Towards systems competent for nurturing children's holistic development from birth through school:

Coherence and continuity

A discussion paper drafted by Jean Gordon and Mihaela Ionescu for the Learning for Well-being Foundation in preparation for the 5th Learning for Well-being Community Day

April 2018

Table of Contents

Summary of key points

Learning for Well-being principles:

1. *Wholeness*: Cultivate expressions of wholeness in people, communities and societies: creating environments for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development through the practice of core capacities.
2. *Purpose*: Allow the unfolding of unique potential in individuals and communities: nurturing behaviours that provide purpose, meaning and direction in every activity
3. *Diversity*: Respect individual uniqueness and diversity: encouraging diverse perspectives and multiple expressions.
4. *Relationships*: Emphasize the quality of relationships: focusing on process and seeing the other as a competent partner.
5. *Participation*: Support the engaged participation of those concerned; involving everyone in decisions that impact them.
6. *Systems*: Recognize nested systems as influencing one another: providing opportunities for different sectors and disciplines to work together.
7. *Feedback*: Ensure conditions for feedback and self-organization: measuring what matters for the well-being and sustainability of any system.

The purpose of presenting this paper as part of the L4WB Community Day is to provide context for discussing the extent to which these principles can contribute to developing a vision or overarching goals for childhood that include health, social services, youth policy, cultural, etc. as well as ECEC and school education.

There is a general acceptance by educators, researchers and some policy-makers of the importance of taking a holistic approach to education in order to support deep learning and nurture the well-being of children but is this happening on the ground?

The work of the Foundation led to asking whether our ECEC and compulsory education systems contain the policy proposals or guiding principles for working towards competent systems that promote a holistic image of children and function in an integrated way. Is there coherence and continuity in the vision, values and principles expressed in European policy documents and commissioned studies regarding early childhood services and school education? Does this vision actually serve the realization of each child's unique potential building on their inner diversity?

The L4WB principles have guided the decision to undertake this piece of work to explore if, where and how they are reflected in current policy orientations in Europe in ECEC and school education. For this first stage, we decided to take as our focus European policy orientations for ECEC and schools. Though EU level documents do not tell us what is happening in every member state, they do give us an overview of key issues under discussion and areas of questioning and exchange. It is for these reasons that the Foundation has commissioned this paper to stimulate initial reflections and discussion at the L4WB Community Day on 24th April 2018 with a view to developing initiatives that can support moving in new directions.

Why competent systems? The concept was developed in a report for the EC in 2011 for early childhood education and care services (Urban et al 20111) Urban et al 2011). Building competence at all levels in the system improves the likelihood of increasing alignment, convergence, coherence and cohesion within systems and among services. The overall aim is better efficiency in achieving the outcomes sought, and enabling individual professionals, teams, institutions and governance bodies to pursue

their professional goals. A competent system is grounded in values that are translated into knowledge and practice at all four levels. This approach provides a practical format for interpreting for ECEC and school education the living systems approach of L4WB that brings an overarching understanding of the organic way in which all complex systems function and evolve.

Questions for discussion:

To what extent can the L4WB principles contribute to developing a vision or overarching goals for childhood that include health, social services, youth policy, cultural, etc. as well as ECEC and school education? Moving forward in ECEC and school education would definitely be progress, but taking the bigger picture of a broader societal living system in which the different sectors are nested and interact with one another would open doors to a truly holistic vision of childhood.

1. How can we work towards a system that addresses children and childhood in a way that is more loyal to contributing to child's well-being, and not lose this focus as children move through the system?
    a. Is there a common vision of the child and childhood? There is a common agreement about the importance of looking at the child in a holistic manner, addressing all aspects of their development, although in ECEC the term is used is 'child' while in the school education it is 'learner'. Are there significant implications of using these two different terms and what would they be?
    b. There is a common acknowledgement of the unique potential that exists in each child since birth and of de facto building their own learning based on their needs and experience too. However, is the inner diversity of each child more emphasized in practice in early years services than in school education … or not?
    c. This also raises the issue of acknowledging the learning pathway for each child as an individual one involving their needs and experience, but critically all these pathways must be coordinated at system level. This should cut across transitions from the home environment to ECEC settings, then to compulsory education and later transitions while recognizing that disruptions to these pathways can happen at any point for many different reasons. Furthermore if we are to pursue the logic, would it not also include children's experiences in the health system, social services, etc.?
    d. The first value set out in the proposal for a Europe Quality Framework for ECEC is a clear image and **voice** of the child. Research points to the fact that it is a component part of making children feel valued through being able to give their opinion and make a difference. Whereas there has been a (slowly) growing acceptance of the importance of the learner's voice in school education, there is still a need to ensure that the right to participation is ensured for younger children too.
    e. While acknowledging the holistic view of child development and well-being, there is a tendency to focus on physical, mental, social and emotional aspects of well-being but not paying attention to spirituality, i.e. how each child finds their meaningful place in the world. Recognizing their uniqueness is one way of nurturing their self-reflection and understanding of self, building their sense of meaning and purpose.

2. Is there a shared image of the role of professionals and of supporting professionalism?
    a. Some consistency can be found in the way professionals are seen as agents of change, reflective practitioners, team players and learners, too. However, little opportunity is provided to professionals to act as such.
    b. Innovation is also mentioned as being an important driving force for change and improvement, with professionals as main actors, but at the same time constraints are

mentioned in terms of little space for risk taking, shared ownership and autonomy both in ECEC and school education.

    c. In both ECEC and schools professional growth and development is acknowledged as being essential. However, in both cases limited conditions and opportunities are created for meaningful learning contexts for professionals, and for allowing them to create relationships with one another.

    d. Within this broader perspective of working towards an image of the 'child' that is shared with all sectors that impact on their lives, it should be possible to think more about initial education and continuing professional development for ECEC and school professionals that is shared across professions.

3. How are parents/carers and families seen?

    a. Parents' involvement and participation in decisions regarding their children becomes less present in services and institutions as children grow older. Is this because of the child's age and the general understanding that children need their parents when they are very young, or is this because of inconsistency between the values that are underpinning the practices in ECEC services and schools? Why are parents not seen at all times as the most important partners?

4. What is the image of the service/institution? What is their purpose and what role do they play in communities/societies?

    a. Both ECEC and schools have made steps towards opening the doors to communities, embracing and responding to the diversity that exists within and around them though the extent to which this happens depends a lot on context and motivation.

    b. In the case of ECEC additional services have been added or adapted to respond to specific needs. In the case of schools outreach to the local community may well be more focused on addressing major issues like early school leaving rather than part of the everyday activity. How can we go beyond this?

5. What happens if services/institutions while being parts of a 'living' system do not interact?

    a. Education and social-welfare systems are living systems in their own right and part of a larger societal living system. Systems cannot develop without interactions among the parts.

    b. Can the parts of the system converge their actions towards the same goal if they are not interacting, dialoguing, sharing, learning from each other and working together? It may be possible, but the most vulnerable groups are likely to suffer the most.

    c. There have been important steps made in both ECEC and school education towards more coordination and integration. In ECEC the discourse is more intense shedding light on critical factors that may enable or prevent collaboration and coordination: shared values/vision, shared responsibility, strong leadership, time, excellent professionals and resources and the quality of relationships and interactions building a culture of cooperation. Are there obstacles to building these bridges in school education?

    d. How we can address holistically the rights and needs of children and their families without creating the necessary mechanisms for services/institutions and people to share their views and work together?

It is clear from our brief review that the L4WB principles are not represented fully in the policies and implementation in either ECEC or school education. In some cases, we see alignment with some of the principles but there are significant gaps between what is espoused and what happens in reality. A major issue seems to stem from our collective view of what is possible. As the paper suggests: establishing a vision, in ECEC and school education systems, that focuses on ensuring that all children

are supported in realising their unique potential could be a significant step forward towards a holistic vision across all systems.

What is unspoken in the reviewed studies and conclusions is that this collective vision must develop in parallel with the vision and embodiment of individual actors – children, parents, teachers, professionals, etc. Therefore, to all the other questions, we add this one: What can I do, personally and as a professional, to embody the L4WB principles more fully into my family, my organization, and my community, in order to contribute to the mindshift necessary for a new vision for children.

1. Introduction

1.1. From fragmentation to holistic, competent systems

There is a general acceptance by educators, researchers and some policy-makers of the importance of taking a holistic approach to education in order to support deep learning and nurture the well-being of children. No minister of education or policy-maker would suggest that our education systems should aim to produce fragmented individuals, but how does that work in practice? Are our early childhood and education systems actually designed to reach such goals?

Whatever we do, children nevertheless experience their lives as a whole. As Eurochild has said, children don't grow up in silos, despite the best attempts by many authorities to address just the problem for which their office has a responsibility (and funds to do it). Children as 'whole' individuals somehow get lost in complex systems, but so do their parents/carers and their teachers and early childhood professionals. In the field of early childhood there are examples in some European countries of creating spaces for families where all their needs can be dealt with in an integrated manner. Once children move into compulsory education the examples decrease. Schools work with doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, etc. but the tendency to reduce their numbers and their possibilities of working closely with schools promoting health and well-being (rather than dealing with problems when they occur) reflects current debates about what to prioritize including in a context of reduced funding.

Education systems and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services are continually under development. Changes whether small or substantial are frequent and sometimes leaving students, families and staff bemused and irritated. At the same time there is a perception that education systems are too slow to change. In general there is frequently an incompatibility between the 'political' timetable of elections, changing governments and priority agendas and, on the other hand, the need to take time to understand how best to address major issues, identify shared understanding and goals and identify implementation strategies that everyone agrees to.

