



THE DANISH ECEC SYSTEM

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AGENDA

- › Organisational system of ECEC Denmark
- › ECEC educators qualification requirements
- › Bachelor of social education and competence areas, and qualification as pedagogical assistants
- › Danish innovative ECEC trends
- › Summary – in relation to VALUE.



ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM OF ECEC

National purpose and goals of preschool are reflected in organizational structures of preschool education and care. Sense and meaning are set up at the national level through the required level of education of the ECEC professionals.

In Denmark the ECEC system includes an integrated system – children from 0-8 years and not split as in other countries.

The ECEC system is governed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (State). The responsibility of implementation of the national curriculum are placed at the municipality level.

The Danish policy and professional development systems (pre-service and in-service) are aimed at strengthening educational attainment and competence development among ECEC staff in order to lead to improved professional competences in meeting new demands and challenges.

Newest demand at a legal level is “Ny styrket læreplan” (2018) focusing on an educare approach.



INTRODUCTORY SNAPSHOT

- › There are more public ECEC providers than non-public providers for institutions that provide ECEC to both younger children (up to two years old) and older children (three to five years old), though the difference is fairly balanced:
- › 64% (183 settings) of settings for the younger children and
- › 67% (1052 settings) for older children are governed by public authorities.
- › The total number of institutions for children up to two years old (284 settings) is significantly lower than for the older children (1578 settings).

(Data from 2015)



INTRODUCTORY SNAPSHOT

- › In terms of the youngest children, under one year of age, less than one-fifth attend ECEC settings (19%).
- › Regarding children between one and two years of age, the situation is significantly different, as over 90% of children are enrolled in the ECEC system.
- › For three- to five-year-olds, the attendance rate is slightly higher (97%).
- › In total, in 2013 almost all children from between the ages of one and five were enrolled in some type of ECEC setting (94%).

(Data from 2015)



ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › The term *pædagog* in Denmark refers to a specific profession.
- › By taking a degree in social education, students become pedagogues, a position that includes work with “development and care assignments within the following areas: children and young people (including working in day nurseries, day care centres, preschool classes, recreation centres/school-based leisure time facilities, after-school clubs, 24-hour service institutions);
- › Institutions for children, young people and adults with reduced psychological or physical capacities; adults with social problems (homelessness, substance abuse, psychological disorders); family institutions; and child and youth psychiatric hospitals.

ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › Additionally, the education leads to qualification for working in the field of crime prevention in neighbourhoods, for example, as well as working within the Prison and Probation Service (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2014).
- › The term *preschool teacher* here refers to educated staff working in ECEC day cares.
- › The term *pedagogical assistant* refers to staff that are not educated at a bachelor's degree level.



ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › The legal framework in Denmark makes no stipulations in terms of mandatory qualification requirements for those working in day cares for children up to the age of six, whether centre-based or home-based.
- › Municipalities are required to ensure day care staff have the “necessary” qualifications regarding ECEC provisions as part of the task of quality assurance and monitoring, but these requirements are not further stipulated and are the responsibility of each Danish municipality.



ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › Day care providers receive funding based on the number of enrolled children, and they are then responsible for ensuring that expenditure, including the total salary bill, does not exceed the allotted amount.
- › There can be considerable local variation.
- › Salaries are tied to collective agreements based on qualification level and experience; hence, in basic terms, providers must choose between employing fewer, but more highly educated staff, or a greater number of less-educated staff.

ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Despite differences, centre-based day cares in Denmark, whether settings specifically for:

- younger children (*vuggestuer* for zero- to two-year-olds),
 - older children (*børnehaver* for three- to six-year-olds)
 - or age-integrated settings (*aldersintegrerede institutioner* for children between zero and six) –
- › are likely to employ a mixture of staff with different educational levels: preschool teachers (*pædagog*) and assistants (*pædagogmedhjælper*).
- › Employment as a preschool teacher requires a bachelor's degree
- › There are no qualification requirements for assistants, although those with specific vocational childcare qualifications as a pedagogical assistant (*pædagogisk assistentuddannelse -PAU*) are placed at a higher pay grade.

ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

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- › Municipalities are required to ensure day care staff have the “necessary” qualifications regarding ECEC provisions as part of the task of quality assurance and monitoring, but these requirements are not further stipulated and are the responsibility of each Danish municipality.
- › With the new Legislation (Ny Styrket Læreplan, 2018) professional development courses are offered (financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs).



ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › Turning to home-based day care, there are no mandatory national qualification standards, although local authorities may require the completion of various courses.
- › Educated pedagogues fulfill a supervisory and supporting role within home-based day cares.
- › Qualification as a pedagogue is mandatory for those working in school reception classes (six-year-olds).
- › Similarly, the first three primary school grades (between the ages of seven and nine) are taught by qualified teachers, but pedagogues may perform certain tasks and play a supportive role.



ECEC EDUCATORS' QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- › In terms of longer courses leading to formal qualifications (master's and diploma programmes), courses are offered at institutions of higher education, primarily the university colleges also responsible for pre-service training.
- › Participants pay for their studies, although employers may cover some or all costs.



QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

TWO QUALIFICATION LEVELS

There are two primary qualification levels within the field of ECEC: preschool teacher and pedagogical assistant. The first result in a qualification as a bachelor of social education, requiring three years and a half of study at a university college. Entry requirements are one of the following:

- A general upper secondary diploma;
- Vocational training as a social and health care assistant as well as certain subject-specific requirements;
- Specific upper secondary level qualifications in the following subjects: Danish, English, social studies, and one other;
- Vocational training as pedagogical assistant as well as certain subject-specific requirements.



BACHELOR OF SOCIAL EDUCATION, REQUIRING THREE YEARS AND A HALF OF STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

- > Students need to develop not only knowledge and skills regarding ECEC, but also meet general and specific competence goals related to the field of ECEC in day care (Reform from 2014).
- > These competence goals are related to an educator's ability to use theoretical knowledge and experience-based skills in practice.
- > It is required that educators work with reflection, planning and implementing theoretical knowledge into practice.

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL EDUCATION, REQUIRING THREE YEARS AND A HALF OF STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

As expressed in the reform, the competence goals in the common part of the pre-service education are to apply some basic professional competences that provide teachers with the skills to support and facilitate development, learning, personal wellbeing, citizenship and intellectual growth for children, adolescents and adults.

The competence areas are:

- > 1) pedagogical environments and activities;
- > 2) profession and society; and
- > 3) social education in practice – first practicum period.

In addition, educators choose a specialisation in order to work within ECEC, called day care education.



COMPETENCE AREAS

Degree holders who complete the specialisation of special education have the competences to be employed within the field of pedagogical work for zero- to five-year-olds.

They have particular competences to conceive of and develop pedagogical environments and activities in which optimal conditions are created on the basis of a professional, pedagogical foundation, used towards a stimulating and safe life for children.

A new reform (2018) based on and educare approach has become more apparent.

COMPETENCE AREAS – AND EDUCARE

- › Competence areas in this part of the educational curriculum are:
 - › 1) childhood, culture and learning;
 - › 2) profession and organisation;
 - › 3) professional relations and communication – second practicum period;
 - › 4) cooperation and development – third practicum period.
- › This area aims at the inclusion of culture, nature and aesthetic forms of expression in pedagogical activities that support children's development, intellectual growth and learning.



COMPETENCE AREAS – EDUCARE AND COOPERATION

- › The professional competence goals (for working with children aged zero to five) are that the educator is able to utilise nature, as well as cultural media and forms of expression to create developmental and learning processes, and furthermore incorporate the perspectives of children into play and pedagogical activities.
- › The second area aims at the organisational conditions for professional, pedagogical practice, including cooperation with parents, volunteers and other professions.
- › And the competence goals are that the student can reflect, assess, explain and qualify pedagogical work on the basis of the organisational and professional conditions.



COMPETENCE AREAS – EDUCARE, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

- › The third area, professional relations and communication – the second practicum period – aims at relational work, interaction and communication in pedagogical practice with zero- to five-year-old children, including the significance of children’s diverse life conditions with respect to wellbeing, relationships and communication.
- › The competence goals in this area are that the student knows how to create relationships with individual children and with whole groups of children, can support the children when they are making relationships with each other, can support the development of children’s communicative competences, can master professional communication and can reflect on their own abilities to communicate and form relationships.

COMPETENCE AREAS – EDUCARE PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING

- › Lastly, the fourth competence area of cooperation and development and third practicum period aim at systematic and knowledge-based reflection upon and contribution to development and innovation within pedagogical practice.
- › The competence goals within this area are that the student must be able to plan, implement, document and evaluate activities and learning processes in a focused way that supports children's wellbeing, learning, intellectual growth and development.
- › In this context, the student must be able to challenge existing practice in professional terms, to look for and assess alternative options and to contribute to the development of pedagogical practice. The course includes this in all four practical internship periods.



