and maintains effective, regular communications both within the centre, with parents and other external stakeholders. <p>Collaborating with other members of staff and professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a reflective practitioner who participates in regular continuous professional development to address personal professional needs; • maintains a collaborative and respectful relationship with the Legally Responsible Person, the Centre Manager and other members of staff.
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 years or over
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum of MQF Level 4²⁰ in Early Childhood Education and Care²¹ or comparable; • A pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English;²² • valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid; • valid Food Handling Certificate.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate to be presented annually; • Self-Declaration Form.²³
Night ECEC Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the absence of the centre manager, one of the childcare educators is to act as a point of reference in case of emergencies and to monitor the night service provision and adherence to national standards.

20 MQF Level 4 with a minimum of 60 ECTS.

21 Based on National Occupational Standards: Childcare Educator.

22 Refer to A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2015). Already employed childcare educators who require further training in either Maltese or English, or in both languages, are highly encouraged to enrol in an accredited and recognised language course to gain proficiency.

23 LN 206/2016

The following support staff may also be employed:

Assistant to the Childcare Educator (ACCE)²⁴	
Description of role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> works in collaboration with the centre manager, the childcare educator being assisted and parents; assists and supports the childcare educator in the provision of care, learning and play (see description of role of childcare educators above); ensures that the children are in a safe and comfortable environment and receive the personal attention required to promote learning, respectful care, and children's holistic wellbeing.
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23 years or over
Pre-requisites and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of enrolment with an accredited institution offering training in childcare theory and practice that is specifically organised for the Assistant to the Childcare Educator;²⁵ ability to communicate effectively in Maltese and English;²⁶ valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid; valid Food Handling certificate.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate to be presented annually; Self-Declaration Form.²⁷

Administrative Staff	
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 years or over
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as per centre requirements
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate to be presented annually

Ancillary Staff	
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 years or over
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as per centre requirements
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate to be presented annually

²⁴ Assistants to the Childcare Educators (ACCEs) may be employed to assist qualified and accredited childcare educators provided that at least 50% of the staff complement are accredited childcare educators with an MQF level 4 qualification in childcare theory and practice (or equivalent). The qualified and accredited childcare educator is to closely supervise the Assistant to the Childcare Educator (ACCE) and provide the necessary support.

²⁵ Based on *National Occupational Standards: Assistant to the Childcare Educator*.

²⁶ Refer to A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2015)

²⁷ LN206/2016

Childcare Educator Trainee

Childcare educator trainees undertaking training leading to an MQF level 4 qualification in childcare theory and practice are not to be counted as part of the child-to-childcare educator ratio. Their role in the centre is linked to the requirements of their course. While on placement at the ECEC centre, childcare educator trainees are to be supervised by a nominated and qualified member of staff.

Standard 1.2

There are no infringements of the Protection of Minors Act²⁸ (POMA) that bar employees from working with children.

Indicators

- The manager, childcare educators and all employees (including possible subcontracted ancillary staff) have official POMA clearance.
- POMA to be renewed annually

Standard 1.3

Appropriate child-to-childcare educator ratios are maintained, and the maximum number of children allowed as per required status for operation, is not exceeded.

Indicators

- The centre always complies with the maximum number of children allowed, as per required status for operation.
- The centre complies with the child-to-childcare educator ratios as follows:

Child-to-Childcare Educator Ratios in Centre-Based and Work-Based Services

Age of children (months)	Number of children cared for by a qualified childcare educator
0 to 12	3
13 to 24	5
25 to 36 ²⁹	6
mixed group ³⁰	6
Age of children (months)	Number of children cared for by a qualified and accredited childcare educator AND an assistant to the childcare educator ³¹
0 to 12	5
13 to 24	8
25 to 36 ³²	10
mixed group ³³	10

²⁸ Cap. 518 *Protection of Minors (Registration) Act*

²⁹ May be extended by a few weeks until the child can be admitted to Kindergarten.

