

ECEY6011 Part 2

According to Moss (2016), quality is a choice and is not a necessity and that the choice can improve quality by adopting particular situations, values and beliefs. Quality is also the consistent achievement of a services expectations (Hayes, 2021).

Eadie et al. (2022) quotes 'Quality in early childhood education and care is conceptualised in three domains: structural, process and system'. This quote meaning that quality in the early years is seen in 3 different ways. Structural quality is concerned with the learning environment, the qualifications that professionals hold, learning frameworks to guide programmes and practice and supports to build learning opportunities at home. Process quality is concerned with children's experiences within early childhood education and care (ECEC) with a focus on pedagogy and teaching strategies, interactions between practitioner and child, programmes, curricula and learning interventions and social-emotional support. Lastly, system quality is concerned with the Government and regulatory standards and the level of investment in to services and programmes. This then leads on to outlining quality assurance and quality enhancement.

By settings taking in to account both quality assurance and quality enhancement, it can lead to the positive improvement of a setting. This can be seen when Williams (2016) discusses that quality assurance is the collection of policies and procedures in an organisation that is designed to achieve, maintain and enhance the overall quality. Quality assurance can also be seen as important as it ensures the quality of teaching and has a focus on the process to achieve quality. An example of quality assurance in early years setting would be a nappy changing procedure not being followed consistently by staff which could then lead to a breach of the settings infection prevention and control procedures. This is a hygiene risk so would have to be acted upon immediately (Early Level Portal, 2025).

Williams also states that quality enhancement is "a process of augmentation or improvement". This meaning developing or expanding the childcare setting. Like quality assurance, quality enhancement can be seen as important as it takes deliberate steps to continually improve the effectiveness of the learning experience of children (Williams, 2016). An example of quality enhancement could be the leaders improving the outdoor environment to make it more engaging for a child's learning which will help the development of their cognitive and social skills along with the improvement of their fine and gross motor skills.

Children that attend a high quality setting will receive sound nurturing and educational support from experienced and qualified staff that will have a positive impact on their cognitive, personal, social and emotional development (Teacher Development Trust, 2024). Ofsted (2022) backs this up by stating that the education and care that children receive affects not only future education but future health and happiness too.

Two methods of quality assurance in a childcare setting is the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) and the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being Scales (SSTEW).

ITERS is designed to assess care programs within a setting for children up to the age of 30 months. It consists of 39 items that are split in to 7 sub sections to help the scale be more inclusive, address the professional needs to staff and to reflect on health and safety information (Environment Rating Scale Family of products, 2024). The tool is also used to evaluate practice in your own provision whilst focusing on the quality of the practice taking place (Hampshire County Council, 2025).

The SSTEWS scale builds on ITERS-R and focuses on pedagogy within the setting and the adult's role in supporting learning and development. An advantage to the scale is that it considers high quality interactions with and between children. Further advantages of the scale is that the profile for scoring is in a visual format which supports the easy detection of patterns for practice. This includes identifying the strengths and any areas for improvement (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2023). However, disadvantages to the scale is that it needs to be used by someone with knowledge of development and that some staff settings may not be ready for all of the subscales (Hoare, n.d.).

To improve a provision, the ITERS assesses seven areas of space and furnishing, personal care routines, listening and talking, activities, interaction, program structure and parents and staff which is broken down in to further sub scales. Each section of the sub scale is marked on a scale of 1 being inadequate to 7 being excellent (Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, 2011). Similarly, SSTEWS is also broken down in to five scales of building trust, confidence and independence, social and emotional well-being, supporting and extending language and communication, supporting learning and critical thinking and assessing learning and language. These five scales are then broken down in to seven sub scales and are rated from 1 to 7 whilst using 3 observations as evidence (Brodie, 2015).

