

# ESTONIA

## ECEC Workforce Profile

*Country report author*

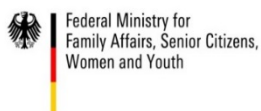
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## 1. ECEC governance

Estonia has a partially unified system of early childhood education and care under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. Governance and system management are distributed between the national and regional levels, reflecting a multi-level governance model with responsibility shared between the Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*) for the integrated early childhood education and care institutions for children aged 1 year 6 months to 7 years (*Koolieelne lasteasutus*)<sup>1</sup> and the Ministry of Social Affairs (*Eesti Sotsiaalministeerium*) for childcare centres for under 4-year olds (*lastesõim*). Local education and social affairs authorities are responsible for ECEC provision and management. As from 2018, all ECEC institutions will come under the Ministry of Education and Research.

## 2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Staff qualifications, professional education/training and remuneration are regulated. There are three main categories of staff (Teacher, Assistant and Nurse) and two categories of setting leaders (Director and Lead Teacher). Assistants and Nurses are required to have an ISCED Level 4 qualification, and Teachers, Directors and Lead Teachers an ISCED Level 6, 7 (Senior Teacher, Master's degree) or Level 8 qualification (Master Teacher).

Table 1 provides a summary of key information; core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) are categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 below).

Table 1  
Estonia: Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points /EQF level/ISCED <sup>2</sup> level
<i>Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja</i> <b>Early Childhood Teacher</b>	<i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> <b>Integrated ECEC centre</b> 1½– 7-year olds	Core practitioner or teacher with group responsibility	1½–7 years	<i>Since 2015:</i> Three-year Bachelor's degree programme
<i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	<i>Koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm</i> <b>Preparatory class</b> 6- to 7-year olds who have not attended kindergarten (voluntary)	Centre director Head teacher Master teacher		ECTS points: 180 EQF: Level 6 (also 7 and 8, depending on final qualification) ISCED 2013: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6
	<i>Lastesõim</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 1½– 3-year olds			

<sup>1</sup> In official documents these are variously translated into English as 'Preschool child care institutions' or 'Preschool institutions' or 'Kindergartens'. In this report the term 'ECEC' will be used as a descriptor for settings (ECEC settings) and 'early childhood' as a prefix for core practitioners (Early Childhood Teachers).

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012, 2014.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points /EQF level/ISCED <sup>2</sup> level
<i>Õpetaja abi</i> <b>Teacher's Assistant</b>	<i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> <b>Integrated ECEC centre</b> 1½– 7-year olds  <i>Koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm</i> <b>Preparatory class</b> 6- to 7-year olds who have not attended kindergarten (voluntary)  <i>Lastesõim</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 0– under 3-year olds	Qualified co-worker	1½–7 years	Compulsory school leaving certificate and 1 year of studies at a Health Care College  ECTS points: n/a <sup>3</sup> EQF: Level 4 or Level 5 for work in Preparatory classes ISCED 2013: 0913 ISCED 2011: 4
<i>Lapsehoidja</i> <b>Childcare Worker</b> (Nurse; Childminder)	<i>Lastesõim</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 1½– 3-year olds <i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> <b>Integrated ECEC centre</b> 1½– 7-year olds	Qualified co-worker	0–7 years	Compulsory school leaving certificate and 1 year of studies at a Health Care College ECTS points: n/a EQF: Level 4 or Level 5 for work with children with special needs and parents ISCED 2013: 0913 ISCED 2011: 4

#### Box 1

SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners (adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010)

- *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- *Pre-primary Education Professional* (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- *Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional* (focus on pre-primary and primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- *Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- *Social Care/Health Care Professional* (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus including adults)

## 2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Table 2

Estonia: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2015/16

Staff categories	Number, Proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree	5,359 (66.1%)*
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	2,197 (27.1%)
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	231 (2.9%)
Staff with non-specialist qualification	1,288 (15%)

<sup>3</sup> n/a: not applicable

Staff categories	Number, Proportion of workforce
Unqualified staff	316 (3.9%)
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	108 (1.3%)
Male staff	51 (0.6%)
Staff with a background of migration	No national data available

\* Ministry of Education and Science 2016, own calculations.

In 2015/2016, there were 8,292 teachers working in Estonian early childhood centres (*koolieelse lasteasutuse*). Among these were 7,004 Early Childhood Teachers, 585 Music Teachers, 463 Physical Education Teachers, 108 Special Education Teachers who work with children with special needs, 97 Estonian Language Teachers, and 35 Swimming Teachers.

