

Part 2

According to Reed *et al.* (2012) quality assurance in early years provision involves systematic processes and practices to ensure that the care and education provided meet high standards. Studies by Cable *et al.* (2012) and Eadie *et al.*, (2022) claim practitioners and settings regularly evaluate their practices to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Nutbrown (2018) believes It is widely acknowledged that providing high-quality education in the early years is essential for children's development. Studies have demonstrated that quality early childhood care and education have a positive effect on children's long-term outcomes, such as academic success, social abilities, and emotional health (Eadie *et al.*, 2022 and Reed *et al.* 2012).

Welsh Governments (2022) Curriculum for Wales in non-maintained settings aims to provide high-quality early years' education in Wales. The curriculum framework includes four purposes, helping children become ambitious learners, creative contributors, ethical citizens, and healthy individuals. It covers six areas of learning and experience and five developmental pathways, focusing on child development. The pedagogy emphasis play-based learning and outdoor learning. Ališauskienė *et al.*, (2023) and Eadie *et al.*, (2022) say quality assurance in settings involves self-evaluation and improvement using tools like audits and feedback from parents and children.

Quality and Safety Framework by Welsh Government (2021) are strategic tools used to improve early years provision, ensuring that settings meet and exceed the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for regulated childcare. Welsh Government (2023) are designed to address specific areas identified during self-evaluation or external inspections by bodies like Estyn (2024) or the Care Inspectorate Wales (2024). They provide a structured approach to making improvements in practice and outcomes, aligning with the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2024) Framework. Quality and Safety Framework consist of assessment and identification, action planning, implementation and monitoring, and review and evaluation. The NMS for regulated childcare in Wales set the baseline for the quality of care and education for children up to 12 of Welsh Government (2023). According to Abbott and Langston (2004) and Eadie *et al.*, (2022) by implementing these

strategies early years settings in Wales can ensure high-quality care and education that supports children's overall development and prepares them for future learning.

Ališauskienė et al., (2023) and Early Years Coalition (2021) claims that observation, focussing on the child, and establishing a rapport are the first steps in effective practice. Understanding children's interests, growth, and learning as well as making plans for the future are subsequently supported by professionally informed knowledge of child development. Zubrzycka-Maciąg (2024) emphasizes the significance of involving the child, parents, caregivers, and other professionals in the educational process. It is important for children to participate in decisions related to their own education from a young age. As stated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to express their views and have those views considered (UNICEF, 2018).

High-quality early education is vital in preparing children for school by fostering key skills and behaviors. Research by Nutbrown (2018) indicates that children who engage in high-quality early learning programs are more likely to succeed academically and socially throughout their education.

The benefits of quality early education also extend beyond academic achievement. Children who attend such programs tend to have higher graduation rates, pursue higher education, and achieve better employment outcomes in adulthood. Moreover, assessment tools like the Leuven Scale, which use observational methods, are valuable in understanding and addressing each child's unique learning needs. This personalised approach allows educators to adjust their teaching strategies to support individual strengths and areas for growth.

In conclusion, ensuring young children have access to high-quality early learning environments is vital for their immediate and future development. It provides a strong foundation for their long-term success and well-being (Bruce et al., 2020).

Eadie et al. (2022) argue that access to high-quality early childhood education, such as the Effective Early Learning (EEL) Project and the Leuven Scale, is essential for various reasons. High-quality early learning environments foster children's cognitive

and social development. Research indicates that children who participate in high-quality early education programs exhibit improved language, math, and social skills (Slot, 2018). Ferdman (2021) emphasizes that inclusivity and diversity are crucial for creating environments that respect and value differences, promoting equity and fostering a sense of belonging for all individuals.