These brief observations led the Learning for Well-being Foundation to ask whether our ECEC and compulsory education systems contain the policy proposals or guiding principles for working towards competent systems that promote a holistic image of children and function in an integrated way. Since the mid-2000s, through its research and workshops and through work with children and young people, and with members of the L4WB Community and other civil society partners the Learning for Well-being Foundation has refined the principles that underpin its work. Based on a living systems perspective, it uses nature as the underlying model and identifies principles for action.

Learning for Well-being principles:

> 1. *Wholeness*: Cultivate expressions of wholeness in people, communities and societies: creating environments for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development through the practice of core capacities.
> 2. *Purpose*: Allow the unfolding of unique potential in individuals and communities: nurturing behaviours that provide purpose, meaning and direction in every activity
> 3. *Diversity*: Respect individual uniqueness and diversity: encouraging diverse perspectives and multiple expressions.
> 4. *Relationships*: Emphasize the quality of relationships: focusing on process and seeing the other as a competent partner.
> 5. *Participation*: Support the engaged participation of those concerned; involving everyone in decisions that impact them.

These principles have guided the decision to undertake this piece of work to explore if, where and how they are reflected in current policy orientations in Europe in ECEC and school education.

As a starting point, recent approaches developed for ECEC open interesting avenues for reflection because they share some of the concerns expressed in the L4WB principles. Firstly, a study undertaken for DG EAC 'Competence requirements in early childhood education and care - CoRe Final Report' (Urban et al 2011), put forward the concept of a 'competent system'. It drew attention to the observation that individual competences cannot thrive in a system that is not, itself, competent, i.e. a system that does not provide the enabling conditions for individuals to be fully nurtured. The authors developed the idea that a competent system 'develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political systems' (Urban et al 2011, p. 21).

Over recent decades much has been written and discussed about 'competence' (including the notions of individual and collective competence). The emphasis tends to be predominantly on the learner (whatever their age) and, in the case of schools or pre-schools, the frontline staff, i.e. teachers and educators, sometimes also on leadership in schools or early years settings. It is rare for there to be scrutiny of the 'competence' of levels higher up in the system: national policy level, regional or local levels, depending on the system in question, or whether there is a reciprocal relationship between the different levels and an articulation between individual and collective competence.

Secondly the 'Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Report' the report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, set up by DG EAC, was launched in 2014. It brought into the discussion two critical aspects: three values underpinning the work were clearly stated and quality was framed as a set of principles for moving towards a quality framework for ECEC. It is important to recall the underpinning values in the box below:

These values and the notion of a competent system where individual and collective competence interacts in a reciprocal relationship are currently driving the ECEC policy agenda and certain initiatives, some of which the Learning for Well-being Foundation has been/is involved in (Transatlantic Forum for Inclusive Early Years, INTESYS). It has stimulated the desire of the Foundation to also investigate school education policy developments in order to understand the extent to which there are similar or shared concerns or focus. It is for these reasons that the Foundation has commissioned this paper to stimulate initial reflections and discussion at the L4WB Community Day on 24th April 2018 with a view to developing initiatives that can support these promising directions. The authors of the paper bring complementary experience as Mihaela Ionescu's work focuses predominantly on early childhood and transitions into primary school, while that of Jean Gordon has focused on several aspects of school education and beyond, including competence. For this Community Day it made sense to bring together colleagues working in ECEC and education as well as in other sectors and fields of work to reflect together on how the principles of Learning for Well-being can bring an added-value to current debates and stimulate initiatives.

Two of the questions underpinning this paper are whether the values above are living values in both ECEC and school education and to what extent they can contribute to developing a vision or overarching goals for childhood that include health, social services, youth policy, cultural, etc. as well as ECEC and school education.

1.2. Policy orientations: state-of-play at EU level

For this first stage, we decided to take as our focus European policy orientations for ECEC and schools. Why start this discussion at EU level, which might seem rather distant from practice? Education systems and ECEC services are very diverse across Europe; policy concerning children, whether about their care, health, education, leisure, etc., varies considerably. At European level, there is a concentration of comparative analysis through the studies commissioned; structured peer exchange and learning through working groups and also the experiences, suggestions and analyses from a large range of stakeholders (networks, platforms, institutions, organisations, etc.) from across Europe who enrich reflection through their research and projects and through the workshops, conferences and public consultations organized by the Commission. Though EU level documents do not tell us what is happening in every member state, they do give us an overview of key issues under discussion and areas of questioning and exchange. Furthermore the DG EAC Joint Report 2015 opened doors towards a more integrated approach to learning:

> 'The value of an integrated framework covering education and training at all levels was confirmed. Today's need for flexibility and permeability between learning experiences requires policy coherence from early childhood education and schools through to higher

education, vocational education and training and adult learning, thereby upholding the principle of lifelong learning.' (DG EAC Joint Report 2015)

Writing this paper has been an interesting challenge: ECEC and school education frequently come under different legislation, regulations and authorities. ECEC provision is frequently offered in separate settings for different age groups (including home-based provision), often under different administrative structures (social services, education system). The age ranges vary between countries but services usually cover 0/1 to 2/3 years and from 3/4 years up to start of primary schooling (usually 5/6 years). In some countries there are unitary systems where services for the whole age group come under same authority while in others the provisions for 0-3 year olds and 3-6 year olds are distinct. There may also be a mix of public and private sector provision involving a cost to families. Only a few countries consider early childhood services as universal public services and encourage access through increased availability, affordability, usefulness and comprehensibility for families. **The question is why early childhood services are not universal, and to what extent the existing services are holistic and truly inclusive to enable children to grow and thrive.**

All European education systems define a period of compulsory education that generally lasts about 9 – 12 years depending on the country. Children are required to either attend school or some other acceptable arrangement. Many countries have a mix of public sector and private/independent schools though the percentage varies as well as arrangements. There are no fees for families for public sector education. Theoretically as presence is required, access should not be an issue and in most cases it is not, but children with long-term illness, a disability, migrant and refugee children may be in fact denied access. **In the case of school education, the question is also whether all children's entitlement to an education that is holistic and truly inclusive enabling them to grow and thrive is a reality.**

Over and above these differences the children are the same. Focusing on the notion of the competent system guided by the L4WB principles provides a way of looking at the issues beyond the individual structure of these two sectors to think about how ECEC services and education systems can better serve the interests of children and their families, including of those in vulnerable situations.

1.3.How the paper is organized

In the next section we have looked briefly at what we mean by competent systems and their characteristics and also what we are referring to by 'competence'. Section 3 focuses on ECEC and section 4 on schools and education systems in both cases following the four levels of competent systems. In section 5 we draw out key issues arising from the previous sections.

2. What do we mean by competent systems and by competence?

2.1. Origin and characteristics of the concept of competent systems

The roots of the concept of a 'competent system' lie in the report *Competence Requirement in Early Childhood Education in Care* commissioned by DG EAC, conducted by the University of East London, Cass School of Education and the University of Ghent, Department for Social Welfare Studies, and published in 2011.

The report draws the attention to an important aspect: individual competences cannot thrive in a system that is not competent, i.e. a system that does not provide the enabling conditions for individuals to excel. A competent system 'develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political systems'. (Urban et al 2011, p. 21) Considering that a competent system is not just the result of the sum of the individuals' competences, implies that competence cannot only be sought in the individual professional, but is also collective and also concerns the other three levels: team/institution level, inter-institutional level and governance level. One of the CoRe Report recommendations at the European level was that the:
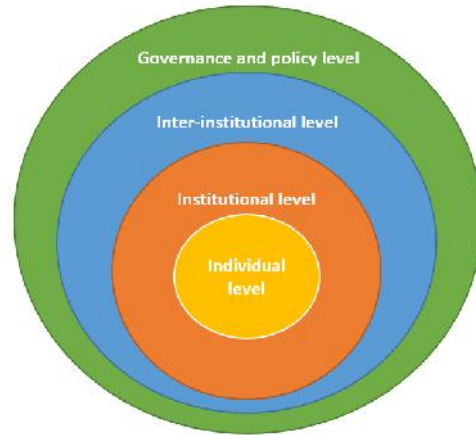
> 'European Commission should be proactive in initiating and encouraging discussions within and across members States about the purpose, goals and values of education, including early childhood education, in order to promote holistic views on education that foster all aspects of individual, inter-personal and social development'. (Urban et al 2011, p.53)

Building competence at all four levels improves the likelihood of increasing alignment, convergence, coherence and cohesion within systems and among services. The overall aim is better efficiency in achieving the outcomes sought and enabling individual professionals, teams, institutions and governance bodies to pursue their professional goals. A competent system is grounded in values that are translated into knowledge and practice at all four levels. The table below illustrates dimensions of competent systems with examples of the knowledge, practice and values important at each level.

