

The Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF) (2020) has been introduced as part of the contract reform in 2019, it replaces the Quality and Outcome Framework (QOF), which was originally introduced as part of the new GMS contract in 2004. Quality Assurance plays an essential part throughout Early Years Provisions, the scheme is designed to promote and ensure the highest quality experiences of care, play and education while encouraging childcare settings to reflect and evaluate their practise (Childcare Partnerships, no date). According to Early Years Careers (no date) high quality settings have the biggest impact on children, enabling them to reach their fullest potential while supporting them to reach high level development. In order to ensure children are kept safe and cared for appropriately childcare settings for children up to the age of 12 must be registered, regulated and inspected regular by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) (Welsh Government, 2019). Early Years Wales is a national third sector organization which provides support for pre-school settings across Wales, the Quality for All (QfA) scheme was developed in 2011, the scheme aims to provide a consistent approach to demonstrate quality across childcare settings for all children. The scheme is typically measured via a completion of a self-assessment evaluation form followed by an assessment of practise. The assessment looks at two main aspects including the ownership, leadership and management and the environment, quality of care and children's learning, play and wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2019). The National Minimum Standards (NMS) are designed to provide help to childcare settings to meet the regulations associated with registered childcare provision. The Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspects all childcare settings on behalf of the Welsh Government in line with regulations, the National Minimum Standards, and their own inspection framework (Welsh Government 2019). The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework (2014) (cited in Department of Education, 2021) sets standards to ensure that children's learning and development needs are met accordingly, children are kept safe and healthy while also ensuring children have the knowledge and skills set they need to start school, this set of standards is set to all early years providers including schools, childminders, childcare settings an out of school providers.

Quality standards in a childcare setting consists of many elements and according to Finding Quality Childcare (2007) the overall element consists of the children's well-being, health, safety and good hygiene along with good nutrition, a well maintained

environment for the children to learn and play and a adequate number of staff to child ratio. Through the eyes of a young child a high-quality programme may include feeling a sense of belonging regardless of their ability, background, or culture, making positive relationships with friends and practitioners while also being emotionally and physically supported and comforted. Similarly, Waterford (2022) states that a nurturing environment encourages confident learning and development along with enabling environments, ensuring that the physical environment is safe and age-appropriate resources are made available indoors and outdoors. However, through the eyes of a parent good-quality settings may include safeguarding the child's health and safety while remaining affordable and conveniently located. Many parents define a high-quality childcare as achieving school readiness, promotion of social skills and happiness of their child within a positive environment (Finding Quality Childcare (2007). Recent research conducted by First 5 (2016) using Quality Matters rating criteria and framework reveal that there are 7 main aspects to consider when understanding what a high-quality setting is, these include:

1. Practitioner to child interactions, positive interaction between staff and child.
2. Practitioner to child ratio and group size - explaining that small group sizes seem to have the best outcomes.
3. Adequate learning activities including a variety of resources which are age appropriate.
4. Knowledgeable practitioners who are nurturing, friendly and welcoming.
5. An enabling environment with plenty of resources, well-kept routine, and a clean, safe area for the children to play, learn and eat.
6. Learning development to ensure children's needs are met accordingly.
7. A well-structured programme which places the children at the heart ensuring learning needs are met.

Quality Matters (2022) (cited in quality child care matters, 2022) argue that high quality childcare is the new benchmark of early childcare and education, children who receive higher quality care achieve positive outcomes academically, behaviourally and socially than children who receive a lower quality care which can have negative effects on the child's language, social and academic development. Quality in the early years is said to lays the foundation for future success, quality care is linked to brain development for social development for infants and toddlers. High quality programmes excel in all areas of care including ensuring the child is

kept safe, healthy and nurtured while in a stimulating environment which supports and promotes all areas of each child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

