

FINLAND

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Contents

1. ECEC governance	3
2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?.....	3
2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision	3
2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity.....	5
3. Initial professional studies (IPS).....	6
3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational	6
3.2 Competencies and curricula in the IPS programmes of core practitioners.....	8
3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability.....	12
4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners	13
5. Continuing professional development (CPD).....	15
6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing.....	16
7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues.....	18
8. General workforce issues.....	19
8.1 Remuneration	19
8.2 Full-time and part-time employment	20
8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace.....	20
8.4 Non-contact time	21
8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies	21
9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment	22
10. References	23



1. ECEC governance

Finland has a unitary system of early childhood education and care, organised in two stages. Following a long tradition as part of the social welfare system, during which early education was included in a predominantly care framework, responsibility for ECEC provision for children up to age 6 was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö*) in 2013. Before this time, only pre-primary transition classes for 6- to 7-year olds were part of the education system.

The Finnish ECEC system is currently undergoing fundamental changes in legislation and in the governance and steering of ECEC services (see *Key Contextual Data*). The qualification requirements of ECEC staff were not included in the first phase of the law reform (*Varhaiskasvatustlaki* 19.1.1973/36 -8.5.2015/580). They are still defined by the Law on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Personnel (*Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksesta* 272/2005). Preparations for the second phase of the law reform (including the competence requirements for ECEC staff) are under way. New National Curriculum guidelines for early childhood education and care (National Board of Education¹ 2016b) were published in October 2016 and they are – for first time in the history of the Finnish ECEC system – legally binding.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 outlines the profiles and minimum qualification requirements of staff working directly with children in ECEC provision. These may have a specialist university qualification (Kindergarten Teacher; Special Needs Teacher), a generalist higher education social welfare/social work qualification (Social Welfare Worker²), an upper secondary health care qualification (Practical Nurse/Childcare Worker) or an upper secondary qualification focusing on young children and families (Children's Instructor). Kindergarten Teachers, Special Needs Teachers or the Social Welfare Workers act as core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility). Primary School Teachers with a Master's degree may also work as teachers in pre-primary transition classes. Special Needs Assistants (personal or group assistants) may also work in ECEC/daycare centres. They are not required to complete a formal qualification³. Assistants work as team members without group responsibility and the need for employing an assistant is weighed up every year in relation to current need.

Core practitioners are categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this section).

Table 1

¹ The Finnish National Board of Education and the Centre for International Mobility CIMO merged in 2017. Together they now form the Finnish National Agency for Education.

² We have chosen Social Welfare Worker as the most appropriate translation of the occupational title *Sosionomi*. We have done this in order to distinguish between Social Workers (who in Finland are required to have a Master's degree in social sciences) and Social Pedagogues (*Sosiaalikasvattaja*), the occupational title in currency before the introduction of the polytechnic system of higher education. The current initial professional studies of Social Welfare Workers (*Sosionomi*) focuses predominantly on social services, but the study programmes for those who intend to apply for a Kindergarten Teacher's post also include some pedagogical subjects.

³ The majority of the 200 assistants working in ECEC settings in the city of Helsinki have completed an apprenticeship training. In 2010, the former school assistant's vocational qualification was replaced by special needs assistants' and after school club instructors' vocational qualifications (National Board of Education 2010; Hasari 2016).