In terms of age, 1,065 were below 30 years of age, 1,514 between 30 and 39 years, 2,136 between 40 and 49 years, 2,364 between 50 and 59 and 1,036 over 60 years of age. Most teachers are women. Only 51 men work in ECEC institutions. 5,359 teachers have a higher education degree, 2,197 teachers applied vocational education (1,536 post-secondary level and 852 upper secondary level), 231 have vocational education and 316 have secondary education and 12 did not specify (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2016).

Since 2015, the minimum requirement for work as an Early Childhood Teacher is a higher education degree from a university or university college. Higher education in early childhood education has been available at Tallinn University since 1967, at Tallinn University Rakvere College since 2000, and at Tartu University and its affiliated Narva College since 2004. The proportion of Early Childhood Teachers with a higher education degree has risen considerably over the past two decades. Whereas in 1995, the share of Early Childhood Teachers with higher education was 20.9%, and in 2001 25.6% (Torm 2002, 465), by 2016 this proportion had reached 66% (The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2016).

### 3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

#### 3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

##### Early Childhood Teacher (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja*)

Since 2015, Early Childhood Teachers in Estonia are required to have at least a BA level qualification from a university or university college/university of applied sciences. One third of the early childhood teaching workforce are EC Teachers with long years of experience and a tertiary-level qualification who are permitted to remain working in the field.

The study programme of early childhood education at Tallinn University gives a contemporary research-based preparation at either Bachelor's (180 ECTS points) or Master's degree level (additional 120 ECTS points). These degree qualifications guarantee students' professional competencies and skills of self-reflection as Early Childhood Teachers. The courses also prepare students to become early childhood education specialists with an understanding of educational policy-making processes. They equip students with the qualifications to support children's development, to create a favourable learning environment, and to cooperate with other adults including parents, other teachers, and specialists in the ECEC network. The Bachelor's degree also supports each learner's personal development and provides them with the option of continuing their studies at Master's level.

### **Bachelor studies**

The ECE study programme at BA level includes mainly in-depth courses in key disciplines (educational sciences, psychology, and field-based studies). According to the logics of the programme structure, the role of in-depth studies supports the future Early Childhood Teachers to acquire a general, cultural, social, communicative, ethical and professional set of skills for pedagogical work with children aged birth to 7 years in diverse ECEC institutions.

The university bases its activities on the needs of Estonian society, drawing on historical experience and educational research, and cooperates with other universities and educational institutions in Estonia and in other countries. Since 1967, Tallinn University has educated over 2,500 specialists in early childhood education, who have either followed the four-year, the five-year or the 3+2 years study route, depending on the preferred model at the time. All of these study routes have in the meantime been equalised with the currently valid Master's curriculum by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

### **Master studies**

The first students were admitted in the academic year 2002/2003. The first specialists with a Master's degree for work as an Early Childhood Teacher-Counsellor graduated from Tallinn Pedagogical University in 2003. Since 2015, the MA study programme is called 'Early Childhood Teacher' (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja*).

Former Master's students from Tallinn Pedagogical University have applied successfully for posts and work in managerial positions in the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, in the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre, in university colleges/universities of applied sciences, as trainers of teachers in further education, in education departments, as directors or head teachers of infant/toddler centres and as class teachers. The curriculum enables students to acquire a research-based education qualification at Master's level, to deepen Early Childhood Teachers' competencies, to complement scientific knowledge in the area of early childhood education, to acquire additional knowledge in pedagogical counselling and the management of children's settings, and to learn how to support children's transition from kindergarten to school. The Master's thesis enables students to continue in-depth scientific studies towards the level of Doctoral studies. Studies take place in the form of lectures, seminars, independent work, practical work, and field-based studies.

A **Lead Teacher** is a pedagogical leader and deputy Centre Head and part of the leading and administration team of the ECEC setting. Qualification requirements for the post of Lead Teacher are a higher education degree and a professional qualification in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Management.

Three levels of the Estonian Qualifications Framework (EstQF which corresponds to the EQF) apply for staff in the teaching profession: levels 6, 7 and 8 (Kutsekoda, n.d.). Early Childhood Teachers are located at level 6, Primary and Secondary Education Teachers at level 7, and teachers at level 8 are Master Teachers who guide the learning processes of other teachers and additionally participate in leadership activities both within the ECEC setting/school and in collaboration with higher education institutions.

Table 3

#### **Estonia: Early Childhood Teacher**

<b>Job title in Estonian:</b> <i>Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja</i> <b>Profile:</b> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
<b>Entry requirements:</b> 12 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate; oral examination
<b>Professional studies:</b> 3 year study route at university, including at least 18 weeks' work placement
<b>Award:</b> Bachelor's degree/Early childhood education ( <i>Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja</i> )
<b>ECTS points:</b> 180
<b>EQF level:</b> 6

<b>Job title in Estonian: <i>Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja</i></b> <b>Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</b>
<b>ISCED 2013:</b> 0112 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 6 <b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Integrated ECEC centre ( <i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> ), 0-7; Preparatory class ( <i>Koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm</i> ), 6-7; Infant/toddler centre ( <i>Lastesõim</i> ), 0-3.