Firstly, The Effective Early Learning (EEL) project is a professional development program aimed at improving the quality of early childhood education and care (Pascal and Bertram, 1997). The EEL Project was initiated in 1993 by researchers at the centre for research in early childhood at University College Worcester, led by Professor Christine Pascal and Dr. Tony Bertram. Pascal and Bertram (2018) explain how it focuses on self-evaluation and improvement for early years settings, ensuring high-quality learning experiences for young children. The aim of the EEL Project is to evaluate and improve the quality and effectiveness of early learning experiences. Support and validate self-evaluation processes externally and enhance the skills and expertise of early years practitioners. Basic training lasts three days and is funded by local authorities. Practitioners can also become accredited EEL trainers after additional training. Emotionally Healthy Schools (2019) says the project uses a model of quality evaluation and development to ensure consistent and high standards across different settings.

Pascal and Bertram (2018) explain the EEL Project has been implemented in various local authorities across the UK, as well as in the Netherlands and Portugal. It has significantly contributed to the development of early childhood education by providing a structured approach to quality improvement. The EEL Project employs specific tools to assess the quality of early learning environments. The child involvement scale measures the level of engagement and involvement of children in their learning activities (Teaching Expertise, 2013).

Studies by Formosinho et al., (2016) believe the adult engagement scale assesses the quality of interactions between adults and children, focusing on how adults support and facilitate children's learning.

The project emphasizes both research and practical application. The research involves rigorous and systematic evaluation of early learning settings to gather empirical data

on their quality and effectiveness and the findings from the research are used to develop and refine the evaluation and improvement procedures, ensuring they are practical and effective for various settings (Teaching Expertise, 2013).

Formosinho et al., (2016) says the EEL Project aligns with national and international standards for early childhood education, ensuring that the quality of early learning experiences is consistently high. It provides guidance for practitioners on observing, assessing, recording, and reporting children's progress, aiming for more coherent and consistent approaches.

Secondly, The Leuven Scale, developed by Ferre Laevers and his team at Leuven University, is a five-point scale used to measure children's emotional well-being and involvement in learning activities (Main, 2021).

According to Main (2021) and Nutbrown (2018) the scale helps practitioners assess children's emotional well-being, which is crucial for their overall development.

Children who feel confident and at ease are more likely to engage productively in learning activities. By measuring involvement, the scale identifies how deeply children are engaged in their activities. Haartsen, Jones and Johnson, (2016) state that high levels of involvement are associated with deep, meaningful learning and development.

Learning Journals (2025) says that the Leuven Scale is based on meaningful observations, placing the child at the centre of learning. Ephgrave (2020) and Haartsen, Jones and Johnson (2016) claim this approach aligns with research suggesting that observation-based instructions are highly effective in early years' education.

The scale provides clear indicators for practitioners to identify and support children who may need additional emotional or educational assistance (Main, 2021).

By focusing on emotional well-being and involvement, the scale encourages the creation of a supportive and nurturing learning environment, including the outdoors which according to Kiviranta (2024) outdoor learning in early years promotes physical development, creativity, social skills, and a connection to nature while enhancing cognitive growth and resilience which is beneficial for children's development.

Unfortunately, there are disadvantages of the Leuven Scale. Firstly, the assessment relies heavily on the observer being the practitioner's judgments, which can introduce subjectivity and variability in the results. This might be from lack of experience according to Learning Journals (2021) and MacRae and Jones (2020).

Secondly, Implementing the scale requires time and effort from practitioners to conduct thorough observations and assessments, which can be tricky, and practitioners need adequate training to use the scale effectively, which can be a barrier for some settings due to costing (Learning Journals, 2021 and MacRae and Jones, 2020).

Lastly, Children at moderate levels of emotional well-being and involvement might be overlooked, as they appear to be "getting on fine" but may still need support to reach optimal levels. Therefore, The Leuven Scale offers valuable insights into children's emotional well-being and involvement, promoting a positive and supportive learning environment. However, it requires careful implementation and training to mitigate subjectivity and ensure accurate assessments (Learning Journals, 2021, MacRae and Jones, 2020 and Haartsen, Jones and Johnson, 2016).