Table 1: Dimensions of competent systems (examples)

	Knowledge	Practices	Values
Individuals	Knowledge of various developmental aspects of children from a holistic perspective […] Knowledge of working with parents and local communities (knowledge about families, poverty and diversity) […]	Building strong pedagogical relationships with children, based on sensitive responsiveness […] Analysing needs of local communities in order to work effectively with parents and disadvantaged groups […]	Adopting a holistic vision of education that encompasses learning, care and upbringing […] Adopting a democratic and inclusive approach to the education of young children in order to sustain social cohesion […]
Institutions and teams	Knowledge of situated learning and 'communities of practice' […]	Shared pedagogical frameworks to orient practitioners' work Arrange paid time for documentation, reflexion and planning for all staff Framework for professional development […]	Democracy and respect for diversity Understanding of professional development as continuous learning process that encompasses personal and professional growth Understanding ECEC institutions as sites of civil engagement
Inter-institutional collaboration	Knowledge of inter-agency collaboration Knowledge of community development Cross-disciplinary knowledge (pedagogy, health, social policy…) […]	Networking and systematic collaboration between ECEC institutions, primary schools, services for families, research and training institutions […]	Interdisciplinarity and interprofessionality Democracy and respect for diversity […]
Governance	Children's rights Diversity in all its forms and anti-discriminatory practice Comprehensive strategies for tackling poverty and inequality […]	Providing adequate resources to ensure equitable access to high quality ECEC for all children and families Integrated approaches to ECEC at local, regional and national level Supporting systemic professionalization […]	Children's right to active participation in society Children's right to develop their full potential Education as a public good and public responsibility […]

Source: Urban et al (2012)

2.2.Competence: briefly what are we referring to?

There is no single definition of competence. It is used in a broad variety of contexts and though the term may be translated directly into different languages, the notion may cover different aspects. The complexity is well described in this quote:

> 'A competence refers to a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world in a particular domain. One's achievement at work, in personal relationships or in civil society are not based simply on the accumulation of second hand knowledge stored as data, but as a combination of this knowledge with skills, values, attitudes, desires and motivation and its application in a particular human setting at a particular point in a trajectory in time. Competence implies a sense of agency, action and value.' (Hoskins & Deakin Crick 2010)

The notion and uses of competence (and competences) in different contexts and the debates around it have been on the agenda for over 30 years centring on issues related to individual and collective competence, the breadth and depth of competence and role of context, and more.

The approach to competence developed in the CoRe report focuses on professional situations (early childhood settings and services) and includes both individual and collective competence. As can be seen in the examples in the table above competences are defined as a set of values, knowledge and practice that enables individuals, teams, institutions and governance bodies to pursue their professional goals, and points at reflectivity as the core element in defining competences.

Since the mid-2000s, considerable work has been underway at European level and in member states to identify a foundation of 'key' competences (or equivalent) considered important for all learners. The Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning published in 2006[1] by the European Commission has recently been reviewed and revised following a period of consultation[2]. Key competences are considered to be those which 'all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. They are developed from early childhood and throughout adult life, through all types of learning. They are defined as 'a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where:

a) Knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject;
b) skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results;
c) attitudes describe the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations; also including values, thoughts and beliefs[3];

Key points for this paper are:

- The EU Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning focuses on individual competence designed to be relevant to learners throughout life;
- In the revised framework following the consultation competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes, the latter including values, thoughts and beliefs;
- In the definition developed in the CoRe report focusing on the professional settings, practice replaces skills because the emphasis is on the reflective nature of practices (rather than technical skills) and values replace attitudes to move towards a vision of early childhood underpinned by negotiated goals and collective aspirations.

---

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=EN
[2] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/competences_en
[3] https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/swd-recommendation-key-competences-lifelong-learning.pdf

- Thus this definition incudes both individual and collective competence at different levels in ECEC systems.

In the next sections, this paper addresses the following questions through examining current policy orientations:
- How can ECEC services and education systems better serve the interests of children and their families, including the needs of those in vulnerable situations?
- How can they ensure more and better consistency and continuity (e.g. during transitions from ECEC settings to school) and work together more closely taking a more holistic perspective of the development of children?
- How can we take account of the different levels and types of individual and collective competence needed for professionals and within a system to respond to the above points?
- Do we see emerging an overarching vision (or goals) for childhood that would also be relevant for health, social services, etc. as well as ECEC and education?

3. European policies and trends in early childhood education and care seen through the competent system lenses

This section looks at European policy recommendations, documents and studies that have built up the current policy framework regarding ECEC and contributed to catalysing a discourse about ECEC competent systems.
The main policy documents that have been considered are:

Document/Report title	Abbreviations used in text as reference
Council of the European Union (2011) - Council conclusions on early childhood education and care	CoE, 2011
European Commission (2011) Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow	EC Communication, 2011
Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., and Van Laere, K. (2011). Competence requirements in early childhood education and care. CoRe Final Report. Brussels: European Commission.	CoRe Report, 2011
DG Justice of the European Commission (2013) Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.	DG Justice Report, 2013
European Commission (E.C.) (2014). Proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care: Report of the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on early childhood education and care under the auspices of the European Commission.	EC, 2014
Sharmahd N, Peeters J, Van Laere K, Vonta T, De Kimpe K, Brajkovic S, Contini L, Giovannini D (2017) Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union. Doi: 10.2766/74332.	NESETII, 2017

By proposing the extended definition of the concept of *competence* to an entire system, the CoRe Report brought a holistic and comprehensive approach to ECEC systems. The report builds on the

research carried out in several EU countries. Its approach recognizes the importance not only of the knowledge and skills that one or a group can possess, but also of the <u>values</u> that are grounding the policies formulation, the intra and inter-/personal and institutional interaction, and the daily practices in ECEC systems. The CoRe Report approach has been followed up by the development of the Quality Framework for ECEC, a strong evidence based document, which proposed 5 key areas of quality with 10 statements as guidance for Member States in defining quality on the system level. The proposed principles of quality have been developed by the ECEC Working Group convened by the DG EAC.

The following sub-sections refer to those values, principles and recommendations regarding each level of the competent systems that are driving currently the ECEC policy agenda.

3.1. Individual level

The competences on the individual level refer to those values, knowledge and practice that are shaping the professionalization and professionalism of those working in early childhood services. The following section will reflect the main trends in the professionalization of the workforce, as it results from European policy documents and studies commissioned by DGEAC.

The following competences (values, knowledge and practices) are consistently promoted in several documents around the following areas:

3.1.1. Children's development, learning and participation:

Most of the documents are reiterating the importance of approaching holistically the child's development and of a holistic pedagogical vision that bridges learning with care and upbringing. (EC Communication, p.6; Peeters et al, 2016) Documents refer to the child-centred approach that recognizes the child as competent, active agent and protagonists of their own learning. (EC, p.7; CoRe Report, p.35) Learning is seen as a co-construction and an open-ended process, with play (structured and un-structured) being pivotal to learning and development. (EC, p.10, 44-47; CoRe Report, 35-36) The child centred and holistic approach dominate the discourse, promoting both care and education, cross-disciplinary learning and multilingualism approaches. (EC, p. 7, 17) Curriculum is less content driven and more seen as a framework for providing learning experiences for furthering child's development.

Observing children and documenting systematically their progress to learn about their interests and needs and their progress in order to inform future individual plans, rather than assessing their academic skills through tests, are seen as a key competences for early childhood professionals. (EC, p.48, 52) The use of the child's portfolio based on observing and documenting the child's progress, is the monitoring and evaluation tool that acts in the best interest of the child. (EC, p.57)

The competence to plan and implement a variety of activities/projects (in the service, in the community) that value and reflect children's diverse needs, talents, and interests, and their diverse background while including children's voices and participation in designing and implementing activities, is seen as being pivotal in ECEC services (EC, p.7; CoRe Report, p.35-36).

3.1.2. Family and community participation

Parents are the main educators of their children (regardless of the child's age) and they have the right to be involved in all decisions regarding their child (EC, p.8), therefore building reciprocal respect and trust among professionals/services and parents is key (CoRe Report, p.37). The individual competences that resonate with democratic values and practices see in families the most important and valuable

partner in ensuring child's healthy development and well-being, a co-creator of the learning about and with the child, and also a co-creator of pedagogical content (EC, p.48-49; CoRe Report, p.37).

ECEC services are seen as platforms for social cohesion, as they are a service for the community (EC, p.8). Flexible and responsive services are built on family and community participation. Valuing the diversity in the community, within and among families, means recognizing the rich environment in which children grow and learn and the strengths that diversity brings in child's development (CoRe Report, p.37).

3.1.3. Professionalization and professional (self-) development and improvement

There is an increased concern about the alignment between services for children under three and those above three up to (even including) primary school in terms of professional profiles, qualifications, working conditions, remuneration and professional recognition. The growing evidence of the importance of the first 1,000 days in an individual's life, advocate for full integration of the care and education professional roles, thus better and revisited professionalization of the staff working with the youngest children, challenging the traditional roles attributed to those roles. (EC Communication, p.6)

The increasing challenges in providing responsive services that are meeting children's and families' needs, require a reflexive approach to everyday practice respectful of the very specific context in which services operate and children and families live. This translates into adapting everyday practices by engaging constantly into self-reflection ('Am I doing the right thing? How can I do it different/better?) and group reflection processes aimed at continuous improvement of the process quality. (EC, p.32)

Nurturing the professionalism of the workforce is constantly reinforced through the use of: the de-privatisation of practice (NESETII, 2017) – observing and supporting each other, using video recordings; co-creation of new pedagogical knowledge with colleagues (CoRe Report, p.38; EC, p.48); participation in group-reflection discussions to address critical aspects of practice (CoRe Report, p.37-38). Such avenues are seen as effective approaches for supporting competent individuals.