### Childcare Workers (Nurses/Childminders) and Teachers' Assistants (*Lapsehoidja and Õpetaja abi*)

Childcare Workers (Nurses, Childminders) and Teachers' Assistants are required to follow a one-year vocational education/training course, organised by the Health Care Colleges in Tallinn and Tartu. Complying with a decree of the Minister of Social Affairs, applicants are expected to acquire competences in health promotion activities in ECEC settings and in the implementation of the National Curriculum. The qualification is pegged at EQF level 4 or level 5, ISCED 4. Graduates can work in ECEC centres or infant-toddler centres.

Table 4

#### Estonia: Childcare Worker (Nurse/Childminder)

<b>Job title in Estonian: <i>Lapsehoidja</i></b>
<b>Entry requirements:</b> School leaving certificate <b>Professional studies:</b> 1 year of studies at a Health Care College <b>Award:</b> Diploma in Child Care <b>ECTS points:</b> n/a <b>EQF level:</b> 4 (or Level 5 for work with children with special needs and with parents). <b>ISCED 2013:</b> 0913 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4 <b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Infant-toddler centre ( <i>Lastesõim</i> ), 0-3; Integrated ECEC centre ( <i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> ), 0-7

Table 5

#### Estonia: Teacher's Assistant

<b>Job title in Estonian: <i>Õpetaja abi</i></b>
<b>Entry requirements:</b> School leaving certificate <b>Professional studies:</b> 1 year of studies at a Health Care College <b>Award:</b> Diploma in Child Care <b>ECTS points:</b> n/a <b>EQF level:</b> 4 (or Level 5 for work in Preparatory classes) <b>ISCED 2013:</b> 0913 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4 <b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Integrated ECEC centre ( <i>Koolieelne lasteasutus</i> ), 0-7; Preparatory class ( <i>Koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm</i> ), 6-7; Infant-toddler centre ( <i>Lastesõim</i> ), 0-3.

## 3.2 Competencies and curricula in IPS programmes for core practitioners

An important document which regulates work in ECEC institutions is the Teachers' Professional Standard, EQF level 6, issued on 27.11.2013 (Kutsekoda n.d.). The Professional Standard sets

out the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes or competency requirements needed for the successful enactment of professional activities. The profession of teacher (in general, not just for early childhood) includes the following tasks and duties:

- planning of learning and teaching activities;
- development of the learning environment;
- supporting learning and development;
- reflection and professional self-development;
- counselling of learners and parents.

Personal qualities needed for the work are described as: self-management, cooperativeness, initiative, responsibility, self-confidence, creativity, tolerance, empathy, integrity and a positive attitude.

Universities are free to put together curricula according to the National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions (Government of the Republic 2008) and the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act (Riigi Teataja 1999). Teachers are required to provide advice on issues of learning and teaching to the parents of children who attend the ECEC centre and to parents whose children do not attend the centre but who reside in the catchment area if the parents so request.

*Box 2* provides an annotated version of the Early Childhood Education Teacher curriculum at Tallinn University (2016-2017) (Tallinn University 2016a).

*Box 2*

**Estonia: Early Childhood Education Teacher curriculum (BA-level) at Tallinn University, 2016-2017**

**Aims of the curriculum:** To create opportunities for the acquisition of a broad education in the Educational Sciences in the area of early childhood education; to support the formation of skills for work as a teacher in early childhood education; to create opportunities for continuing studies in early childhood education at Master's level.

**Competence specifications:** An early childhood education graduate ...

- has foundational knowledge in the educational sciences, systematic knowledge of pre-school education, knows the principles of child development, subject didactics and methods of scientific research;
- knows how to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical work with children and adults;
- knows how to create a favourable intellectual and physical environment for child development;
- knows how to plan, integrate, analyse critically and evaluate pedagogical processes;
- knows how to search information by using various information sources in the area of pre-school education and to engage with specific questions and problems of the field;
- knows how to conduct empirical research, write and formalise a Bachelor thesis;
- knows how to reflect upon own activities, evaluate needs for self-education and further training and possibilities to continue at a post-graduate (Master's) level.

**Course structure**

University-wide courses (18 ECTS points), e.g. general and social psychology

Basics of research (12 ECTS points)

Child development, learning and teaching (36 ECTS points)

Core courses (24 ECTS points)

Electives (6 ECTS points)

Language Specialisation (6 ECTS points)

Pedagogical professional placements (18 ECTS points)

Professional didactics (30 ECTS points)

Additional elective module(s) (18 ECTS points)

Final thesis (12 ECTS points)

**TOTAL: 180 ECTS points**



### 3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Currently the only route to becoming an Early Childhood Teacher/Pedagogue is to study full-time or part-time either at Tartu or Tallinn universities and their affiliated colleges.

