

Quality Standards for ECCE (Draft)



MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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Approach and Structure of the document

This framework is illustrative of good practices, and identifies the key principles and indicators required for assuring quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services. Defining these standards will allow for the progress towards assessment, regulation and finally accreditation of ECCE provisions. The framework allows programmes to assess quality, and identify the possible lacunae that need to be addressed if quality ECCE is to be provided.

The document comprises of three separate but interlinked sections: the framework; the domain themes defining the standards of quality; and the assessment tools for grading and accreditation as a reference.

Section-1: The Quality Standards Framework

1.1 Preamble

The quality standards are being framed for ECCE centres across all sectors. These are applicable to all ECCE provisions that cater to children in the age range of 0-8 years, with initial focus on establishing standards for ECCE centres for 2-6 year olds. The services for 2-3 year olds will be offered by Crèche facilities. With the Right to Education Act, the services for children in the age group of 6-8 years would overlap with the primary education; therefore the early primary education will also need to consider the guidelines laid in the present document.

The quality standards adhere to the philosophy of integrated approach for holistic child development, of which education/ early stimulation is an integral part. The present framework is set in the context of the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy and National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education. It is informed by the National Curriculum Framework Position Paper on ECCE, 2005 and other national and international work on developing minimum specifications and quality standards for ECCE.

It lays down norms and standards relating *inter alia* to building and infrastructure; pupil- teacher interaction; learning experiences planned for children; parent involvement. The framework does not merely indicate the norms, but a systemic revamp that encompasses the vision of holistic child development opportunities for all children attending any kind of ECCE provision. The framework allows programmes to assess quality, and identify the possible lacunae that need to be addressed if quality care and education are to be provided.

This quality criterion states upfront the following non-negotiables which must be made available to all children attending any kind of ECCE provision:

- Duration of the ECCE programme should be 3-4 hours
- 1 classroom measuring 35 square meters for a group of 30 children and availability of 30 square meters of outdoor space for a group of 30 children
- The building should be structurally safe and within easy approach. It should be clean and should have surrounding green area
- Clean potable water should be available
- Separate toilets for girls and boys should be available
- Immediate health service in terms of First Aid/ Medical Kit should be available at the centre
- Adequate trained staff should be appointed
- There should be provision of adequate developmentally appropriate toys and learning materials
- Space should be allocated for cooking meals and nap time for children.

- The adult child ratio should be 1:20 for 3-6 year old children and 1:10 for under 3s.

It must be noted that these minimum standards/ non negotiables for any ECCE centre do not equate with quality services and ECCE Centres would be encouraged to exceed mere compliance with minimum standards and make continuous forward development on the domains specified in the quality standards.

1.2 Current Situation

At present, in India, as in many other countries, there is a great diversity in the nature of programmes available for ECCE. The number of players in the field is increasing; this multiplicity of service providers has led to diverse models of ECCE entering the field, bringing with them a multitude of philosophies of childhood and education, often without examining the cultural and contextual relevance of the models. However, there is no certain qualification for an individual to enter the field of ECCE, and there have hardly been any attempts made to lay down some guidelines to ensure that the ECCE services offered are of the right quality and serve the best interests of the young child. At times, many of these ECCE provisions are detrimental rather than being beneficial to the young child.

Therefore, it follows as a logical corollary to set some acceptable standards for ECCE in order to ensure improved quality across all the programmes and provisions available to the young children across the country.

1.3 Rationale

Standards and norms are crucial:

- To promote professionalism in the field
- To promote, reinforce and safeguard quality services for all young children
- For systematic development of this field

The purpose of the Quality Framework is to provide directives for areas known to be important for ensuring the optimum developmental opportunities for children. It also involves developing appropriate support mechanisms to ensure that quality is achieved and maintained.