Participation in professional development activities in line with the specific needs of the workforce, especially for those who work with ethnic minority children, or with children that require additional support, or those from low-income families (EC, p.32, 33, 48, 53) complements the individual's reflexive competences and group support on the level of the service. A diverse professional development offer is based on learning about the diverse and specific needs of the workforce.
The professional's learning is nurtured by networking with other professionals from other services. (CoRe Report, p.42)

3.1.4. Main critical issues

Dynamic societal changes are largely affecting children and family's lives and require a strengthened readiness from services to answer to their needs and meet their rights. While services are trying to adjust and be more responsive, there is an increased need for more aligned pre-service preparation with the actual reality of the future professionals, as well as for more reflective and action-research oriented in-service training to meet personnel's actual professional needs.

How can professionals become more competent in responding to ongoing and increasing challenges, if not enough time, options and funds are allocated for those professional development activities that have proven to be effective and can empower professionals to be reflective practitioners and explorers? How can they become more competent if they are not listened to and appreciated? And if they have seldom worked in isolation?

The complexity and intertwined nature of challenges that families encounter (increasing poverty, multi-lingualism, unemployment, discrimination, etc.), require new competencies at the level of pre-service and in-service training providers and a broader understanding of the profile of the early childhood professional.

A limited understanding of the high and unique responsibility of working with very young children (under 3s) is still legitimizing a lower level of qualification of the staff and separate roles for care and for learning (education).

3.2. Institutional Level

The competences on the institutional level refer to those values, knowledge and practice that are shaping the professional and organizational culture, climate and purpose in the early childhood services. The following section will reflect the main trends in organizational and professional management and leadership, as it results from European policy documents and studies commissioned by DGEAC.

Several documents and studies make reference to the role of the organizational and professional management and leadership that create the conditions for high quality services for children and families, especially for the most vulnerable.

While individual competences are key, the competences defined on the level of the team and institution are essential in nurturing those individual competences. The following areas have been identified as being addressed through various documents and studies.

3.2.1. Organizational vision, culture, climate and management

Building a shared vision on the level of the institution based on a common understanding among all personnel and families about the image of the child and families, about learning and participation, about the meaning of early childhood services for children, families and communities, lays the foundation for a consistent continuum between the learning environment at home and in the service, smoother cooperation among staff and families and co-constructing actions.

ECEC services are seen as meeting points for families and social cohesion platforms for communities provided that they are equipped with a visionary leadership and professional team who creates opportunities for dialogue and participation in decision making for all families and uses reaching-out policies and actions to ensure access and participation of all children and parents. (CoRe Report, p. 40)

As services to communities, ECEC services are respectful of diversity and responsive to the changing needs and demands of children and families, and they promote diversity in the personnel, reflecting the diversity in the communities where they operate. (CoRe Report, p.39-40) Close cooperation among personnel, as well as staff-led innovations and initiatives are encouraged by an empowering leadership and participatory management. Service improvement is a collective responsibility grounded in shared values and a shared understanding of quality and uses meaningful tools for internal monitoring and assessment aimed at improvement of the quality of policy and practice (NESETII, 2017).

By embracing a child-centred and holistic approach to child development and family well-being, ECEC services are open to cooperate with other institutions in the community to ensure coordination in addressing children's and families' needs.

3.2.2. Professional culture and climate, pedagogical leadership

A competent institution develops/embraces a common pedagogical framework to orient practitioners and ensure consistency in their diverse practice. (EC, p.33; CoRe Report, p.39) Creating a supportive environment for ensuring and sustaining *process* quality is highly depending on the culture of the institution and its pedagogical leadership. (NESETII, 2017, CoRe Report p.50-51) Investment in peer support, reflexivity and professional trust and growth among staff is possible where:
- individual and group support and pedagogical guidance to all staff is provided in line with their specific needs (mentoring and coaching);
- professional learning communities are set up where all staff can participate and address openly critical aspects of practice, mirroring the pedagogy in the institution; (EC, p.33)
- the practice is de-privatized allowing colleagues to observe each other and discuss, confront ideas about pedagogies; (NESETII, 2017)
- participation in professional development activities is incentivized and there are opportunities for career development and mobility (CoRe Report, p.52);
- opportunities for the staff to participate in cross-sectoral professional development activities are valued and thus offered;
- experiments and innovations led by the staff are encouraged, thus bridging practice with theory and theory with practice.
- Non-contact time is provided for professionals to meet colleagues from this institution and from other services (CoRe Report, p.47)

3.2.3. Main critical issues

The way services are perceived, understood and enacted by the personnel (and not only) working in the services reflects the meaning and the sense that they give to their work and also the type of culture that is nurtured within and around the service. Transitioning from a closed to an open institution to families and communities, flexible and responsive to their emerging needs requires a social, value-based, broad and aligned understanding of the purpose of the institution.

Socially generative early childhood services that celebrate growing professionalism require collaborative management, shared leadership and family involvement and participation in decision-making processes (especially the most vulnerable). This means valuing people's diverse views and strengths, listening to them and finding together with them solutions, trusting the power of peer learning and co-creation while sharing common values.

An open institution, a service for the community cannot work in isolation, therefore the cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination become necessary.

3.3. Inter-institutional level

The competences on the inter-institutional level refer to those values, knowledge and practice that are recognizing the important role of each institution in the system and the 'interaction' between them in providing quality professionals and services which ultimately impact children's and families' welfare.

The inter-institutional level refers primarily to the cooperation among services across sectors, and ages, as well as with the in-service training institutions and local authorities (Core Report, p. 42-43). Many research studies and articles refer to inter-sectoral cooperation, the rationale that stays behind it, as well as the advantages and benefits for children and families.

The main areas that have been addressed for the inter-institutional level in EU documents are as follows.

3.3.1. Addressing holistically child's and families' needs and demands

The holistic view of child's development and of family wellbeing intrinsically requires a 360° view on the services that address their rights and needs and therefore a rethinking of the traditional structures and remits of services from the perspective of the child and family, bringing together care and education and other sectors.

The most compelling arguments are regarding families living in difficult conditions that impact directly child's safety and healthy development. In the context of universal entitlement but also in a rights-based approach, outreaching these families and creating pathways for cooperation among various services to address their specific needs (EC, p.22; CoRe Report, p.42) is becoming the most effective approach to achieving better outcomes.

An additional indication of the added value of creating a competent inter-institutional environment is the management of transitions for both children and families from one service to another (across sectors and ages). (EC Communication, p.7) The most disadvantaged ones are the most at risk for failed transitions leading to discontinuity, missed opportunities and thus widening the gaps in outcomes.

3.3.2. Networking, cooperation, coordination, and integration

A competent inter-institutional environment requires having institutions with a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities, being expected to collaborate (EC, p.59). The co-existence of siloed ECEC services is pretty much the 'rule' in many European countries. However, in the past two decades more and more successful experiences have demonstrated that by listening to the actual needs of children and families, new ways of governance and service provision can be enabled. The re-thinking of the way in which services and professionals communicate, plan and work together claimed for new competences on the individual and institutional level, as well as on the governance level.

When referring to a competent inter-agency work, documents refer to an integrated approach at local, regional and national level involving all stakeholders, including families, together with cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice. (EC Communication, p.7; EC, p.60; CoRe Report, p.42) While being a long and demanding process of change, in many places the valuable examples are at the level of communities/municipalities, having a starting point in networking early childhood services. (EC, p.61)

Existing experiences on integrated work in ECEC point to the importance of key factors such as: shared vision, leadership, communication and information sharing, time, service delivery, workforce and financing.

3.3.3. Main critical issues

Changing the mindset of people working at different levels in the systems about the importance of cooperation and coordination and introducing new ways of thinking and doing things, from designing, to planning and delivering services is a long term process. It requires a shared rationale and a clear purpose for people and institutions, meaningful participation to various processes, quality inter-

personal and inter-organizational relationships, strategic leadership, and personal/professional and organizational fulfilment.

Services/institutions mean people, too. A competent inter-agency work cannot be created without creating opportunities for professionals from different sectors working with different age groups to meet, talk, learn and work together.

3.4. Governance Level

The competences on the governance level refer to those values, knowledge and practice that are shaping the policies, regulations, mechanisms and tools that are guiding the overall early childhood education and care system at national, regional and local level. The following section will reflect the main trends in governance, as it results from European policy documents and studies commissioned by DGEAC.

The governance level play a crucial role as it 'sets the tone' for the overall policies, rules and procedures in the system and establishes ways in which different levels of governance should interact and work in an aligned way. Depending on the type of governance (centralized, de-concentrated, de-centralized) there are different regulation, mechanisms and tools employed for governing the system.
European countries are democratic societies, thus driven by democratic values that should be reflected in their governance and policies, and, equally important, in practice.

Particular challenges in today's societies are requiring particular attention to governance structures and functioning in order to address (especially) the increasing poverty, inequity and diversity, as well as the dynamic social-economic changes impacting children and families lives.
Several European documents have addressed issues of access, inclusion, equity and poverty and made recommendations regarding ways in which the ECEC system may contribute to overcoming them.

3.4.1. Universal entitlement and progressive universalism

Universal entitlement is only halfway to go for meeting the rights of ALL children. The universal value of the legal entitlement depends to a great extent on how accessible it is. In ECEC the concept of access is part of a more complex envelope that it refers also to: availability, affordability, usefulness and comprehensibility (EC, p. 21-22). While entitlement might be acknowledged by the law, services might still be not accessible, or not available, or not affordable, sometimes not useful for families, and not comprehensive (DG Justice, p.9). For this reason, in ECEC policies, greater attention is paid to how much the measures within the universal entitlement (and given the diversity of families' and children's needs) are addressing children's rights, not through targeted programs, but through additional measures and services (flexible hours, bi-lingual programs, subsidies, vouchers, etc.). The concept of progressive universalism is very much promoted to end the dichotomy of universal versus targeted interventions (EC, p.17).
Cross-sectoral collaboration for comprehensive strategies tackling poverty and socio-cultural inequalities (CoEU, p.5) is seen as the most effective approach.