The Baby Effective Early Learning Programme (BEEL) (2006) acknowledges the importance of quality during a childcare setting, according to BEEL there is an improvement process beyond the National Minimum Standards, the intention of the BEEL programme is to provide settings with the means to capture the essence of quality in the practise, explore how individuals at the setting child and or parents perceive the quality provided by the setting and to plan specific improvements of quality. BEEL express how they perceive the National Minimum Standards as a baseline for which setting begin their quality journey. Reading Rockets (no date) explain how preschool programmes are typically rated on two dimensions of quality, process and structure. Observations are carried on the interactions, activities, materials, learning opportunities and health and safety while the second dimension is rated on the structural quality which includes group sizing, staff to child ratios and the training and qualifications of the practitioners at the setting. The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) (Cited in Reading Rockets, no date) has been used widely across early education research to measure the process of quality, the revised edition consists of 43 items organised within seven areas of centre-based care for children aged between 2.5 and 5 years. The areas include, personal care routines, space and furnishings, language-reading, interaction, activities, programme structure, and parent partnerships. The areas have detailed descriptions and are rated between 1-7 with 1 being inadequate and 7 being excellent. Typically when activity and interaction ratings are at a higher-level children develop more advanced language and mathematic ability as well as social skills in comparison to children who attend a poor-quality setting which is said to be linked to increased behavioural problems. Furthermore, the benefits in cognitive and social development in early childhood care typically is carried throughout the education process into adult hood. Siraj-Blatchford *et al*, (2002) (cited in Foundation Years. 2015) quality research explains Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study recommend adults to have a warm, responsive relationship with the children, high quality interactions including sustain shared thinking, practitioners to set clear educational goals and parents to be supported and involved with children's learning and development as much as possible. The Sustained Shared Thinking and

Emotional well-being (SSTEWS) Scales for 2-5 years olds provision is being used in the Study of Early Educational Development (SEED) research looking at the quality of provision and practice related to Sustained Shared Thinking and the Emotional well-being of children, the focus is on how practitioners support children's language for thinking and social emotional wellbeing. The crucial message that children's early learning is secured through their personal, social, and emotional development. The SSTEWS scale builds on the Assessing Quality in the Early Years: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale" ("ECERS-E") which is an instrument for measuring quality in literacy, numeracy, science, and diversity as observable in childcare settings in addition to children's cognitive social, and behavioural development outcomes for children aged 3-5 years of age.

According to Early Years Careers (2016a) an important attribute to obtain a high-quality standard of the setting is good parent partnerships between the practitioner and the parents of the children who attend the setting, parents undoubtedly know their child the best so good communication via staff and parents is important to ensure the child is looked after according to their needs. Positive parent partnerships is said by Early Years Careers (2016b) to improve the quality of practise and overall outcomes for the children as this ensures children's needs are met to the highest possible standard. Similarly, PACEY (2022) state that positive parent partnerships is central to the Early Years in the National Minimum Standards for Registered Childcare (NMS). PACEY (2020) suggest that building positive relationships often consists of involving and communicating with the parent as much as possible, a way to do this is via a learning journal or a daily diary which keeps the parent up to date with their child's learning development and daily routine or activities. Teach Early Years (no date) agree and state that the most effective way to communicate is via a diary which keeps parents informed about their children while also providing the opportunity to communication channel between the parents and the setting, however for many years nursery settings have created diary's in paper form but given the shift in technology and the current digital age in the 21st century settings are now moving away from paper and using applications which can be downloaded on smart phones and IOS software. Modernised applications such as Famly (no date) are currently being introduced to settings all across the UK, the app provides real time updates of the children along with photos, videos, messaging forum which is private between

the setting staff and the parent and much more. Estyn (2019) (cited in Nursery resources, 2019) explain how the key to a successful Early Years' experience where expectations of learning development are reached is typically when the parent partnership is strong. Childcare settings are where children develop their social skills, prepare for the transition to school while also growing and learning in an enabling environment, this is where the communication with the parents or caregivers is essential.

In conclusion, high-quality childcare programmes are more likely to provide positive learning outcomes and development for children which leads to successful futures throughout childhood and adult life. During a variety of inspection documents carried out by the CSSIW high-quality settings saw that children were happier and content while reaching their educational expectations for their ages, however, often childcare settings were chosen by the caregiver on the location or price of service rather than the level of quality at the setting.

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