Finland: Regular contact staff in ECEC centre-based provision

Job title and profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED level ⁴
<p><i>Lastentarhanopettaja</i> Kindergarten Teacher</p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	<p><i>Päiväkoti</i> (‘day home’) ECEC centre 0–6 years</p> <p><i>Esiopetus</i> Pre-primary transition class 6–7 years</p>	<p>Core practitioner with group responsibility</p> <p>Centre head</p>	0–7 years	<p>Bachelor’s degree 3 years university Specialism in early childhood education</p> <p>ECTS points: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6</p>
<p><i>Sosionomi</i> Social Welfare Worker</p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Social Care/Welfare Professional</p>	<p><i>Päiväkoti</i> ECEC centre 0–6 years</p> <p>Complete range of social services, including ECEC centres, but also family guidance, work with senior citizens, rehabilitation for drug users, etc.</p>	<p>Core practitioner with group responsibility (but not in pre-primary transition class)</p> <p>Centre head</p>	All ages	<p>Bachelor’s degree 3½ years higher education institution (polytechnic) Specialism in social services</p> <p>ECTS points: 210 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 6</p>
<p><i>Lähihoitaja</i> Practical Nurse/ Nursery Nurse</p>	<p><i>Päiväkoti</i> ECEC centre 0–6 years</p> <p>Complete range of social and health care services, e.g. children’s homes, hospital units, youth centres, services for senior citizens etc.</p>	Qualified co-worker	All ages	<p>Approximately 3 years upper secondary vocational qualification in social welfare and health care</p> <p>ECTS points: n/a⁵ EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 3</p>
<p><i>Lastenhojaaja</i> Children’s Instructor/ Childcare Worker</p>	<p><i>Päiväkoti</i> ECEC centre 0–6 years</p> <p>Also work in: playgroups run by the Lutheran church parishes, open ECEC services and family services, out-of-school provision</p>	Qualified co-worker	0–7 years	<p>Approximately 3 years upper secondary vocational qualification in childcare, education and family welfare at The Church Training College or corresponding training institution.</p> <p>ECTS points: n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 3</p>

⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012, 2014.

⁵ n/a = not applicable

Job title and profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED level ⁴
<i>Eryislastentä-</i> <i>hanopettaja</i> or <i>Var-</i> <i>haiskasvatuksen er-</i> <i>ityisopettaja</i> (both titles are in use) Special Education Teacher (early child- hood) <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Peda- gogy Professional (Special Needs)	<i>Päiväkoti</i> ECEC centres 0–6 years and other set- tings/groups for young children with special needs	Core practition- er with group responsibility or focus on chil- dren with spe- cial needs if working in a multi- professional team. Centre head	0–7 years	1-year postgraduate university study route in special needs education following a qualification as Kindergarten Teacher (university route) and 2 years' work experience as Kindergarten Teacher ECTS points: 180 + 60 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112/0114 ISCED 2011: 6
<i>Avustaja</i> Special Needs Assistant	Personal or group assistant for children with special needs in various settings	(Non-qualified) co-worker (although quali- fication rec- ommended)		No IPS required; recommended: 1–2 years vocational training ECTS points: n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2013-F: n/a ISCED 2011: 3

Box 1

SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners (adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010)

- *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (specialist focus, 0– 6/7 years)
- *Pre-primary Education Professional* (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- *Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional* (focus on pre-primary and primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- *Social and Childhood Professional* (broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- *Social Care/Health Care Professional* (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Table 2 provides an overview of selected aspects of the structural composition of the ECEC workforce in Finland. Statistics in the table are taken from a report published by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Alila et al. 2014), which draws on several statistical sources. There have been no significant changes in the number and distribution of ECEC employees since 2012. Figures here apply to all ECEC services – including family day care, which is now part of the ECEC system following the introduction of the new curriculum guidelines in autumn 2016. The figures referring to centre-based ECEC have been estimated so that if approximately 30% of all employees have tertiary level education (either as Kindergarten Teacher, Special Education Teacher or Social Welfare Worker), one can conclude that the rest of the staff (70%) comprises Practical Nurses or the equivalent. According to current legislation, every third staff member (working

directly with children) must have tertiary-level professional education, while the requirement for co-workers is an upper secondary level vocational qualification. Assistants do not belong to these categories⁶.

In 2012, the proportion of women in the ECEC workforce varied according to the occupational group between 93.7%–99.9%.

Table 2
Finland: Structural composition of workforce in ECEC provision*

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree	2012: approx. 30% - 18% with Kindergarten Teacher qualification - 10% with Social Welfare Worker qualification - 1.9% with Special Needs Teacher qualification
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	2012: approx. 70%
Staff with non-specialist qualification	Only small numbers, mainly as substitute staff
Staff without formal initial professional studies	2012: 6%
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	Mostly off-site
Male staff (all ECEC services)	2012: 2.1% 6.3% of male employees work in ECEC administration, e.g. as Centre Heads.
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data .

*Alila et al. 2014.

In 2012, the average age of personnel in all ECEC services (including family day care) was 47.5 years. The average age of Centre Heads was 52.7 years and of Kindergarten Teachers, 41.8 years.