It is possible to combine studying and working by enrolling for part-time studies or at the Open University. Part-time studies alongside employment as a teacher are free of charge, but Open University BA and MA courses are not, and teachers must pay for them.

#### **Notes on the history of IPS/Early Childhood Education in Estonia**

The institution traditionally responsible for the professional education/training of core practitioners working in ECEC settings was the Tallinn Pedagogical School (Tallinna Pedagoogikakool 1994, 60). In 1995, the school was renamed **Tallinn Pedagogical Seminar (TPS)**. This institution has been educating Early Childhood Educators/Teachers since 1937. In 1991, an adult education and early childhood education methodology unit was opened at TPS, staffed by employees of the previous National Preschool Education Methodology Centre.

Some years later, Tallinn Pedagogical Seminar gained the status of a university of applied sciences. After Estonia regained its independence, the first state-wide early childhood education conferences took place at TPS. Since 2015, Tallinn Pedagogical Seminar has been affiliated to Tallinn University.

The **Rakvere Pedagogical School (RPS)** was founded in 1972 as a result of the rapid expansion of the ECEC institutions network at that time, and the need for early childhood education increased considerably during the 1970s. The predecessor of RPS was the Rakvere Economic Technical School which operated from 1958. As a result of the reorganisation, a new specialist course was introduced aimed at providing early childhood education teacher education for graduates of the 8th grade, and later for graduates of secondary schools. As in all earlier establishments, theoretical studies were complemented with practice in an early childhood setting. In 1992, RPS started training early childhood caregivers and social workers for schools. After later joining the Tallinn Pedagogical University (TPU), Rakvere Pedagogical School now provides a Bachelor's degree for prospective Early Childhood Teachers. An initial professional studies course specialising in early childhood education at higher education level has now also been founded at **Tartu University**.

On 1 September 1967, the **Tallinn Pedagogical Institute** (renamed Tallinn University in 2005) opened the specialist degree course for early childhood education and psychology; students were admitted for both full-time and part-time learning. Between 1993 and 1997, a four-year common degree was introduced for Pre-Primary and Primary School Teachers. Between 1994 and 1998 this was extended to include a child psychology specialisation (a four-year Bachelor's degree course).

Between 1995 and 2002 the Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher combined degree course lasted five years. Between 1998 and 2005 it was possible to follow a four-year degree in Educational Sciences, with a specialisation as a Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher. The education of students who graduated in those years has currently been equalised with a Master's degree.

The new 3+2 curricula for Early Childhood Teachers were compiled in 2001 and the first students both for Bachelor's and Master's levels were admitted in the academic year 2002/2003. Since 2002, the Teacher in Early Childhood Education Bachelor study route takes three years to complete. The following Master's programmes have been available:

- 2002 – 2004: Teacher-Counsellor of Preschool Education (one year, 40 ECTS points). The first Master's students in the field of early childhood education teacher-counselling graduated in 2003.

- 2003 – 2010: Teacher-Counsellor of Early Childhood Education (two years, according to the new curriculum, 120 ECTS points).
- Starting in 2010 and up to the current time, the MA studies have been called ‘Early childhood education’; the nominal study period is two years, 120 ECTS points (Veisson et al. 2011).

Since 2015, early childhood education BA and MA study programmes are located at the teacher education and educational science faculty at Tallinn University School of Educational Sciences. The faculty comprises early childhood education, general education, vocational education and adult education.

The activities in the field of teacher education and educational sciences are also supported by the Centre of Excellence in Educational Innovation. Focus fields are areas of activity that connect different research fields and work with the key issues in the society rather than studies or academic research (Tallinn University 2016). The aim of the Centre is to support the development and application of a 21st century learning culture in the Estonian education sphere.

The University chose educational innovation as an area of focus since the difference between the needs of education institutions and society has increased considerably in the past decade. Learning is gradually moving outside formal education and does not end with a diploma, but continues throughout life.

Fortunately, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 is planning great changes in education. The School of Educational Sciences, which is responsible for developing this area of focus, also highlights non-formal and informal education, as well as support services for education, since formal education needs to become more individualised and supportive of differences (Tallinn University 2016).

#### 4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners

Workplace-based practica in ECEC settings during the **Bachelor study route** are organised in five parts and are allocated a total of 18 ECTS points. This means that they comprise 10% of the overall study programme (Tallinn University 2016a).