³⁰ Within the mixed group, only one child can be under the age of eighteen months.

³¹ While every effort is to be made to adhere to the established ratios, exceptional circumstances might require some flexibility in their application. Refer to Appendix 1: *Ratio Permutations*. The limits indicated in this appendix should not be exceeded under any circumstances.

³² May be extended by a few weeks until the child can be admitted to Kindergarten.

³³ Within the mixed group, only one child can be under the age of eighteen months.

Standard 1.4
The premises are suitable for the service provided.³⁴

<p>Centre-Based Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The premises follow the principles of universal design and are organised so that spaces can be accessed, understood and used, to the greatest extent possible, by everyone. • The premises should have a 5m² of accessible space per child. • The design of the centre should allow for the free movement of children between different areas and activities and enables them to engage in both indoor and outdoor activities. It also allows staff to supervise and engage with children. • The premises have a well-functioning IT infrastructure and are digitally equipped to support the integration of digital technology within the centre. • The premises work well for everyone and support the education and care of a wide range of children while providing an enabling environment for a diversity of staff, family members and visitors.
<p>Night ECEC Service Provision³⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In night ECEC service provision the child capacity is to reflect the number of cots and/or beds approved for the overnight sleep of children. • Appropriate distancing between cots. • Free from disturbers of restful sleep.

Standard 1.5
The premises and equipment are safe, secure, clean and regularly maintained.

<p>Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The premises, equipment and resources used by children are in compliance with regulations and standards of safety. • All resources, including natural resources are used according to safety requirements in relation to the children's age and competences. • All play equipment and resources are suitably designed for children, regularly cleaned, and well-maintained. • The premises are kept in a good state of maintenance, cleanliness and repair, and staff maintain and encourage good standards of hygiene.³⁶ • The centre has a valid³⁷ Health and Safety Risk Assessment Report which is updated every two years. Identified health and safety risks, if any, are certified as addressed in the Compliance Certificate. • An annual safety certificate regarding electrical appliances is issued and signed by a warranted engineer • Only authorised persons are permitted entry in the indoor and outdoor areas of the centre.
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³⁴ Refer to the Registration Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3years).

³⁵ Reference made to Night ECEC Service Provision must take into account ALL indicators in the relevant standard.

³⁶ Cleaning routines of the premises include daily cleaning of resources used by children during play.

³⁷ To be considered valid, a Health and Safety Risk Assessment Report needs to refer specifically to these National Standards, be dated and signed by a competent Health and Safety officer.

Standard 1.6

The health, wellbeing and safety of children, including children's right to be protected from any abuse, are promoted and ensured at all times.

Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff members are fully committed to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">› care for each child;› promote the good health and safety of all children;› take all reasonable precautions to prevent accidents and the spread of infection among children in the centre;› safeguard the children's right to be protected from any abuse or physical ill-treatment;• ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to address each of the above;• ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to deal with fires, earthquakes and other emergencies
Night ECEC Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A minimum of two members of staff are on duty during operational hours.• Staff members actively supervise all children during the night service provision. Staff on duty shall be awake and alert to the needs of the children.• An appropriate infant cot/toddler bed is provided for each child.³⁸ Staff members monitor that these are safe, regularly cleaned and maintained.³⁹• All staff members must annually complete training on measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).



³⁸ Chairs, sofas, pillows, adult beds, waterbeds, beanbags, pushchairs, car seats, baby recliners are not suitable cot/bed replacements.

³⁹ Nothing is allowed in the cot/bed with the child except a pacifier. Cot/bed sheets must be tight fitting and bedding, linen and children's personal hygienic items are regularly cleaned and well-maintained.

Quality Area 2: The Quality of Learning and Care

Standard 2.1

The effective leadership skills, knowledge and abilities of the centre manager are supporting the provision of a high-quality education and care experience for children.