3.4.2. Workforce policies

Professionalization of workforce is very much depending on the workforce policies addressing the conditions for the initial preparation, induction, and continuous professional development. (EC, p.33) The 2013 Report of the DG Justice was already mentioning that key to improving the quality of childcare is that: "all childcare workers have[ing] a specified minimum level of training, better working

conditions and more opportunities for continuing training, and being given proper recognition, especially in terms of remuneration." (DG Justice Report, p.8; EC p.37)

As a sector with a high presence of low-qualified staff in services for children under 3, the policies that foresee career mobility through flexible qualifications pathways especially for the low-qualified staff are highly requested. (Peeters et al., 2016; Core Report, p.40)

Increasing the diversity in the workforce to better reflect the group diversity of the populations they serve, while emphasising also the individual value of group members and the complexity of all individual identities. (Core Report, p. 40)

3.4.3. Unitary systems with cross-sectoral coordination and efficient funding

Unitary systems require a shared understanding of the role and responsibilities among different levels of governance on the horizontal and vertical (across sectors, and between local-regional and national levels) and a coherent governance framework bringing stakeholders together for coordination of policies and procedures (EC Communication, p.7; EC, p.61-62; CoRe Report, p.47)).
Unitary systems enable better transitions, better integration of services and more efficient funding. "A systemic and more integrated approach to ECEC services at local, regional and national level involving all relevant stakeholders – including families - is required, together with cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice" (EC, p.62). Smooth transitions from home to services and from one service to another are key for all children, and especially for the most vulnerable ones.

3.4.4. Main critical issues

While there is already a wealth of evidence of how important early years are and the need for services for young children since the very early stage and for their families, early childhood services are still not considered universal public services and access is not yet strengthened through increased availability, affordability, usefulness and comprehensibility.

The siloed approach of levels of the system and of professions in different early childhood sectors is still reinforced by siloed governance and policies, which contradicts the holistic view on child development and the holistic view on family and family environment.

The dissonance between policies and practice is demonstrating the lack of alignment between competences at different levels, or in other words a 'disarticulated' system with an unclear sense of purpose.

4. Schools and education systems

This section looks at the ways in which current DG EAC policy principles and recommendations on schools could support a competent systems approach. The main sources used are the set of five reports on the Working Group on Schools 2016-2018, the report of the Working group on Schools Policy 2014-2015 (see table below). The choice has been guided by the fact that working groups and the review of the key competences framework involved a large number of stakeholders. The documents are:

Report title	Abbreviations used in text as reference
Continuity and transitions in learner development. Guiding principles for policy development on learner pathways and transitions in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18	(WGS-CT)
Teachers and school leaders in schools as learning organisations. *Guiding Principles for policy development in school education.* Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18	(WGS-TSL)
Networks for learning and development across school education. *Guiding principles for policy development on the use of networks in school education systems*. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18	(WGS-N)
Quality assurance for school development. Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18	(WGS-QA)
A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving. Policy messages. Working Group on Schools Policy 2014-2015.	(WGS-WS)

This section highlights selected aspects of these reports that support a discussion about policy trends for schools and education systems that make it possible to envisage 'joining the dots' of competence at all the different levels within systems in a mutually supportive and reciprocal manner that can contribute to individual and collective competence. The aim of the Working Group on Schools 2016-2018 was:

> *'… to support Member States in increasing the capacity of schools education for systemic and sustainable change. It sets out a vision for schools education systems that can help define shared values within a European Education Area.' (European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems. Summary sheet)*

It is significant that the work started from the basis of a shared vision and values within a European Education Area. The four reports took account of recent research and literature, group discussions by the members (mainly representatives of their national ministries of education), invited experts, peer learning activities (visits to selected countries) and surveys to prompt reflection. Overall the Working Group has examined 'successful, emerging or potential new, policy developments' that can support and improve quality, inclusion and innovation in education systems in Member states.

For this type of exercise the learning process adopted is as important as the content because it affects both the discussions and the outcomes. Hence the peer learning approach and the guiding principles adopted by the Working Group illustrates well that at governance level, as at others, the diversity of education systems in Europe means that common challenges and shared principles will lead to different solutions on the ground that take account of this diversity as well as the complexity of

education systems. The work focused on four areas identified as key to better learning: quality assurance for school development; continuity and transitions in learner development; teachers and school leaders in schools as learning organisations; and networks for learning and development across school education systems.

The four interlinked reports that have identified a number of guiding principles for each topic reflect current thinking, practice and research in these areas. They provide an interesting starting point to look at how school education policy principles, agreed by country representatives and experts, shape up in terms of developing competent systems. With similar groups of stakeholders and similar processes the Working Group 2014-2015 that focused on prevention and early intervention of early school leaving at the school and local level, looked at how a more holistic and collaborative approach could be implemented.

The following four sub-sections review these reports following the four levels of the competent systems approach as it has been developed for ECEC. We encourage readers to further delve into the different reports to find out about the many examples from Working Group members and peer visits that enrich the understanding of the guiding principles agreed.

At the heart of the WGS' remit:

> *'Improving the experiences and outcomes of all learners should be the central pursuit of school education policies. Therefore it is prudent to examine what is needed at school level and then the conditions can be created at policy level.' (European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems – summary sheet on Working Group Schools)*

4.1. Individual Level

At this individual level we are interested in the different roles, expectations, development needs of professionals working directly with children (teaching staff and school leaders). These factors are of course influenced by the vision for learners and learning with which teaching staff and school leaders undertake their work and what is, therefore, prioritized.

4.1.1. Children's development, learning and participation

The report on *Continuity and transitions in learner development* (WGS-CT) emphasizes that the learning pathway for each child is an individual one involving their needs and experience but that must be coordinated at system level. Furthermore individual pathways may be non-linear and subject to disruption at any stage: periods of missed schooling for health or family reasons, young people leaving institutional care, migrant populations and refugees. The systemic organisation of these pathways will have profound consequences for learners in terms of opportunities and risks as they progress and transition through the education system (WGS-CT).

The report acknowledges that learner voice and the right to education are fundamental rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Referring to considerable research the report emphasizes that learner 'voice' is a prerequisite for creating a school culture where the learners feel valued and able to give their opinion and make a difference. Making this possible entails both the willingness of the adults to share responsibilities, suitable infrastructures as well as monitoring of learner participation (WGS-CT).

One of the 4 key areas of focus for the WGS 2016-2018 was continuity in transitions based on observations of the potentially negative effects on learner development of fragmentation and difficult

transitions in learner pathways (WGS-CT). Transitions with their potential for becoming stumbling blocks for children occur at different points during their schooling. Recent research demonstrates the importance of transitions firstly from pre-school to primary school where some continuity in the curriculum and the teaching and learning methods can support learners. Transitions from primary to secondary school are another key point and research shows the need to better prepare students for the changes in learning environments and expectations. This is a significant point where students from lower socio-economic groups often require greater support in order not to fall behind. (WGS-CT) Transitions between different types of education are another critical stage, e.g. between general and vocational education. There are also the transitions that occur through changes in the family situation, moves, migration, etc. Recognising these potentially difficult points is important for ensuring that staff and schools can deal with them.

The quality of the learning environment is considered very important – 'supportive, varied and inspiring'. This includes creating environments that nourish learners' social and emotional well-being within the school as well as their creative, cultural and civic opportunities outside school, and addressing issues of violence (bullying) in an inclusive way. The development of social and emotional skills has been shown to have a direct influence on teaching and learning. The report recommends education systems to consider directly monitoring and supporting learner well-being that should also be taken into consideration by school inspection. (WGS-CT)

This is the foundation on which deep learning can be developed and nurtured in all learners.

However motivated teachers and school leaders are, all of this can provide substantial challenges for them especially those working in difficult situations and/or without the support needed.

4.1.2. Professional development of teachers and school leaders

The report *Teachers and School Leaders in Schools as Learning Organisations*, reminds us that teachers who are central to the academic and social progress of learners are generally motivated, but may be working in challenging situations with conflicting priorities and between autonomy and accountability. Thus the personal and collective identities that teachers and school leaders form are critical (WGS-TSL). In the same way that values of inclusivity and diversity are important for learners, they also need to apply to teachers and school leaders, encouraging team work and peer learning. (WGS-TSL). Developing a shared vision enables teachers and school leaders to collaborate rather than compete.

Teachers and school leaders should be recognized and respected for their expertise and their contributions to developing education systems as well as being recognized as learners themselves working within (what should be) learning organisations. At the same time they need to be supported in developing their capacity to work across networks of schools (WGS-TSL). There is an issue for the authorities of reaching the right balance between providing support and giving freedom to take risks, innovate, take ownership and stimulate collaboration in curriculum and school development. This is a key element within a competent systems approach.

The report on Teachers and School Leaders implicitly echoes certain characteristics of living systems - the importance of education being learning system in itself and schools functioning as learning organisations ensuring that everyone can participate effectively and are not isolated, strengthening networks while leaving time for change to become embedded. Engaging with multiple stakeholders including social partners, families and students is part of that process. Learning organisations require processes that involve all partners with a common understanding, shared language, and cooperation across different institutions and within schools. An atmosphere of trust is also necessary. (WSG-TSL)

Teachers' professional development from their initial teacher education through continuing professional development needs to support professional competence development as well as capacity and autonomy. One recommendation is embedding practice-oriented research and enquiry as part of continuing professional development as a way of stimulating and motivating teachers. As the key competences have been increasingly integrated into curricula[4] this has led to increasing development of new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment (WSG-TSL). The recommendations made by the KeyCoNet network underlined the crucial role that teachers play in implementing key competences and, therefore, that their initial education and in-service training are of the utmost important and resources are needed. However, for a variety of reasons, reforms to teacher education lag behind.