1.4 Underlying Principles

The following principles form the cornerstones for the quality standards being laid in this document:

- **Developmentally/ age appropriate services:** Services and programmes for the children in the age group of 0 – 8 years have to be developed keeping in mind the developmental abilities .i.e. developmental domains, milestones and needs of the child.
- **Ensuring holistic development of children:** Pedagogies used in ECCE programmes should emphasize the holistic development of the young child, also keeping in mind the needs of special children. Both care and education are important, and the linkages between them need to be explored and drawn on. Interlinkages across domains should also be addressed as the domains of development are not exclusive to each other.
- **Relevant to the child's context:** The pedagogy should reflect the learning of the child in his/her context. Transactions should be based on understanding of the context of the child and the social background of the family.
- **Partnership with family and community:** It is important to recognize the family as the first context where learning and development for all children takes place. The family and parents are of paramount importance in the delivery of ECCE programmes and services. A harmonious relationship with positive linkages to the family and parents ensures that the best interests of the child are kept in mind for optimum development.
- **The centrality of the child's learning in the environment:** The child is an active agent in learning, and this has to be encouraged and facilitated in order to allow him/her to develop his/her full potential. The child should be free to make choices, explore and experiment, for which the child should be provided with such opportunities in the surroundings. The voices of the children, along with the voice of the special children, need to be listened to, in order to ensure that their interests are being met by the practitioners, researchers, teachers, professionals and various stakeholders.
- **Equity, Inclusion, Diversity:** Quality ECCE programmes should value and respect diversity of all kinds – cultural, linguistic, caste, gender, class, disability etc. Quality programmes should promote a sense of belonging among children from the varied Indian cultural heritage whether from high socio-economic strata or from low economic strata, abled group or disabled group. Programmes should embrace diversity by introducing variety of rich and varied experiences, thus allowing children to value and respect diversity.

The approach of Quality Standards is informed by the principle that quality is a multifaceted concept and its enhancement should be seen as a dynamic and a

continuous process and not an end in itself, wherein organisations move towards optimum by adopting a cumulative approach towards quality improvement. This would lead to continuous improvement in the services offered by centres in a manner that meets the needs of the young child. It is a tool to promote equitable quality. A graded approach is being adopted wherein the essential criteria will be laid down in a graded and weighted form.

1.5 Systemic Requirement

The 'quality standards' is not a standalone exercise. It is supported by an enabling environment, with genesis of associated National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy; National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education. It would also require an aligned system of supportive supervision; teacher education framework and professional support for ECCE personnel.

The quality systems and process for standards would be established under the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Council. National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Council would play a leading role in defining and promoting 'quality ECCE'. It will be a national organisation under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, with members selected from a range of sectors within the field of child development like Higher Learning Institutions; professionals and members from civil society for carrying out all the key activities in order to establish best practices and ensure consistently high standards of service. The Council would be the apex body to guide and oversee the implementation of the National ECCE Policy as well as advise and guide ECCE programmes, consistent with the National ECCE Policy/ legislations etc. The Council will be responsible for the external evaluation of the centres. The formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring will be established under the council. The Council will identify and train appropriately qualified and experienced people who can become quality advisors and accreditors. A support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards by ECCE providers, reflective practitioners will be developed.

1.6 Inputs and Process Specifications

The entire process comprises of three sub- processes i.e. quality configuration, the quality assessment, and the quality improvement process.

1.7 Accreditation

Accreditation is defined as a process by which a recognized community establishes standards for services. The standards are above the minimum regulatory

requirements of programmes and apply on a voluntary basis for evaluation against the standards and, if found to meet or surpass them, are granted a certificate of recognition.

Accreditation within the purview of this document is the evaluation of the quality of the infrastructure and processes that support ECCE practices and follows a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) methodology. In view of the same, a set of standards have been devised to ensure that all kinds of ECCE programmes run by public, private, civil society or any other bodies follows certain kind of quality. Based on these standards, the pre-schools are to be reviewed and then accredited by a national body. The focus is to move ahead from just the minimum standards to continuously strive towards higher standards.

1.8 Steps for Certification

The process of accreditation may take following steps for the certification:

- Establishment of a national registration system for all ECCE service providers wherein it would be mandatory for all ECCE Centres to register with the respective state authorities.
- Accreditation would be a self-selecting process and the first step for accreditation would involve an expression of interest by the practitioner to register with the National ECCE Council as an ECCE service provider. The programme would do a self-assessment, and go through a process of self-improvement based on the quality standards.