3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

Study programmes for prospective Kindergarten Teachers are provided by seven universities in Finland. Åbo Akademi and the University of Helsinki also offer classes in Swedish (Swedish is the second official language in Finland). Finnish universities enjoy a high degree of autonomy regarding the statutes regulating the teacher education programmes. For example, the University of Tampere applies a problem-based learning approach as the basis for its curriculum whereas at the University of Helsinki, EC teacher education applies a multidisciplinary and research-based approach, emphasising the importance of child development, learning and active interaction as the basis for early childhood pedagogy.

⁶ Personal or group assistants for children with special needs work in ECEC/daycare centres. Usually a child must have a diagnostic statement in order to be granted a personal assistant.

Table 3

Finland: Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Finnish: <i>Lastentarhanopettaja</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling + matriculation Professional studies: 3 years university, degree course in (early) education Award: Bachelor's degree, Early Childhood Education ECTS points: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplaces: ECEC centre, 0-6 years; pre-primary transition class, 6-7 years; ECEC planning and administration

In Finland, there are approximately 20 Universities of Applied Sciences (polytechnics) with study programmes for the Social Welfare Worker's degree (Bachelor in social services) and both the quantity and the content of ECEC studies vary considerably.

Table 4

Finland: Social Welfare Worker

Job title in Finnish: <i>Sosionomi (AMK)</i> Profile: Social Care/Welfare Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling + matriculation Professional studies: 3½ years higher education institution (polytechnic), degree course in social services Award: Bachelor's degree (polytechnic), Social Services ECTS points: 210 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplace: ECEC centre, 0–6 years ⁷ ,

Special Needs Teachers' (early childhood) education is available at five universities as a one-year postgraduate course of study.

Table 5

Finland: Special Needs Teacher (early childhood)

Job title in Finnish: <i>Erityislastentarhanopettaja</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (Special Needs)
Entry requirements: 3 years undergraduate studies (Bachelor's degree in early childhood education) and 2 years work experience as a Kindergarten Teacher Professional studies: 1 year postgraduate university study route in special needs education in early childhood Award: Postgraduate award in special education ECTS points: 180+60 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 012/0114 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplaces: Segregated (exclusively for children with special needs) and integrated (children with special needs integrated in mainstream ECEC settings) ⁸ groups in ECEC centres or posts in mainstream groups in ECEC centres, consultative work in ECEC services; ECEC administration and planning.

⁷ If a person with a Social Worker qualification wishes to work as a Kindergarten Teacher, the awarded degree should include 60 ECTS points of educational studies or social pedagogy.

⁸ Early education for children with special needs is mainly provided in mainstream settings (inclusive education)

The employees who work as Nursery Nurses in ECEC or daycare centres are required to complete either a Practical Nurse's or Children's Instructor's vocational training. The IPS of Practical Nurses and Children's Instructors (and Special Needs Assistants) can also be organised as an apprenticeship and in some cases, the first year of studies e.g. in the IPS of Practical Nurses, training may consist entirely of workplace-based learning. Children's Instructor's training is regulated by legislation on basic vocational training; the curricular goals and content are approved by the National Board of Education⁹. 12 vocational training institutions, of which The Church Training College has the longest experience of training Children's Instructors, offer this qualifying route. The Church Training College is a private educational learning institution with an affiliation to the Lutheran Church. It specialises in social and health care education as well as in various church-related occupations.

Apprenticeship is nowadays the main form of training (The Church Training College 2016b; Act on Amendments of Act on Basic Vocational Training (1998, amended 2014); National Board of Education 2014). Competence-based qualifications will strengthen the ongoing reforms of the upper secondary level vocational qualification system; the new qualification system will be effective in 2018.