QUALIFICATION AS PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANT

- › Qualification as a pedagogical assistant is part of the upper-secondary vocational education and training system.
- › The course alternates between periods at college and workplace internships.
- › Those with work experience within childcare can receive credit transfers for internship periods and thereby substantially reduce the course length. In terms of entry requirements for training as a pedagogical assistant, the course is currently open to anyone who has completed compulsory lower-secondary education.
- › From 2015, however, minimum requirements will be introduced regarding grades in the subjects of mathematics and Danish.



QUALIFICATION AS PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANT

- › Note that, as stated above, qualification as a pedagogical assistant is not mandatory for employment in an assistant position. In some cases, the course will be taken as in-service training by those already employed in such positions, while continuing to work part-time, with the support of their employer.
- › A qualification as a pedagogical assistant also offers an alternative entry route to the pedagogue education for those without a general upper-secondary diploma.
- › More information is available in Danish at <https://www.ug.dk/uddannelser/erhvervsuddannelser/den-paedagogiske-assistentuddannelse>

QUALIFICATION AS PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANT – FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

- › Educated pedagogues have received a comprehensive education concerning ECEC and have a strong professional identity, both internally and within society.
- › However, a substantial number of those working in day care centres have no particular qualifications for work with young children.
- › While vocational training as a pedagogical assistant has been available since 2008, a study from 2013 indicated relatively low employment levels following graduation.
- › It would seem clear that further efforts are necessary to increase awareness of the professional profile of qualified assistants if they are to replace (cheaper) assistants and thereby raise the overall qualification levels of those working with young children in response to a growing focus on quality within ECEC.
- › Available in Danish at <https://www.lfs.dk/8826>.

SOME DANISH ECEC TRENDS

- ECEC settings / contexts with a well-developed tradition of innovative CPD in some ECEC settings in Denmark are characterised by staff who are empowered to provide and expand on quality ECEC, renewed practices and/or emphasising data use on child outcomes (well-being, learning, inclusion).
- This happens when professionals work in a context of change towards creative and critical thinking with fellow professionals. This is often self-governed (institutional/municipal) (bottom-up approach), few have centralised standards.
- Coordination and leadership at all levels are key to any innovation in CPD

REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVITY

- Critical reflection, **the question of ‘why’ (to-do) within communities of practice** rather than merely ‘how’ and ‘what’ comes to the fore.
 - Reflection and the relationship to ‘learning by doing’ holds enormous potential for innovation and professional learning in CPD since reflection is what can lead to the continuous renewal of ECEC strategies and practice.
- Reflection and reflexivity in the Danish ECEC context often also include the implementation of knowledge into everyday practices, critical reflection on setting goals, improving best practices in staff groups and developing competences to work together innovatively together towards collaborative learning and organisational change.
- This happens as e.g. in the Danish TOT within in e.g. learning laboratories, where staff set goals for change and in the former VIDA project (2010-2013).

INNOVATION AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

- › Communities of practice are identified as increasingly important in promoting a culture of collaboration and co-creation, evaluation and critical reflection as the foundation for ongoing innovation and creativity in CPD in Danish ECEC.
- › They represent ‘democratic’ participatory approaches in professional development work that would also nurture critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on questions such as “what is quality practice”.
- › The goal in these ECEC institutions is to establish working communities which are competent and where individuals work is made transparent for different collaborations.

TACKLING INEQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Innovations in CPD targeting social inequality and diversity are approached in **two different ways in the Danish ECEC context** :

- I. As part of communities of practice and special interest networks – a community and system level – in a context where democratic participatory CPD tackling society's social challenges is the tradition and take departure in bottom-up approaches to CPD (e.g. VALUE in Denmark)
- II. As a specifically designed CPD-based intervention, with a combination of CPD and social innovation based on exploratory design and change laboratories – interrelation between a top-down and bottom-up approach moving from a deficit- to resource-oriented thinking on disadvantage (e.g. VIDA).

IN SUMMARY

- › Regarding resources for in-service training and further professional development, there are no formal frameworks in Denmark but in practice there are standards set by local authorities. Standards differ between pre-service and in-service and also differ between the roles of ECEC workers (bachelor and assistants).
- › However in spite of growing awareness of the sense and meaning of innovative ECEC also in relation to a new legal framework, several institutions claim that the resources does not meet the requirements set.
- › Especially in relation to a new initiative (Ny styrket læreplan) – aimed at improving children’s care, well-being and learning through improved learning environments (Educare approach) huge new professional competence requirements are set.
- › At a policy level resources are translated into continuous professional development – and management will be strengthened,



THANK YOU!

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