4.1.3. Family and community participation

The WGS-CT affirms that the participation of learners and their families and/or carers in decision-making affecting their education is a key principle and support must be provided. This would include making pathways more transparent for learners and their families both through guidance and reviewing pathways.

While parental involvement is a key factor in educational success, family-related issues may also contribute in different ways to early school leaving (WGS-WS). For many reasons the relationship between schools (teachers and school leaders) and families may be challenging (mindsets, language, perceptions, etc.), but education is a shared responsibly and building trust and cooperation important for the learners. The report on whole school approaches to early school leaving discusses several ways of increasing parental (and carer) participation in decision-making within the school and providing the support needed to marginalized parents/carers to increase their participation (WGS-WS). It may also involve accessible information, reflecting on communication, etc.

4.1.4. Main critical issues

There are many strong guiding principles for school development in these reports. At this individual level, one of the significant outcomes of the peer learning of the Working Group Schools is a clear vision of learners with their individual learning pathways based on who they are and their experiences that would create a firm basis for allowing the unfolding of each learner's unique potential. It acknowledges the fundamental rights of the child and in particular the right of children to have their voice heard and taken into consideration through their active participation in their learning as a prerequisite for a healthy school culture. **A question to consider is whether the different 'systems' which affect the lives of children growing up (education, health, social services, culture, etc.) actually base their work on compatible, even shared, visions of childhood or whether they have a tendency to function as closed systems.**

Learning pathways are fundamentally individual but are strongly influenced by how they are organized at systemic level, starting with schools. It is very encouraging that there is emphasis on the need to recognize that teachers are learners too, working within what is hopefully a learning organisation nested within an inclusive learning system. **An issue arising is the difficulties schools may encounter in functioning in this way in challenging situations.**

The guiding principles of the reports and the measures to consider create a strong framework for learner-centred education within a competent system. The issue is more about the reality on the ground. **It is worth asking the question whether the predominant climate promoting competition,**

---

[4] For more information on the very varied approaches implemented in schools, see http://keyconet.eun.org/

individual achievement and high performance can be shifted towards the essence of these principles. As Michael Fielding writes,

> 'Democracy is fundamentally a way of living and learning together. The challenges facing education today are ill-served by the insistent drum beat of delivery. Education, in both its principled and pragmatic senses, requires a more subtle mutuality and a more holistic, more humanly fulfilling orientation. Its rigour is relational rather than directive, its urgency collaborative rather than commanding.' (Fielding 2015).

Traditionally schools have found it difficult to reconcile their mission of education with parental involvement. It is quite characteristic of school systems that the involvement of parents tends not to be on a daily basis of interaction, but often limited to critical moments such as transitions. While this is important, **enlarging the interactions could bring benefits to learners, families/carers and the schools. It is always worth reminding ourselves that a 'whole school' approach is one that involves all the institutional, local and family partners of schools as well as the students and staff.**

4.2. Institutional Level

At this level we are concerned with the specific roles of schools as learning organisations as developed in the reports on the Working Group Schools 2014-2015 and 2016-2018.

4.2.1. Organizational vision, culture, climate

The report of the Working Group Schools 2014-2015, *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving*, emphasizes that addressing early school leaving should be 'embedded in an overall inclusive learner-centred vision of education …' in which different stakeholders inside and outside the school collaborate together and integrate their efforts. The whole school approach is considered to be ecological with the school seen as multidimensional, part of an interactive system that can learn and change, an open learning hub that provides support to the local community and receives support from it (WGS-WS), i.e. the school as a living system nested within and collaborating with other living systems. Furthermore in a whole school approach all the members of the school community are actively engaged in 'cohesive, collective and collaborative' action where the culture and climate in place are one of a 'whole school around a whole learner'. Though the focus of the report is on early school leaving, this overarching, integrated approach is relevant for all learners.

Moreover, in the reports of the WGS 2016-2018 there is an emphasis on recognising schools as learning organisations (WGS-CT + WGS-TSL) and not just organisations dispensing learning. On the one hand, this means that the values of inclusivity and diversity considered important for learners also apply to teachers, and on the other hand that developing team work among teachers will stimulate peer learning building trust (WGS-TSL). Connecting teachers for professional development can help address issues of isolation among individual teachers which can be a major issue including for newly qualified teachers (WGS-N).

4.2.2 Student participation, voice and agency

The institutional level is also about the roles and place of students in the school and whether they are recognized as competent learners and partners. Giving students the opportunities to express their views, give ideas and be heard by the adults in the school is an important part of becoming an actor of one's learning and creating a sense of belonging and motivation (WGS-WS). This can be through both formal and informal channels: inside the classroom as well as through student councils for example. All learners need to be supported in order to be able to participate with confidence but those in more vulnerable or marginalized situations will need more support to ensure that their voices are heard too (WGS-WS). This is not an easy step for teachers and school leaders for who have been educated and trained in systems that do not prioritize students' participation whether in the classroom or across other school activities and who need support to develop the practices and tools to do it with confidence through in-service training, team working in schools and networking across schools.

4.2.3. Professional culture and pedagogical leadership

School authorities can also help schools develop professional working and learning cultures that motivate teachers and school leaders (WGS-TSL) including through a culture of reflective practice and enquiry that give them a role at school level within their professional teams as agents of change in education systems contributing to the development of curriculum, teaching and learning (WGS-TSL). These are professional competences that are both individual and collective and have an impact on the individual professional as well as on the institution.

In the report on *Quality Assurance for School Development* (WGS-QA), the focus is on giving schools the tools and capacities for development that respond to changing needs of learners within a professional learning community. While the guiding principles of this report have an overall importance for the governance of education systems (see below 1.4), they are also relevant at each level. At school level that includes using evaluation for school development, being able to take considered risks with a view to innovating for school development, underpinned by building trust and respect with all partners.

4.2.4. Main critical issues

The reports make a strong case for whole school approaches in which schools can function as learning organisations within an inclusive system supporting teachers and school leaders as learners themselves. Among other points they recommend developing team work that builds competence and prevents teachers from feeling isolated. The emphasis is on 'whole' learners in 'whole' schools. **It is a challenging principle that requires close working among the different levels in the system building individual and collective competence.**

There is a firm recognition that learners need support to be actors of their own learning and need the opportunities of being heard and being able to give their views and opinions both on their learning and all the issues that affect living together in a school and staff need support to do that.

The reports encourage reflective practice among education staff within schools so they can be agents of change for curriculum, teaching and learning.

Furthermore ensuring the conditions for feedback and evaluation will be critical in responding to learners' changing needs, building trust with partners and innovating for school development.

4.3. Inter-institutional Level

The inter-institutional level refers to the role of each institution within the system and the 'interaction' between them in providing quality services which ultimately impact children and families. In the case of schools we are referring to all the different types of institutions that potentially interact with schools, such as health services, libraries, social services, early childhood services, cultural and sports activities, child protection, research, etc.

4.3.1. Networks for learning and development across education systems

Inter-institutional working is fundamental to school development as learning organisations nesting individual schools within a supportive framework that may include governance, higher education, parents and the local community (WGS-N). The purpose of networking is to improve the experiences and outcomes of all learners through school and systemic development – i.e. the learner is central to the purpose of networking. Thus, one of the guiding principles for continuity and transitions (WGS-CT) is that systems should have the capacity to engage with different stakeholders to provide social and emotional support to learners.

The inter-institutional level in the reports of the working group focuses on networking among schools that establishes connections and relationships, develops collective intelligence for the mutual benefit of all and works towards common or shared goals. In complex school education systems (which they all are) networks support horizontal decision-making, help solve complex problems, sharing responsibilities and synergies among stakeholders and enabling innovations to evolve more quickly through optimisation of time and resources thus promoting knowledge sharing (WGS-N). They are viewed as professional networks built on trust and motivation and contribute to enhancing the professional development of teachers and capacity building in schools. Very crucially they mediate the different levels of the system (WGS-N). This is echoed in the WG Report on Continuity and Transitions in so far as school clustering is considered important to encourage collaboration between institutions ensuring a good exchange of information and a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities that can, in some cases, lead to transition plans but also to pedagogical exchanges among teachers.

A crucial contribution of the Networking report is that cooperation among key actors needs time for activities and recognition. They need to feel they have a voice and in general it may mean they are carrying out activities that are different from their daily professional tasks. This is a key factor for all inter-institutional cooperation.

4.3.2. Engaging with stakeholders

The Networks report has as one of its guiding principles the reference to cross-sectoral working. It focuses essentially on the range of stakeholders in education systems: including teachers, school leaders, network initiators and managers, consultants, researchers and evaluators, as well as policy makers. Bringing together these actors is, in itself, no easy task especially since there is frequently neither the support nor the structures (informal or formal) to do it. However the final guiding principle in report on Continuity and Transitions opens the space to a broader range of stakeholders as it calls for the development of cross-sectoral policies and indicators to ensure that accountability is shared between schools, health, social services and youth services to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of learner progress, particularly in the case of learners in vulnerable situations. This is echoed by some of the case studies in the Networks report exploring the advantages of multi-stakeholder networks to specific groups of learners, e.g. those at risk of early school leaving, students with mental health issues, etc.