**Practicum I in ECEC Institutions:** 3 ECTS points, first year, autumn semester

The first part of field-based studies takes place over a period of 10 days/2 weeks. The students reflect on what it means to be a teacher; they familiarise themselves with work in different ECEC institutions and with the curriculum; they observe and analyse educational activities and learning environments and cooperate with colleagues and children in the group.

**Practicum II in ECEC Institutions:** 3 ECTS points, second year, autumn semester

The second part also takes place over a period of 10 days/2 weeks. The students familiarise themselves with the kindergarten group's documentation (daily and weekly schedule, planned educational activities, educational work diary, etc.); they observe and analyse educational activities carried out by the group teacher and activities they conduct in cooperation with the teacher; they plan for children's play and integrated educational activities for children aged 3-6; they choose and analyse teaching methods and materials, including ICT; they organise and conduct children's games and outdoor activities, analysing them in terms of the children's development.

**Practicum III in ECEC Institutions:** 3 ECTS points, second year, spring semester.

During the third practicum, again lasting 10 days/2 weeks, students become acquainted with a kindergarten group's programme; they observe, analyse, plan and carry out educational activi-

ties and guide children's free activity within the group; they take into account children's individual characteristics and specific developmental needs when planning activities; they are able to carry out the main activities of the daily schedule; to guide children's play; to organise games and outdoor activities; to communicate with parents; to participate in the meetings and events of the ECEC setting; and to seek out appropriate ICT materials to support children's learning and to evaluate their own activities.

**Teaching Practice IV** (3 ECTS points, two weeks, third year autumn semester) and **Teaching Practice V** (6 ECTS points, four weeks, third year, spring semester)

The specific focus of these two elements of field-based studies is currently under revision. However, the overall aim is for the students to carry out as many assignments as possible independently, both in terms of teaching and of evaluating observed and self-conducted activities in the ECEC centre. Starting in the second week, students make a daily plan for their own activities according to the group schedule. They are expected to draw up Concept Cards for five projects which integrate a range of educational activities (movement, music, outdoor learning, inquiry-based learning, activities in small groups) and to analyse and reflect on the learning processes which take place. This includes assessing individual children's play activities according to a specified evaluation instrument. Beyond this, students are expected to organise a group party in their children's group, to prepare a presentation for the ECEC centre's pedagogical council and to present it at a meeting. They are also expected to observe and analyse the teaching activities of other students and to cooperate with the Teacher's Assistant. During these two practicum periods students learn to communicate with parents and to examine the centre's strategies for partnership with parents, and participate in all centre meetings and events, including music and movement activities with the children at such events. Students learn about the work of the ECEC Centre Head and summarise the main tasks. They also participate in assessing the children's school readiness. The practicum periods end with an oral examination conducted by all supervising teachers who have given written feedback on the student, and takes into account their practicum portfolio and self-evaluation measures. It is planned to formalise the practicum portfolio electronically.

**Practicum abroad:** 15 ECTS points

A practicum can also take place in another country, but this is optional and additional to the required practica. If students choose to spend a practicum period abroad (for at least ten weeks), they are required to spend at least three months in the country. During this time they are able to participate in the daily activities of an ECEC setting and learn about other ECEC systems, approaches and methodologies. They are expected to fill in observation sheets and complete a practicum portfolio. Students are supported financially through a European programme such as Erasmus+.

**Optional courses:** 6 ECTS points each

To acquire additional practical knowledge supporting children's learning or physical skills or children with special educational needs, there are several optional practice-oriented courses available which are allocated 6 ECTS points each.

Workplace-based practica in ECEC settings during the **Master study route** are organised into two optional courses (6 ECTS points each). The aim of the MA practicum is to create opportunities for the students to become familiar with a leading role in educational activities, guiding teamwork and learn about different forms of work organisation, applying different methods and appropriate ICT tools to assess their own work and that of their colleagues.

## 5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

New strategic focal points in policies for the teaching profession have been specified in the document 'Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020'. The implementation of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy and the professional development of academic staff take place under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research. The 'Teacher and Leadership Programme' (2015-2020) is a comprehensive professional development system for Early Childhood Teachers and Centre Heads (see also *section 6*).

For the implementation of the goals specified in the strategy, measures have been provided for making the teaching profession more attractive. These include the re-organisation of the continuing professional education of Early Childhood Teachers and Centre Heads in early childhood settings, providing feedback on teaching performance, and improving the digital competence of learners and teachers. Professional standards and competence models form a conceptual basis for the continuing education of Early Childhood Teachers and Centre Heads. A central in-service training system supports the development of the specified competencies.

According to the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (1999), teachers are required to participate in continuing education. Nowadays, however, with professional standards as an orientation, the identification of development needs is largely driven by the teachers themselves. Annual national teacher training priorities are set together with universities and other stakeholders. For the year 2016/2017, the priorities for Early Childhood Teachers are: implementation of the national preschool curriculum; child-initiated approaches to learning; supporting children with special needs; Estonian as an additional language for children with a different home language.