Indicators

- The manager effectively fulfils the responsibilities defined in the role description outlined in Standard 1.1;
- The manager actively promotes the centre's philosophy, ensures that it reflects national legislation, policies, standards, strategies and that respects the holistic development of the child;
- The manager ensures there is a clear vision for the Centre with clearly defined aims and objectives that are shared with all stakeholders;
- The manager promotes an ethos of professionalism, transdisciplinary and collaborative teamwork.
- The manager maintains clear lines of responsibility in day-to-day management;
- The manager is aware of the strengths and challenges of the centre and inspires commitment to continual improvement;
- The manager ensures that effective internal review processes are in place and are used to inform improvement in the quality of the service provision;
- The manager promotes reflective practice and supports all practitioners, including new staff members, to continually improve their practice;
- The manager regularly reflects on their own practice and consults with the different stakeholders, acting upon the feedback received;
- The manager establishes collaborative partnerships with parents, practitioners, other professionals and the general community to safeguard and promote the rights of the child and their holistic development;
- The manager ensures the effective planning and implementation of the DQSE's recommendations;
- The manager maintains oversight of children's overall progress in line with curricular expectations.

Standard 2.2

All children are welcomed and included through an environment that nurtures their learning and development through play.

Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The centre's commitment to welcoming all children irrespective of race, colour, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, disability or any other status is abundantly evident⁴⁰.• The centre ensures that all children have equitable access⁴¹ to the learning opportunities offered.• The centre ensures that the necessary scaffolding⁴² is in place to eliminate barriers⁴³ that might restrict access to learning opportunities.• Children are treated as competent human beings, who can communicate, exercise agency⁴⁴ and make choices.• Childcare educators monitor and keep track of each child's overall learning, development and progress to enhance strengths, address risk factors and provide support as needed.• The centre provides a play-based and digital learning environment and equitable access for all children to learn about, through and within a digital environment.• The centre fosters partnership relationships with parents and other centre stakeholders ensuring smooth transitions that respect the individual characteristics of the child⁴⁵• The centre operates a designated carer system. Childcare educators take responsibility of the overall wellbeing and individual needs of each child entrusted in their care. Staff members demonstrate a supportive approach with one another in implementing the designated carer system.• The centre fosters links with external professionals and/or agencies⁴⁶ where appropriate, with a view to optimizing support for children with specific needs.
Night ECEC Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designated carers respond to the individual child's needs and interests during bedtime and morning routines,⁴⁷ taking into account information provided by the parents and their own observation of the child;• The Centre provides a homely environment.

40 Refer to *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, article 2. Refer also to the *Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Cap.413)*

41 **equitable access** means that every child, at every level of ability, is catered for and has the opportunity to learn in his or her own way.

42 **scaffolding** means the practice of assisting and guiding a child to accomplish a task. Scaffolds may be provided by a more knowledgeable adult or child and should vary according to the progress the child is making. Scaffolding should be matched to the needs of each child.

43 **barriers to learning** means anything that stands in the way of a child being able to learn effectively. Barriers to learning vary widely and can be of a linguistic, cultural, emotional, physical nature and so on.

44 **exercise agency** means being able to make choices and decisions to influence events and to have an impact on one's world.

45 Transition procedures include child's initial entry to childcare, from one age group to another within the centre, from centre to centre (if applicable) and from centre to kindergarten.

46 Professionals and external agencies may include, but are not limited to: Early Intervention Services, Child Development Assessment Unit and Speech Language Department.

47 See Standard 2.3 underneath.

Standard 2.3

The curriculum⁴⁸ helps children to acquire the desired learning outcomes.

Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The five broad learning outcomes of the Early Years Cycle guide the childcare educators' pedagogy.⁴⁹• Childcare educators implement a curriculum that is designed to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">› respond to the children's diverse interests, strengths and capabilities;› provide a positive learning environment that respects the holistic development of each child;› reflect an understanding of learning⁵⁰ and development⁵¹ that is consistent with current research, theory and practices in quality ECEC.• Play is the central medium through which children learn and develop.⁵²• The centre's curriculum is informed by authentic assessment⁵³ practices that notice, recognise children's learning and respond to it fostering further learning:<ul style="list-style-type: none">› planning that is informed by childcare educators' observations of the children;› planning that is based on recognition of different children's interests, needs and strengths;› planning that is flexible and responsive to children's evolving and emerging interests, diverse ideas and dispositions.• Childcare educators reflect on and evaluate their practice to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">› identify what has been successful and whether the expected learning has taken place;› scaffold, modify or extend learning experiences to meet the needs of each child in meaningful and relevant ways.
Night ECEC Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The bedtime routine may include pre-bed soothing rituals like washing the children's faces and hands, brushing of teeth, nappy changing/toileting routines and changing into night wear. This may also include quiet enjoyable activities.• The morning routine may include breakfast, brushing of teeth and getting dressed.

48 Refer to *List of Terms*, above.

49 Refer to A National Curriculum Framework for All (MEDE, 2012): <https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Resources/The-NCF/Documents/NCF.pdf>; *Learning Outcomes Framework, Early Years* (2015): <http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/early-year>

50 An understanding of how learning occurs to ensure that all children can access and experience meaningful learning opportunities (Meyer et al., 2014).

51 An understanding of how the brain develops in the early years of a child's life (Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University).

52 Childcare Educators provide opportunities for a variety of indoor and outdoor play including: creative play, language play, physical play, imaginative play, socio-dramatic play and construction play.

53 Authentic assessment is assessment done in real-life situations as part of the normal course of the day vs assessment that takes the form of tests in formal situations. Types of authentic assessment may take the form of portfolios and learning notes/stories/journals.

Standard 2.4

The environment and resources support children's play, learning and development.

Indicators

- Good use is made of the opportunities afforded by the physical environment to ensure children:
 - › have access to noisy play areas, as well as quiet spaces where the children can withdraw to rest or nap.⁵⁴
 - › experience stimulating and enriching learning spaces that invite children to inquire, experiment and explore a range of resources and materials;
 - › have opportunities to engage, communicate, create and learn through age-appropriate digital technology;
 - › benefit from both indoor and outdoor spaces to extend and vary learning experiences according to the evolving interests of the children
- Indoor and outdoor resources are accessible and used effectively to stimulate, consolidate and extend children's learning.⁵⁵
- Resources should include natural⁵⁶ and/or recyclable materials to stimulate children's creativity and imagination and promote a mindset of sustainability.
- Children's achievements are creatively displayed in modes that are accessible to children and parents.

54 Noisy play areas may include spaces where dramatic play, physical play, blocks, musical instruments and active physical play take place. Quiet areas may include spaces where shared reading takes place and appropriate resources for napping/resting are kept.

55 The environment and resources need to respect the individual differences and needs of the children.

56 The range of natural resources may vary in size, shape or colour, such as: leaves, flowers, shells, twigs, fruit, vegetables, seeds, rocks. As with any other resources used in the Centre, ensure that the natural materials provided are safe to be used with young children. Be particularly careful if the children are at an age where they are likely to put the natural resources in their mouths.

Standard 2.5

Childcare educators nurture meaningful relationships and engage in high quality, enjoyable and stimulating interactions to enhance children's learning.

Indicators

- Childcare educators foster an environment of respectful, caring and secure relationships with children.
- Childcare educators provide nurturing care when interacting with children. They are sensitive, responsive,⁵⁷ predictable and warm during physical care routines.⁵⁸ They listen to children, value what they say, and stimulate verbal communication at all times.
- Childcare educators promote positive interactions amongst the children to nurture peer relationships.
- Childcare educators minimise sources of stress in the children's daily lives at the centre and help them to cope with it through maintaining a calm respectful environment
- Childcare educators foster a language-rich environment that supports children's bilingual development in Maltese and English and promotes positive attitudes towards children's home languages.⁵⁹
- Childcare educators adopt a Whole Centre Positive Behaviour Approach to address challenging behaviour, in ways that respect the dignity of the young child.
- Childcare educators encourage independence during all physical care routines. During mealtimes, childcare educators join in with the children and, if help is needed, they assist in the best way that meets the children's individual needs.
- Childcare educators guide and support children to gain self-care abilities and increasing independence⁶⁰.
- Childcare educators strengthen children's core life skills and support their ability to focus, plan for and achieve outcomes, adapt to changing situations and resist impulsive behaviour.⁶¹