It is also emphasized in the Whole School Approach to Tackling Early School Leaving because it is a multidimensional problem that requires the cooperation among a wide range of professionals and services. They bring different and complementary skills, perspectives and experiences. (WGS-WS)

4.3.3. Main critical issues

There are two main points to make here**. Firstly though the guiding principles in all of the Working Group Schools reports underline the importance of working with a broad range of stakeholders and institutions, in practice it can be very difficult for individual schools to undertake unless they have the support within the system and the resources: time to meet, build a relationship, develop ideas for coordinating efforts, etc.** This is the case whether the notion of cross-sectoral working focuses mainly on other actors within education systems or more widely across the different services to children and families. **Essentially the issue arising here is understanding the reciprocity among different clusters of individual schools working in networks with other school and other external stakeholders. The quality of relationships is a key aspect to making this work.**

Secondly, cross-sectoral working is frequently seen as a good way to address specific problems (behavioural, bullying, early school leaving, etc.). **Reflecting on how to build inter-institutional working into the everyday work could contribute to innovation and school development. It is not sustainable for schools to do it alone; they need institutional support and recognition of what they are doing.**

4.4. Governance Level

The governance level refers to the policies, regulations, mechanisms, etc. that are steering the education system at national, regional and local levels (as relevant).

The aim of the Working Group was to support member states in defining shared values that can provide an overarching vision for the European Education Area promoting better learning within a systemic and sustainable approach to change. It respects the diversity of systems to find the best implementation for them while encouraging peer exchange and learning.

4.4.1. Policy vision for learners

For learner development a clear vision at policy level is needed to ensure that the experiences and outcomes for all learners are improved and are the central pursuit of education policies and the central concern in the pursuit of quality (WGS-TSL).

The need to take account of the complexity of education systems by ensuring interaction among the different levels of governance is certainly not a new recommendation, but it seems to be one that education systems have great difficulty in actually implementing, which is a critical issue. It is the horizontal and vertical connections throughout the system that build collective knowledge and promote a sustainable cycle taking a long-term approach, with piloting, reflection and feedback. The Working Group Schools identified three areas of policy-making process that need attention:

- • feedback and flow to inform evidence-informed action;
- • motivation and engagement of all actors to make change happen;
- • sustainability of action together with stability in order that policy action have a lasting positive impact.

The WGS-CT took the perspective that learning is a prerequisite of personal growth and development at all levels within the system. Schools systems are balancing two sets of priorities for all learners: developing knowledge, skills and attitudes for an active role in work and life in society; and contributing to the personal development of the individual and their relationships. All that needs to take account of aspirations and build on strengths. It also entails supporting and developing continuity between levels and types of education to support learners' transitions. (WGS-CT) Furthermore, being inclusive does not only mean taking a universal approach as it is also important to invest in targeted support to learners with additional needs (WGS-CT).

4.4.2. Schools as learning organisations

The summary sheet leading into the final report on the governance of school education (due to be published late April 2018) reflects a living systems approach where the different levels are nested: the focus is on schools as learning organisation within education systems as learning systems, collaborative decision-making, networking, etc. For example, a school that is a learning organisation will enable teachers and school leaders to help improve policy and pedagogy through local research and networking and contribute to collaborative decision-making at all levels enabling interaction between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

In bringing all of these principles to bear on the development of schools and education systems, evaluation and timely feedback play a role in supporting evidence-informed policy-making as an integral part of the innovation process (WGS-QA). The Working Group on quality assurance focused on the recommendations of recent research on the importance of coherence and synergy in quality assurance, i.e. an effective interplay between external and internal elements at all levels with the ultimate aim of ensuring that all learners have the best possible opportunities (WGS-QA). There are many approaches to evaluation and quality assurance that have complementary purposes and in line with the complexity of education systems, the WG emphasized that no one model of QA will suit all contexts or all purposes. Together they are important for accountability and ongoing development of schools and systems, in a balanced manner, as well as changing needs of learners (WGS-QA). For this to work building trust between the different levels and the internal and external actors is fundamental as is also building the capacity of all actors to generate, interpret and use data (WGS-QA). This process should support the development of a common language and shared understanding about school and system development that leads to recommendations and tools for quality assurance being coherent with other recommendations on school governance (WGS-QA).

4.4.3. Main critical issues

Together the reports bring a set of guiding principles that can ensure coherence among the different levels in complex education systems, provide guidance on cooperation and networking, align key principles of a learner-centred approach in schools as learning organisations that are growing, developing and can be innovative through supportive multi-level governance and active collaboration with a range of partners.

However, it is clear that, whatever claims to the opposite, short term political agendas influenced by regular election horizons hamper the capacity of education systems to engage in a longer term process of improving the quality of experiences and outcomes for all learners. Too often a change in government means the end to funding for pilots underway or a change of direction.

Establishing a vision for education systems within the goal of building a European Education Area that focuses on ensuring that all learners are supported in realising their unique potential could be a significant step forward. **It will be interesting to see whether there is the political will for this to**

happen through a dynamic peer learning processes that encourages a reflection on a vision for childhood, for all children growing up in Europe that would reach across all the policy areas that affect children's lives. Inter alia, that would include education, social services, health, justice, culture, etc.

5. Issues for discussion

The main purpose of this paper is to invite reflection on and discussion about the extent to which there is coherence and continuity in the grounding values, principles and understandings stated or implicitly expressed in the European policy documents and commissioned studies, regarding early childhood services and school education. Focusing on the notion of the competent system guided by the L4WB principles provides a way of looking at the issues beyond the individual structure of these two sectors. To what extent is there an aligned vision in the way child development, learning and well-being are addressed? Does this vision and the accompanying policies providing guidelines for implementation really serve the realization of each child's unique potential building on their inner diversity in the best way?

The choice of using the 'competent system' framework and approach for analysing the different 'levels' of the system was because it provides an interlinked approach that enables us to look at the different levels and dynamics in both ECEC and school education. This approach expands the concept of competence so it includes not just an individual perspective but also a collective one at institutional and systemic levels; provides a broader, deeper understanding and a holistic view of a 'living' system that (in principal) serves the same child from birth through school education. The focus is not just on the children or the front line workers it is also about all those who from their various positions contribute to shaping these systems. But not less important, it is about the underpinning values that should be guiding the selected knowledge and practices employed within the systems. Taking the perspective of a competent system should also enable us to pursue reflection on what it means to consider all those we learn and work with as competent partners.

In using the four levels of the competent system to reflect on current policy orientations, it was intended to identify the common areas as well as differences and gaps in both fields (ECEC and school education), and draw attention to where the efforts should be put into creating more alignment through learning from both fields.

The 7 principles of the Learning for Well-being Foundation presented in the Introduction bring an overarching understanding of the organic way in which all complex systems function and evolve. How can we work towards a system that addresses children and childhood in a way that is more loyal to contributing to child's well-being and self-realization, and not lose this focus as children move through the system? Researchers and policy analysts in ECEC and school education have frequently noted a gap between declared policy principles and the implementation. Hence a useful question is how can we make a system function in a way that is fully aligned to its vision and main purpose?

By looking at those principles and at the brief analysis at the four levels of the competent system (see above sections 3 and 4), this section intends to summarize where the areas of coherence and continuity are situated, where there is inconsistency, as well as what we are missing when trying to improve a system that is meant to meet children's rights and to orchestrate the wealth of individual and collective diversity towards the single purpose of children's holistic development across the different aspects of their lives.

An overall reflection should be made, however, about the extent to which democratic values are translated into the way children, professionals, families and services/institutions are seen and how

they impact the way the system is functioning. The respect for individual value and diversity, for participation and dialogue of all actors, for negotiating roles, responsibilities and contributions while having a common goal is essential. It can be seen in the quality of relationships among adults and children, and among children and how they are shaped and allow personal and collective social and overall growth.

5.1. Is there a common vision of the child and childhood?

There is a common agreement about the importance of looking at the child in a holistic manner, addressing all aspects of their development, although in ECEC the term is used is 'child' while in the school education it is 'learner'. Are there significant implications of using these two different terms and what would they be? Though in this paper we are focusing on ECEC and school education, in order to take a genuinely holistic vision of the 'child' and childhood, other sectors that have important impacts on children's lives (such as health, mental health, social services, youth policies, culture, etc.) would also need to be included.

There is a common acknowledgement of the unique potential that exists in each child since birth and of de facto building their own learning based on their needs and experience too. However, is the inner diversity of each child more emphasized in practice in early years services than in school education … or not? This comes back to our question about the gaps between inspiring policy orientations and the reality on the ground. One of the three underpinning values in the European Quality Framework for ECEC is about having a clear image and voice of the child and childhood. It indicates that child centeredness is understood as seeing deep into the child, learning about them and following their lead in providing them with opportunities for learning. In the good examples, this brings learning closer to the child and is more organic. In school education, there is frequently a national curriculum or framework curriculum leaving teaching staff less space to take their cues from the children in the classroom. Competition is more present especially as children move up the system that cannot reflect a learner-centred perspective.

This also raises the issue of acknowledging the learning pathway for each child as an individual one involving their needs and experience, but critically all these pathways must be coordinated at system level. This should cut across transitions from the home environment to ECEC settings, then to compulsory education and later transitions while recognising that disruptions to these pathways can happen at any point for many different reasons. Furthermore if we are to pursue the logic, it would also include children's experiences in the health system, social services, etc.