Table 6

Finland: Nursery Nurse/Childcare Worker

Job title in Finnish: <i>Lastenhoitaja / Lastenhojaaja</i>
<p>Route 1 - Practical Nurse/Nursery Nurse (when working in ECEC centre)</p> <p>Entry requirements: 9 years comprehensive school</p> <p>Professional studies: Approximately 3 years upper secondary vocational training in social welfare and health care (Practical Nurse)</p> <p>Award: Vocational qualification in social and health care</p> <p>ECTS points: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0922</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: ECEC centre (0 to 6/7 years)</p>
<p>Route 2 - Children's Instructor (<i>Lastenhojaaja</i>)</p> <p>Entry requirements: 9 years comprehensive school</p> <p>Professional studies: 3 years upper secondary vocational training at The Church Training College or corresponding training institution in Childcare and Education and Family Welfare.</p> <p>Award: Vocational qualification in childcare and family services</p> <p>ECTS points: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0922</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: ECEC centres (0-6 years)</p>

3.2 Competencies and curricula in the IPS programmes of core practitioners

Kindergarten Teacher (*Lastentarhanopettaja*)

Competency specifications (Bachelor's degree programme in early childhood education at the University of Helsinki):

⁹ Since 2017 The Finnish National Agency for Education.

At the end of the study programme students are expected to:

- understand early childhood and pre-primary pedagogy;
- have a knowledge base about learning, interaction and play;
- understand cultural diversity in childhood;
- view children’s development as a holistic, socio-cultural process;
- understand the significance of the children’s learning environment;
- be able to use new technologies;
- be familiar with the goals, contents and methods of early childhood education (including pre-primary transition classes);
- be able to analyse early childhood education as a social phenomenon;
- understand how to use appropriate techniques to stimulate children’s learning.

Curricular areas: (1) Language and communication studies (19 ECTS points); (2) Basic studies in education (25 ECTS points); (3) Intermediate studies in education (51 ECTS points); (4) Content/subject areas in early childhood education (60 ECTS points); (5) Minor subjects (25 ECTS points) (see *Box 2* for details). Through bilateral contracts, students can study for part of the degree at a university in another country, e.g. through the ERASMUS programme with 50 partner universities or the NORDPLUS student exchange programmes (University of Helsinki 2016).

For the preparation of the Kindergarten Teacher study programme at the University of Helsinki (see *Box 2*), representatives of municipalities, as the largest employers in the ECEC sector, were consulted.

Box 2

Finland: Curricular areas, Kindergarten Teacher study programme, University of Helsinki

<p>(1) Language and Communication Studies (19 ECTS points) Orientation to university studies and Kindergarten Teacher’s profession (4) Academic writing (2) Communication and interpersonal competence (2) Second national language (3) Foreign language (3) ICT (digital technologies) ‘Driving licence’ (3) Further ICT studies (2)</p> <p>Basic Studies in Education (25 ECTS points) <i>Cultural basis of education</i> Social, historical and philosophical foundations of education (5) PST* Changing childhood (5) <i>Psychological basis of education</i> Psychology of development and learning (5) PST* <i>Pedagogical basis of education</i> Didactics (5) PST* <i>Research methods</i> Academic thinking in the context of education (5)</p> <p>(3) Intermediate Studies in Education (51 ECTS points) <i>Cultural basis of education</i> Education for diversities (5) PST* <i>Psychological basis of education</i> Advanced course in educational and developmental psychology (5) Pedagogical leadership and multi-professional cooperation (5) <i>Pedagogical basis of education</i> Observation, planning and evaluation in early childhood education (7) Pedagogical activities in early childhood education (5) Preschool and early primary years education (3) Toddler pedagogy (3) Special education and multicultural education in early years (5) Research methods I (5) Bachelor’s thesis (8)</p> <p>(4) Content Areas in Early Childhood Education (60 ECTS points)</p>
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Basis of content areas in early childhood education

Language and interaction (communication) (5)

Mathematics (4)

Environmental education and natural sciences (4)

Religious and moral education (4)

Skills and arts education

Arts education (5)

Music education (5)

Crafts education (5)

Didactics of physical education (5)

Children's literature and drama (5)

Skills and arts education, well-being, culturally sustainable development (3)

Practice

Integrated practice (8) PST*

Advanced practice (7) PST*

(5) **Minor Subject (25 ECTS points)** (e.g. special education or pre-primary and early primary years education)

*PST = Pedagogical Studies for Teachers (35 ECTS points)¹⁰

Social Welfare Worker (*Sosionomi (AMK)*)

Competency specifications (Bachelor's degree programme in social services at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (polytechnic)):

The study programme is based on the following principles:

- empowering citizens;
- preventing marginalisation and promoting inclusion and social pluralism;
- promoting social participation, equality and wellbeing in society.