When they feel that they are ready, they request an external assessment by the National ECCE Council. The practitioner would fill the self-assessment tool and deposit along with supportive documents to the Council. The centres must comply with the requirements of the accreditation process and should fulfil the requirements related to each standard.

- This would be followed by an examination of the deposited form to verify the contents and assess if the practitioner follows the specifications and exists at least at Level 1 of the graded tool. In case it does, the team from the National ECCE Council will visit the ECCE centre for an inspection to ensure compliance with the regulations prescribed for assessment and accreditation. The valuers would visit the preschool; interview the teachers/caregivers, other staff and parents; and make observations.
- The visit of the inspecting team would lead to an analytical report on the basis of observation and analysis to arrive at an evaluation of the programme, which would then recommend accreditation or further improvements. A panel of experts would approve the accreditation. In case the practitioner does not

adhere to the laid standards, the practitioner would be provided with supportive supervision and guiding material to adopt the standards and reapply within a time period of three months. If the practitioner fails to do so, it would have to put in a fresh application. A predetermined follow-up procedure will be implemented consistently.

- The National ECCE Council will establish multidisciplinary support teams and develop guiding material and best practices publication for mentoring the ECCE programmes to become quality service providers.
- Annual evaluation and periodic reviews would be taken up on cyclic basis.

Appropriate mechanisms would be evolved and adopted for certification, adherence to the quality standards and handling violations.

1.9 Challenges:

- Enforcement in private and voluntary sector.
- No legal implication of not adhering to the quality standards.

Section 2: Quality Standards

The quality standards form the core of the present framework. Eight key domains defining the standards are proposed herewith, along with components under each domain for further unpacking of the details within each standard. The assessment tool will further have critical areas under each component that make quality criteria measureable and assessable, to make the quality standards operational.

The ECCE centres will be assessed and granted weighted grades according to the components of the quality standard domains.

Standard I: Interaction

- Teacher/Adult- child interaction
- Child - child
- Child – environment/material
- Staff- family Interaction
- Intra staff

Standard II: Health nutrition, personal care and routine

- Health (check-up, first aid, immunization, handling illness)
- Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Habit formation

Standard III: Protective Care and Safety

- Adult supervision
- Socio/Emotional protection
- Physical safety

Standard IV: Infrastructure/ physical environment

- Space, building, outdoors (size, ventilation, light, disabled friendly)
- Aesthetics , cleanliness, green area
- Safety and approach
- Water facility
- Toilet facility

Standard V: Organisation and Management

- Programme philosophy and methods
- Documentation and records
- Programme planning
- Parent involvement
- Financial management(fee, salary, fund allocation)

- Staffing(adequacy, professional qualifications, professional development opportunities, reflective practitioners)

Standard VI: Children experiences and learning opportunities

- Provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation
- Encourage child to make choices and participate in play
- Foster child's language and literacy abilities
- Develop problem solving and mathematical abilities
- Promote each child's physical abilities
- Nurture development and maintenance of relationships
- Cultivate enjoyment of and participation in expressive arts

Standard VII: Assessment and outcome measures

- Assessment methods
- Assessment reporting
- Facilitating development through assessment
- Staff assessment and development
- Programme assessment (staff meeting, parent feedback)

Standard VIII: Managing to support quality System

- Teacher education and on site professional development, opportunity for capacity building at all administrative levels, career path for the staff
- Monitoring and supportive supervision
- Research

Section 3: The Assessment Tool

The assessment tool applicable across all ECCE programmes will be developed through a consultative process. Some existing tools enlisted below will be placed for discussion. The most suitable tool may be adopted/ adapted and then validated in the field across different ECCE settings.

- Programme Evaluation Package, World Bank
- Tamil Nadu Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, developed by M S Swaminathan Research Foundation
- Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University, Delhi
- Accreditation Tools by branches of Indian Association of Preschool Education
- Balwadi Environment Observation Rating Scale (BEORS), Mobile Crèches