The first value set out in the proposal for a Europe Quality Framework for ECEC is a clear image and voice of the child. Whereas there has been a (slowly) growing acceptance of the importance of the learner's voice in school education, though probably more for secondary age children than primary, there is still a need to ensure that children's right to participation is ensured for younger children too. Research points to the fact that it is a component part of making children feel valued through being able to give their opinion and make a difference. While acknowledging the holistic view of child development and well-being, there is a tendency to focus on physical, mental, social and emotional aspects of well-being but not paying attention to spirituality, i.e. how each child finds their meaningful place in the world. Recognizing their uniqueness is one way of nurturing their self-reflection and understanding of self, building their sense of meaning and purpose.

5.2. Is there a shared image of the role of professionals and of supporting professionalism?

This is an area where consistency can be found in the way professionals are seen as agents of change, reflective practitioners, team players and learners, too. However, little opportunity is provided to professionals to act as such. Innovation is also mentioned as being an important driving force for change and improvement, with professionals as main actors, but at the same time constraints are mentioned in terms of little space for risk taking, shared ownership and autonomy both in ECEC and school education. In a system lacking overall coherence, contradictory and parallel images of professionals working with children may co-exist and can lead to a missed sense of purpose for professionals. What do we expect their image to be about their own profession and place in the system? What competences should be nurtured in order to be attuned with the image of their profession? Moreover, do ECEC professionals and teaching staff actually see themselves as learners? And do they feel part of institutions that are learning organisations themselves, where there is space for diverse perspectives and multiple expressions?

In both fields professional growth and development is acknowledged as being essential. Reflection, peer learning and group working are mentioned in several documents as avenues for strengthening professionalism, which indicates an alignment of views. However, in both cases limited conditions and opportunities are created for meaningful learning contexts for professionals. Although evidence has been brought about the effectiveness of certain approaches to professional development, why is it disregarded? Within this broader perspective of working towards an image of the 'child' that is shared with all sectors that impact on their lives, it should be possible to think more about initial education and continuing professional development for ECEC and school professionals that is shared across professions. Furthermore, is there a holistic view of professionals whose personal and professional development is interrelated?

One inconsistency that reflects a traditional and limited understanding of the role of professionals working with children is related to the social and professional recognition of their position in the overall system. It impacts both on the self-image of the professional, and also on the importance accorded to each period in the child's life and the social perception of the status of the profession. Why are there still statutory differences in the qualification structures required and remuneration of the professionals working with children of different ages? As part of reflecting on possibilities of creating more cohesion, understanding the similarities and differences in the competences required for working with each age group could contribute to reducing barriers among professionals.

5.3. How are parents and families seen?

Perhaps this is the area where we can see more difference between the two sectors. Parents' involvement and participation in decisions regarding their children becomes less present as children grow older. Is this because of the child's age and the general understanding that children need more their parents when they are very young, or is this because of inconsistency between the values that are underpinning the practices in ECEC services and schools? Why are parents not seen at all times as the most important partners? Again this is a critical aspect where policy and practice can be in contradiction.

In ECEC the diversity among families is seen as an asset, and also contributes to adapting the services to be more responsive to families' needs, acknowledging the importance of the home environment for children's development and well-being. Some schools may be less flexible in this regard but that is very dependent on the prevailing mindset partly determined by traditional attitudes to schooling where the

school takes over from parents during school hours. In what ways is there dissonance in expectations (from both parents and schools) leading to a lack of dialogue and dysfunctional relationships?

5.4. What is the image of the services/institutions? What is their purpose and what role do they play in communities/societies?

This is an area that brings into the discussions a broader topic: are both ECEC and schools seen as institutions/services that serve society (whether public or private)? Are they seen as contributors to community development and increased social cohesion? What is the vision, what is the main purpose invested in these services/institutions?

All these questions, as well as their answers will lead ultimately to political choices. And they are strongly connected with the three sub-sections above. The limited intervention/impact of these systems and services within communities reflects a relationship in which the lack of interaction between the services and their environment, or when the service disregards the environment in which they function, and can lead to dysfunctional relationships between personnel and families, children and personnel, etc.

Both ECEC and schools have made steps towards opening the doors to communities, embracing and responding to the diversity that exists within and around them though the extent to which this happens depends a lot on context and motivation. In the case of ECEC additional services have been added or adapted to respond to specific needs. In the case of schools outreach to the local community may well be more focused on addressing major issues like early school leaving rather than part of the everyday activity. It is also true that the purpose and role of schools tend to be more narrowly defined – there is a mission to 'educate' rather than a primary focus on socialization and its role in identity and value formation (Desjardins 2015) that has been reinforced by neo-liberal policies. In split ECEC systems where pre-school (3-6 year olds) is the first stage of the education system this can lower the age at which children will be subject to school structures (and 'schoolification' – Urban 2015) which can adversely affect transitions for children and families as well as their experiences. Depending on the school system there can be a range of issues including leadership, centralisation, funding, national politics and policies, mindsets, etc. Whole school approaches are a first step in building the notion of community around the school and with the local community. They could also provide a step towards working with other sectors.

5.5. What happens if services/institutions, while being parts of a 'living' system, do not interact?

A renowned ECEC scholar once said that 'interaction drives development' when referring to human development (another living system). Education and social-welfare systems are also both living systems in their own right and part of a larger societal living system enabled by human beings. Key characteristics of living systems are wholeness (the individual child, the class, the early years centre, etc.), being open to other 'systems' (other individuals, schools, early year's centres, etc.), encouraging interactions and recognizing interrelatedness both within the individual and among different types of 'systems'. Systems cannot develop without interactions among their parts? European education and social welfare systems were created to serve political objectives of the industrial and post-industrial age, but also to support children's development, learning and well-being. Now, can the parts of the system converge their actions towards the same goal if they are not interacting, dialoguing, sharing, learning from each other and working together? It may be possible, but with many failures, especially

as regards those that need this convergence the most, the most vulnerable groups, leading to limited results.

There have been important steps made in both ECEC and school education towards more coordination and integration. However, in ECEC the discourse is more intense and sheds light on critical factors that may enable or prevent collaboration and coordination: shared values/vision, shared responsibility, strong leadership, time, excellent professionals and resources. In addition, it implies to a greater extent the importance of the quality of relationships and interactions across services/institutions and professions, building a culture of cooperation. Why are we so reluctant to build these bridges?

While the issue of transition from preschool to school has been discussed for decades though not yet solved, especially for the most disadvantaged children, there is an even larger question about how we can actually address holistically the rights and needs of children and their families without creating the necessary mechanisms for services/institutions and people to share their views and work together? Cooperation and coordination among services and institutions that operate like a net would prevent children from falling through the holes. What can be done to nurture such competences for inter-agency and inter-institutional work?

We cannot leave the governance level without coming back to the bigger issue. Our intention in writing this paper to stimulate discussion at the Learning for Well-being Community Day on 24th April was to better understand if, where and how the Learning for Well-being Principles are reflected in current policy orientations in Europe in ECEC and school education with a view to developing initiatives that can support promising directions. It made sense to bring together not only colleagues working in ECEC and school education but also those in other sectors and fields of work. To what extent can these principles contribute to developing a vision or overarching goals for childhood that include health, social services, youth policy, cultural, etc. as well as ECEC and school education? Moving forward in ECEC and school education would definitely be progress, but taking the bigger picture of a broader societal living system in which the different sectors are nested and interact with one another would open doors to a truly holistic vision of childhood.

References

Council of the European Union (2011) *Council conclusions on early childhood education and care.* http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09424.en11.pdf

Desjardins, R. (2015) The Precarious Role of Education in Identity and Value Formation Processes: the shift from state to market forces, in Learning to Be - Idealism or Core Business?, European Journal of Education, Vol. 50, No. 3. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12114

DG Justice of the European Commission (2013) *Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth.* Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

European Commission (2011) Communication from the Commission: *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow.*

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Directorate B2 – Schools and multilingualism, Reports produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18:

Continuity and transitions in learner development. Guiding principles for policy development on learner pathways and transitions in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18

Teachers and school leaders in schools as learning organisations. Guiding Principles for policy development in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18

Teachers and school leaders in schools as learning organisations. Guiding Principles for policy development in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18

Networks for learning and development across school education. Guiding principles for policy development on the use of networks in school education systems*. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18

Quality assurance for school development. Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in school education. Produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18

EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Directorate B2 – Schools and multilingualism, Report produced by the ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2014-15:

A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving. Policy messages. Working Group on Schools Policy 2014-2015.

Eurofound (2015). *Early childhood care: Working conditions, training and quality of services – a systematic review*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Peeters, J., Sharmahd, N., Budginaite I. (2016) *Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in Early Childhood education and Care (ECEC): Pathways towards Qualification*, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union. Doi: 10.2766/898530

European Commission (E.C.) (2014). *Proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care: Report of the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on early childhood education and care under the auspices of the European Commission.*

Sharmahd, N., Peeters. J., Van Laere, K., Vonta, T., De Kimpe, K., Brajkovic. S., Contini, L., Giovannini, D. (2017) *Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional*

learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union. Doi: 10.2766/74332.

Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., and Van Laere, K. (2011). *Competence requirements in early childhood education and care. CoRe Final Report*. Brussels: European Commission.

Urban, M. (2015) From 'Closing the Gap' to an Ethics of Affirmation. Reconceptualising the Role of Early Childhood Services in Times of Uncertainty, in Education and Social Transformation, in European Journal of Education, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2015. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12131