Professional development is optional for teachers and assistants and required for centre directors and head teachers. In the past, all teachers were entitled to take further education courses every five years (160 hours). Currently they are expected to attend courses that focus on the competencies mentioned in the Professional Standard for Teachers (see *section 3.2*). According to the Estonian Education Information System, preschool teachers attend on average 35 hours per year of CPD. All costs are covered by the state and the employers.

The main providers of CPD activities for Early Childhood Teachers and Centre Heads are Tallinn University and Tartu University. Additional providers are private or third sector organisations, such as *Innove*, a non-profit organisation which aims to coordinate lifelong learning development activities and to implement the EU structural aid in a targeted manner. Central in-service trainings are free of charge, funded by the state and employers. Alongside training courses, an increasing number of alternative development methods are becoming available, such as mentorship, supervision, coaching, network learning.

Continuing Professional Development for Early Childhood Teachers is provided by Tallinn University and Tartu University, some private organisations, and also by *Innove* (Tallinn University 2016). In 2003, *Innove* took over the activities of the former foundation 'Vocational Education and Training Reform in Estonia'. Among other things it organises trainings and the development and implementation of qualifications and curricula in the area of general and vocational education (Innove 2016).

The Open University at Tallinn University (Tallinn University 2016b) coordinates the continuing education programme and is open to anyone who is interested in developing themselves or their organisation, advancing their specialist field or their vocational or professional qualifications, using credit points in degree studies or acquiring a second study major or a study minor.

CPD activities are organised either by the local government or by the ECEC settings themselves. In the case of the latter, the centre heads of ECEC institutions are responsible for organising courses for teachers and assistants. Every ECEC institution organises 'development conversations' (*arenguvestlused*). Centre Heads can also send teachers to further education

courses at universities (Centres for Educational Innovation) or to events organised by *Innove* (see above).

Specific forms of CPD are formally recognised in terms of career advancement (e.g. credit endorsements for specialist posts such as Senior Teacher or Master Teacher).

Centre Heads must have a higher education qualification and a professional qualification in early childhood pedagogy and management. The main modules of such courses are: innovation, result oriented leadership and management; teamwork, personnel management, cooperation with interest groups and stakeholders including children and parents; resource management; the education process and support of children's development; presenting 'success stories' to colleagues.

In terms of current reforms, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 provides for the development of competence centres at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu which are responsible for the development of teacher training and educational sciences. The competence centres are targeted at collecting and developing knowledge about learning and teaching, and passing on such knowledge to ECEC institutions.

There have been no recent large-scale research projects on CPD activities in the early childhood workforce, but relevant research is planned for 2018.

Key challenges in developing and implementing CPD policies are: stronger cooperation with the social and health care fields; providing an effective training system for the ECEC workforce; supporting children with special needs; and supporting teachers' competence in developing Estonian language learning among children with a different home language.

## 6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

### System-related reforms

Recent policy reforms and initiatives have been mostly of a general, system-related nature rather than specifically related to ECEC staffing. These general policy goals include the preparation of children for school and for citizenship, supporting children with special needs, safeguarding vulnerable children, reducing inequality and social disadvantage and supporting children when home and national language differ. Initiatives introduced within the context of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 include, for example, raising staff awareness for values oriented learning. In 2015, this programme was piloted in 439 (67%) kindergartens (in more than 1,000 groups) and in 81 schools (ca 350 classes) around Estonia. Further programmes have focused on bullying prevention and health promotion. Since 2010, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has been supporting a joint venture between the Danish branch of "Save the Children" and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, entitled "Bully-Free Kindergarten". The majority of Estonian pre-school child care institutions have joined the initiative.

During the first half of 2015, the European Commission's Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (European Commission 2014) was translated into Estonian and made accessible for ECEC institutions. Information days for reflecting on the quality framework, as well as on the quality of the early childhood curriculum, took place in all Estonian counties and in Tallinn from February-May 2015. Altogether, 653 teachers, head teachers and specialists from local and county governments participated in these information days. Further information days specifically on the implementation of the national curriculum took place later in the year, attended by centre heads and deputy heads from all Estonian ECEC institutions, around 1,000 teachers, and also local and county government specialists.

During 2014-2015, Estonia participated in an international ECEC study funded by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which enabled a comparison of the Estonian ECEC system, including the staffing system, with that of other countries and provided a basis for discussions on system reform (Bertram and Pascal 2016).

### Teacher and Leadership Programme

For the period 2015-2020, the programme 'Competent and motivated teachers and leaders' has been initiated with the aims of developing a comprehensive CPD system for teachers and heads of early childhood institutions, of boosting the status of ECEC and of making the ECEC teaching profession more attractive. (Budget: 24.6 million euros, including 20.9 million euros from the European Social Fund).