57 Responsive caregiving includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds, gestures and verbal requests. Babies respond to faces, gentle touch, cuddling, eye contact, smiles, vocalisations and gestures as well as the soothing sound of baby talk.

58 Feeding, nappy changing/toileting, napping/sleeping routines and bathing are carried out by the designated carer.

59 Refer to A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (MEDE, 2015):

60 Childcare educators should be mindful to increase the complexity of skills step by step by observing and finding each child's 'zone' of being challenged but not frustrated (Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University).

61 Executive Function Skills – Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

Standard 2.6

The centre welcomes parents and works in partnership to support children's wellbeing, learning and development.

Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The centre welcomes the presence and active involvement of parents especially during the initial stages of their child's settling-in period at the centre.• The centre provides opportunities for both informal experiences and planned events that involve and engage parents as partners in their child's educational journey, fostering a learning community.• Childcare educators regularly share and discuss with the individual parents the progress of their child's learning and holistic development in a spirit of mutual respect. Formal one-to-one meetings are held at least twice yearly.• Any concerns about the child's overall development are to be discussed with the parents concerned through the involvement of the Centre Manager.• Staff members provide parents with information about the child's daily routine at the centre⁶².• The centre promotes and cultivates continuity of learning and development ensuring smooth transitions for each child.• Parents are encouraged to provide healthy and nutritious food and drinks for their children to support the centre in the promotion of a healthy diet and in line with National and Centre policies⁶³.• The centre promotes the use of technology to strengthen relationships among parents, families, the centre and the young children.
Night ECEC Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff members seek parents' knowledge of the child's nightly routines and any related individual needs.⁶⁴• The centre welcomes parents to establish a smooth transition from home to centre.

⁶² Communication may include information about the child's daily routine (eating, drinking, toileting/nappy changing/bowel movements, napping, etc.)

⁶³ Further information about healthy nutrition may be obtained from the Health Promotion Directorate.

⁶⁴ Childcare educators are informed about each child's sleeping habits and any problems which may arise during the night (e.g. bedwetting, nightmares, sleepwalking). Childcare educators ensure that parents provide a number of items that are typically needed during nightcare including: night wear, bedding, blankets, slippers, toothbrush and toothpaste, comforters such as pacifiers (if needed), nappies, bathing material and clothes for the next day.

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Appendix 1: Ratio Permutations

Ratios when assistants to the childcare educator are included (0-12 months)		
Qualified Carer	Assistant	Children
1	1	5
1	1	6
2	1	7
2	1	8
2	1	9
2	2	10
2	2	11
2	2	12
3	2	13
3	2	14
3	2	15
3	3	16
3	3	17
3	3	18
4	3	19
4	3	20
4	3	21
4	4	22
4	4	23
4	4	24
5	4	25
5	4	26
5	4	27
5	5	28
5	5	29
5	5	30
6	5	31
6	5	32
6	5	33
6	6	34
6	6	35
6	6	36
7	6	37
7	6	38
7	6	39
7	7	40
7	7	41
7	7	42
8	7	43
8	7	44
8	7	45
8	8	46
8	8	47
8	8	48
9	8	49
9	8	50