After using the ITERS assessment, it tells practitioners how to assess programs for children from birth to 30 months, what the provision is like in the environment for the protection of children's health and safety, what the appropriate and how to assess the appropriate levels of stimulation through language and activities (Environment Rating Scale Family of products, 2025). Harms, Cryer and Clifford (2003) developed the ITERS scale to assess the quality of centre-based childcare programs. They all state that it is designed for supervision, program improvement, self-assessment, monitoring, teacher training and program evaluation.

The SSTEWS scale has a different age range to the ITERS scale, and it is for use in settings with children aged between 2 and 5. The scale shows some differences to the ITERS scale as it has a focus on observing interactions. The scale tells practitioners a number of ways of supporting sustained shared thinking within their setting (Mackenzie, n.d.). Some of the ways in which Mackenzie says practitioners can carry out the SSTEWS assessment is by showing genuine interest and giving their full attention, respecting children's decisions and choices and inviting children to elaborate, offering the practitioners own experiences and giving examples and using encouragement to further the children's thinking.

For practitioners, they are able to use ITERS for self evaluation and reflection which plays a part in the continuous improvement of quality. Due to the scales being transparent, it

provides practitioners with concrete steps towards improvement and with a suitable scoring system, it allows them to accurately track improvement (Nursery World, 2012). After further research, James and Campbell (2024) discuss how they use ITERS within their roles and the benefits of it. For James and Campbell, it helps them to build their understanding around the best actions they can take for the children to promote better life-chances for every child. It allows them to reduce biasness, help them challenge their thinking and practices along with encouraging other observers to evidence what they see. Finally, it breaks down behaviours and aspects of their provision in to the levels of quality in order to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Between the ITERS and SSTEWS, both of the scales aim to promote the overall development and look deep in to the well-being of children. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (2021) supports this analysis by stating that ITERS audits the environment to create attachment between the setting and adults which will also support the well-being of children to aid development. Whilst SSTEWS builds on this scale and goes further in to analysing what adults actually do to support children's well-being and their behaviours. Likewise, this scale could also have a link to the environment throughout the assessment process like ITERS.

By management driving quality using ITERS, they would analyse the overall score from each area of the assessment. If the setting scores 3 or under this would tell the leaders that the setting needs improvement. If the overall score is a 4 or 5 it shows the provision is effective but could be improved and if the setting scores a 6 or 7 this shows that the provision is highly effective (Grenier, 2020, pp.92–93). Management would then look closer in to the areas that they scored the lowest in and work effectively together to find ways to improve those areas ready for further inspections.

With regards to SSTEWS driving quality in the provision, leaders would look at how their setting has scored with 1 being inadequate and 7 being excellent. If results are not where they are expected to be, leaders will work together to come up with plans to improve quality in the setting. This could be through whole setting observations to create a baseline to assess progress, individual practitioners doing regular performance management meetings, carrying out focused sub-scale observations linked to the action plan or inspector recommendations and having a termly focus to build up scale marks (Early Years Service, n.d.).

With the ITERS scale being linked with cognitive development in children, an early years theorist who has a link to this is Jean Piaget. Sutherland (1992) writes about Piaget's theory claiming that children passed through different stages of thinking that were instinctively different from each other. The link between Piaget's theory and ITERS could potentially lead to impact of scores throughout the assessment. This being because children within the provision progress and develop cognitively at different points in their childhood, just like Piaget stated in his theory.

To conclude, it has been outlined what quality is and the importance of it which led in to the 3 types of quality that can be seen in early years education. Whilst considering these 3

qualities, there were brief outlines of quality assurance and enhancement and examples of where these can be seen within a setting. With all of the above in mind, ITERS and SSTEW are ways of assessing a setting to identify strengths and weakness. These 2 tools can help leaders to find ways forward to improve the overall quality of their settings. Children's Commissioner for Wales (2019) says that under article 3 of the The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 'everyone who works with children should always do what is best for each child'. This statement playing an important part in the quality of leadership and management in individual settings. This statement is supported by UNICEF (2022) and they further it by stating 'parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision'. This statement also contributing to the quality within each early years setting.

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