Focal points of the programme are:

- Introduction of an educational leader competence model for self-evaluation and receiving feedback;
- Digital competences of teachers;
- The educational institution's developmental projects for creating a more supportive organisational culture for the new learning approach;
- Supporting networks for joint learning both within and outside the institutions;
- Learning events for sharing best practices in early childhood education;
- Leadership training courses for centre heads and deputy heads;
- Teacher further education, include that offered by universities and the training of centre-specific trainers;
- Development and implementation of a teacher competence model for self-evaluation and receiving feedback.

### Regional Teachers' Centres

In every county and in every city district of Tallinn there are kindergartens and schools which function as methodology/consultation centres for teachers, 49 in all. Also, regional (county) teacher support centres have been set up, as well as regional counselling centres such as the *Pathfinder* centres organised by the *InnoVe* Foundation.

## 7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues

### Values and values education

**Source:** Ülavere, P. and M. Veisson. 2015. "Values and Values Education in Estonian Preschool Childcare Institutions." *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability* 17 (2): 108–124. doi: 10.1515/jtes-2015-0014

**Background:** Research on *Values and Values Education in Estonian Preschool Child Care Institutions* was initiated by the Estonian National Values Education Programme (2009-2013) (P.I. Professor Margit Sutrop, University of Tartu).

**Aims:** The objective of the study was to provide an analysis of the values that principals, teachers and parents in ECEC institutions consider important to be taught to children, as well as to find out which activities should be used to implement values education.

**Procedure:** This was a country-wide questionnaire survey (convenience sampling). 978 respondents from all 15 Estonian counties included 163 centre heads, 425 teachers and 390 parents in ECEC institutions.

**Findings:** The most important values according to the centre heads were a sense of humour as well as pride (respect towards self and apprehension of one's own values) and inventiveness, whereas teachers valued patience to a significantly higher degree. Compared to centre heads, parents viewed confidence and commitment as more important, while compared to teachers, parents thought it more important that kindergartens teach the importance of good education. In summary: Values education in ECEC institutions takes place primarily in adherence to the specific group's rules during the course of everyday communication and activities. Personal role models are considered to be very important in values education.

### Professionalism of early childhood education teachers

**Source:** Peterson, T. and M. Veisson, E. Hujala, U. Härkönen, A. Sandberg, I. Johansson, and E. Kovacsne Bakosi. 2016, "Professionalism of Preschool Teachers in Estonia, Sweden, Finland and Hungary." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 24 (1): 136-156.

**Background:** According to reports commissioned by the European Commission (2011) and OECD (2012), the professionalism of early childhood teachers is a key factor in ensuring the quality of early childhood education.

**Aims:** The aim of a study on *Teacher's professional development* was to investigate the views of Estonian, Finnish, Swedish and Hungarian early childhood teachers and principals regarding professionalism within a cross-cultural context.

**Procedure:** The sample consisted of teachers and principals from Estonian (174; 118), Finnish (82; 84), Swedish (117; 96) and Hungarian (111; 99) ECEC institutions. A rating scale was implemented.

**Findings:** Similarities could be found between the views of Finnish and Swedish teachers and principals and between those of Estonian and Hungarian teachers and principals. However, differences between the countries were significant and depended on the country context. The highest mean ratings were given by Estonian and Hungarian principals and Estonian teachers to creating a learning environment. The development of values was evaluated highest by Finnish principals and teachers. Swedish teachers evaluated teaching strategies highly. The statements with the lowest evaluations by all interest groups were family involvement and professional development.

### Cooperation between parents, teachers and centre heads

**Source:** Suur, S. and M. Veisson. 2012. "Teacher-Principal-Parent Understandings of Partnership in Early Childhood Education: A Comparative Study," In *Lifelong Learning and Teacher Development. Estonian Studies in Education*, edited by Jaan Mikk, Marika Veisson & Piret Luik: 58-77. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

**Aim:** Supported by the city of Tallinn, the aim of this study was to find out how cooperation between parents, teachers and centre heads can support children's learning and how the communication between these groups is organised.

**Procedure:** 465 teachers, 396 parents and 167 leaders responded to a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Questionnaires were anonymous and data protected.

**Findings:** Cooperation with parents supports children's development and a smooth transition to school if parents are involved in the organisation of learning process, developmental conversations and supporting the child's individual development at home. Similarities and differences between evaluations of parents, teachers and leaders are discussed. All parties value parents' meetings highly, as well as specific events and everyday communication with each other. Communication via a group list of parents and letters are not popular forms of communication.