Ratios when assistants to the childcare educator are included (13-24mths)		
Qualified Carer	Assistant	Children
1	1	8
1	1	9
1	1	10
2	1	11
2	1	12
2	1	13
2	1	14
2	1	15
2	2	16
2	2	17
2	2	18
2	2	19
2	2	20
3	2	21
3	2	22
3	2	23
3	2	24
3	2	25
3	3	26
3	3	27
3	3	28
3	3	29
3	3	30
4	3	31
4	3	32
4	3	33
4	3	34
4	3	35
4	4	36
4	4	37
4	4	38
4	4	39
4	4	40
5	4	41
5	4	42
5	4	43
5	4	44
5	4	45
5	5	46
5	5	47
5	5	48
5	5	49
5	5	50

Ratios when assistants to the childcare educator are included (25-36mths)		
Qualified Carer	Assistant	Children
1	1	10
1	1	11
1	1	12
2	1	13
2	1	14
2	1	15
2	1	16
2	1	17
2	1	18
2	2	19
2	2	20
2	2	21
2	2	22
2	2	23
2	2	24
3	2	25
3	2	26
3	2	27
3	2	28
3	2	29
3	2	30
3	3	31
3	3	32
3	3	33
3	3	34
3	3	35
3	3	36
4	3	37
4	3	38
4	3	39
4	3	40
4	3	41
4	3	42
4	4	43
4	4	44
4	4	45
4	4	46
4	4	47
4	4	48
5	4	49
5	4	50

Appendix 2:

Manual of Policies and Procedures

- The centre has a manual containing all its policies and procedures. There is evidence that this is accessible to and accepted by staff and parents. Periodical reviewing of the manual of policies and procedures takes place during staff meetings.
- The manual of policies and procedures includes the following contents:
 - › The philosophy⁶⁵ of the centre
 - › The centre's approach to care, learning and play⁶⁶
 - › Assessment practices⁶⁷
 - › Admission to centre
 - › Equal opportunities
 - › Transitions⁶⁸
 - › Healthy eating
 - › Positive behaviour management
 - › Working in partnership with parents
 - › Sick children
 - › Immunization⁶⁹
 - › Accident management
 - › Emergency preparedness plan (Fire safety and evacuation)
 - › Uncollected child
 - › Child protection, to include:
 - Safety and security of children*
 - Suspected abuse*
 - Children's rights*
 - › Data protection, to include:
 - Child's records keeping*
 - Staff record keeping*
 - › Complaints about the service
 - › Whistle blowing
 - › Staff recruitment
 - › Staff development
 - › Staff supervision
- Appendices to be included in the manual for policies and procedures:
 - › Admission form
 - › Fees structure
 - › Parental consent forms (agreement with centre policies, data protection, administration of medication and outings)
 - › Injury report
 - › Complaint form
 - › Cleaning routines⁷⁰
 - › Any other appendices

65 Refer to the *List of Terms* in this document

66 Refer to *Quality Area 2* in this document. This should include the pedagogical approach underpinned by the philosophy adopted and implemented.

67 Refer to *Quality Area 2* in this document. This should include the process of how childcare educators will regularly observe, record and report the progress of children's learning and development.

68 Transition procedure upon child's initial entry to childcare, from centre to centre (if applicable) and transition procedure to kindergarten.

69 It is highly recommended that all children making use of ECEC service (0-3 years) are in line with the National Immunisation Schedule.

70 These may include cleaning of premises, toilet facilities, resources etc.

- When applicable, details of the night ECEC service provision are to be documented in the centre's Manual of Policies and Procedures⁷¹, giving due attention to the particular characteristics of this service, including:
 - › Child protection, to incorporate also:
 - Night ECEC service provision*⁷²;
 - › Safe sleep practices and sleeping arrangements and procedures;
 - › Bedtime routines, including information regarding screen time;
 - › Supervision of children;
 - › Managing difficulties around sleeping habits.⁷³

71 See footnote 53.

72 This policy provides clear guidance in relation to the physical contact considered appropriate for night time routines and when attending to the children's hygiene needs.

73 This may apply to those instances when a child fails to settle to sleep or becomes distressed, including procedures regarding bed-wetting, nightmares or general distress.

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