According to the studies of Haartsen, Jones and Johnson (2016) and Pascal and Bertram (2018) there are several similarities between the Leuven Scale and the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project. Watson and Fawcett (2016) claims both are designed to improve the quality of early childhood education by focusing on key aspects of children's development and learning environments.

The Leuven Scale Measures children's emotional well-being and involvement, placing the child at the centre of the assessment (Haartsen, Jones and Johnson, 2016) whereas the EEL Project Emphasis self-evaluation and improvement of educational practices, focusing on the quality of learning experiences for children (Pascal and Bertram, 2018).

Watson and Fawcett (2016) studies say The Leuven Scale utilise meaningful observations to assess children's emotional well-being and involvement, and EEL project encourages practitioners to conduct self-evaluations based on observations of their educational practices and interactions with children.

According to Learning Journals (2025) the Leuven Scale Promotes a positive learning environment by ensuring children feel confident and engaged and the EEL project aims to improve the quality of early learning settings, creating supportive and nurturing environments for children.

Additionally, according to Learning Journals (2025) The Leuven Scale uses a five-point scale to systematically assess emotional well-being and involvement, and the EEL Project Provides a structured framework for self-evaluation and improvement.

Both impact on child development, which is critical, the Leuven Scale supports high levels of emotional well-being and involvement are associated with deep, meaningful learning and development and the EEL project improves educational practices leading to better learning outcomes and overall development for children (Nursery World, 2012).

The theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, as cited by Guy-Evans (2024), highlights the various environments that shape a child's development, such as family, school, and community. Similarly, theories like those proposed by Abraham Maslow, referenced by McLeod (2024), focus on the holistic development of individuals and the importance of self-actualization. These theories underscore the necessity of a supportive and nurturing learning environment. By creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere where every child feels valued and supported, their learning experience can be significantly enhanced. This involves building strong relationships between staff and children, as well as fostering secure attachments, which McGarvie (2024) notes are crucial, as these emotional connections profoundly influence children's development.

Additional studies have explored various methods to promote quality in early childhood education. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) investigated Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (EPEY) and found that effective pedagogy balances adult-led group work with freely chosen play activities, with sustained shared thinking being key to strong adult-child interactions. A 2019 follow-up study by Siraj-Blatchford emphasised the importance of ongoing training and professional qualifications for childcare staff, which enhances their practice and understanding. Pascal and Bertram (2018) support these findings and stress the importance of focusing on

children's emotional and educational needs, while also calling for further research in this area.

Another study by Rudoe' (2020) study examines the concept of 'quality' in early years' education, highlighting the importance of context, diversity, and individualized approaches to learning, and challenging the dominant neoliberal discourse that prioritizes standardization and regulation. The study concludes that the concept of 'quality' in early years education is complex and contested, and that practitioners' understandings of 'quality' provision are shaped by their values, beliefs, and practices, and that a child-centered approach that prioritizes individualized progress, professional skills, and children's wellbeing is essential for high-quality provision.

The study by Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram (2018) highlights that the Effective Early Learning (EEL) framework emphasizes developing children's social and emotional competencies, such as self-esteem, assertiveness, and resilience, to foster effective learners with a sense of agency. The EEL program embraces a democratic, participatory method for evaluating and improving the quality of early childhood services, with an emphasis on child well-being, engagement, and learning attitudes. It underscores the need for continuous improvement in early learning environments, particularly in enhancing teaching quality and the learning atmosphere. The authors argue that a person-centred approach to early childhood education is essential for fostering social and emotional development, as well as for building a more democratic and inclusive society.

To conclude, according to Aubrey (2011) and Cook (2013) Continuous Professional Development (CPD) ensures staff are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills. Regular monitoring of child progress and feedback mechanisms helps ensure each child receives the support they need. External inspections, such as Estyn Inspections, ensure compliance with statutory requirements and assess the quality of provision (Eadie et al., 2022).

NO AI used.

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