### **Additional research activities**

Since 2014, Tallinn University has participated in the project *Professionalism and professionalism of teachers in changing society* (P.I. Professor I. Goodson 2013) funded by the Estonian Science Agency. This project aims to scrutinise how global changes and policy transformations and teachers' life histories have affected teachers' professionalism and professionalism in Estonia. As such the project has great potential for producing knowledge that has important practical implications, allowing increasing policy take-up and maximisation of teacher motivation and commitment, but also considerable international interest since relevant data from former communist countries is not available from previous studies.

## **8. General workforce issues**

### **8.1 Remuneration**

Teachers' salaries are related to the level of education and work experience.

During the transfer of ECEC institutions to municipal ownership, early childhood education teachers were the first in the educational system to feel the inequity in salaries. Article 27 of the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act (1999) stipulates: the remuneration of early childhood education teachers is defined by the local authorities and so far it has not been regulated by the State. Although the remuneration level of ECE teachers has been raised substantially, the differences between counties have remained. This is an indicator of society's attitudes and the low status attributed to the work in ECEC; such attitudes can influence the education of the next generation of citizens.

In the two largest cities, Tallinn and Tartu, and in a few smaller municipalities, early childhood education teachers' salaries are equal to those of primary school teachers. It is a decision made by the municipality governments. The aim is to pay equal salaries in all local governments, but the current reality is that ECE teachers' salaries are lower than those of primary school teachers. The new government in Estonia promised to enhance the salaries of all early childhood education teachers to equal those of primary teachers.

It is possible to live on this salary, but remuneration is not much more than a minimum wage (September 2017: 840€ in Estonia).

Directors' and head teachers' salaries are higher according to the posts of responsibility.

### **8.2 Full-time and part-time employment**

According to official statistics (Statistical Yearbook of Estonia 2015), most early childhood education teachers (95% in 2014) work full time (35 hours per week); only 5% work part time (up to 35 hours per week).

### **8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace**

Staff members are supported by the director and head teacher of the ECEC setting and by the local municipality, which organises courses for teachers and assistants. There are also seminars organised by the municipalities and counties. Many institutions participate in different projects. Novice teachers are guided by a mentor – an experienced member of staff in the ECEC centre - for one year.

The system of educational advisers and consultants is currently under development.



Evaluation is conducted in order to decide on the professional skills and professional competence of teachers and their level of qualification. The evaluation conditions and procedure are approved by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. Regular developmental assessments are held with teachers and assistants by the director or head teacher.

All teachers belong to the Teachers' Council of Preschool Institutions which has the task of analysing and assessing the learning and teaching provided in the ECEC setting and which submits proposals to the director, the board of trustees and the rural municipality or city government in order to improve the learning and teaching.

#### 8.4 Non-contact time

There is no non-contact time in the ECEC institutions in Estonia. Working hours are 35 hours per week and during this time, teachers work directly with the children. Children sleep after lunch and teachers can use this time for documentation.

#### 8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

In smaller municipalities there are sometimes shortages of teachers. Usually the teacher is required to have at least a Bachelor's degree. In case of shortages, however, an exception is sometimes made and students are hired. This decision is usually made by the director of the ECEC institution, and a work contract is usually signed for one year only.

In order to fill vacant teaching positions, the head teacher or other persons employed in the field of learning and teaching, or the director of the ECEC institution is required to organise a competition, the procedure for which needs to be approved by the board of trustees on the proposal of the director.

### 9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

- A major challenge is **to guarantee a place in an ECEC institution** for all children who need it, which will have repercussions for the staffing of ECEC. As from 2018, the Ministry of Education and Research will take on responsibility for settings previously under the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- **Extending research on early childhood education** issues is another challenge in Estonia. Researchers need more research grants from the Estonian Science Agency and Ministry of Education and Research, which have decided to give more responsibility to the universities to make decisions on how to use the research money and which studies will be granted.
- A further challenge is **to raise the status of early childhood education teachers** and find the funding to pay them on the same level as all other teachers. The status of ECE teachers in society demands a concerted effort at the levels of the profession, legislative policies and legal acts. Although all political parties declare the importance of early childhood education, their understanding of the content of early childhood education is quite different. Over the years, the prevailing majority of ECE teachers have done their professional job in the best possible way. They have been keen to learn and have valued education and learning. ECEC has a more meaningful role to fulfil in society today than we have thought so far. Estonian ECEC settings and teachers are dedicated promoters of a culture of education in our society (Torm, 2011). The Preschool Teachers' Union and Preschool Leaders' Association in Tartu and Tallinn have been successful.

- A final challenge is **to establish child-centred and play-based learning and teaching** in ECEC institutions. All universities and specialists who organise continuing education need to be aware of this. At present, younger teachers tend to be more open to these approaches than the more experienced teachers who received their education during the Soviet period, when early childhood education was much more teacher-centred.

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