Curricular areas: The following study units at the Metropolia form the early childhood education track the in Social Welfare Worker's training programme:

- Childhood growth and development (5 ECTS points);
- Everyday life of families and children in Finnish society (5 ECTS points);
- Individual and community counselling (5 ECTS points);
- Supporting daily life through socio-pedagogical work plus first internship (15 ECTS points);
- Child protection (5 ECTS points);
- Special needs support in early education (5 ECTS points);
- Early education (20 ECTS points);
- Work placement in ECEC setting (20 ECTS points) = third internship;
- Thesis (15 ECTS points).

Special Needs Teacher (early childhood) (*Erityislastentarhanopettaja*)

Competency specifications (University of Helsinki study programme):

Psycho-social factors such as learning how to use play, how to support peer interaction and how to recognise children's needs and respond to them as well as pedagogical sensitivity are abilities that are achieved in the Special Needs Teacher's education programme at the University of Helsinki. Studies are based on an ecological framework of early interventions which are considered to be not only individual support for the child with special needs, but also impact on every child's action and behaviour by boosting children's strengths and finding new courses of action in unfamiliar or challenging situations. Furthermore, after graduating, the students are expected

¹⁰ Teachers working in comprehensive (primary/secondary) schools, as well as in other educational institutions, are required to have 60 ECTS points in *Pedagogical Studies for Teachers* of which 35 ECTS points can be taken in the Bachelor's degree course for Kindergarten Teachers.

to understand the considerable impact of physical environmental factors in ECEC (play materials, schedules, daily structuring of the programme) on children's development and learning.

Curricular areas: The postgraduate course in Special education (early childhood) at the University of Helsinki focuses on basic studies in special education (25 ECTS points), Children's behaviour, well-being and interaction (10 ECTS points), Learning Support (20 ECTS points), and Professional growth (10 ECTS points) (see Box 3 for details; Suhonen 2016).

Box 3

Finland: Curricular areas, Special Needs Teacher Education, University of Helsinki

<p>Basic studies in special education (25 ECTS points)¹¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Introduction to Finnish special educationMarginalisation and mental healthSpecial educational needsLearning disabilitiesScientific thinking in the context of education <p>Theme 1. Behaviour, well-being and interaction (10 ECTS points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Communication and perceptionChallenges in behaviour <p>Theme 2. Learning support (20 ECTS points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Brain and learningIn-depth special educationReading skills and reading difficultiesMathematical learning difficulties <p>Theme 3. Professional growth (10 ECTS points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Special Needs Teacher as a researcher

Practical Nurse/Nursery Nurse (*Lähihoitaja*¹²)

Competency specifications: After completing the Practical Nurse's vocational qualification focusing on children and young people, graduates are expected to be able to:

- plan, carry out and evaluate tasks relating to children's basic care and upbringing, including children with special needs;
- follow the legal regulations of social welfare and healthcare, official guidelines and ethical principles and rules in her/his work;
- apply child- and family-centred working principles (National Board of Education 2010).

Curricular areas: Initial professional studies comprise compulsory and optional modules. Since 2015, students are awarded 'competence points' instead of credits, and for the Practical Nurse IPS, these now amount to 180 competence points (instead of the previous 120 credits).

Compulsory modules are: (1) Support and guidance of growth; (2) Nursing and care; (3) Rehabilitation support. In addition to these modules part of the study programme specialises in Children's and Youth Care and Education and those planning to work with children and young people choose this specialisation route.

The curricular areas have remained the same since the 2015 reform (Rajamäki 2016).

¹¹ Basic studies in special education (25 ECTS points) must be completed before entering the special education teacher's study programme. However, only 20 ECTS points are compensated. Thus, the sum total of ECTS points of whole study programme is 60 ECTS points.

¹² When a practical nurse (*lähihoitaja*) works in an ECEC centre her/his job title is nursery nurse (*lastenhoitaja*).

Children's Instructor (*Lastenohjaaja*)

Competency specifications: After completing the Children's Instructor's vocational qualification, graduates are expected to be able to:

- work in child- and family-oriented services in various contexts;
- act according to the underlying principles of early childhood education and care;
- take care of a child's holistic upbringing and well-being;
- support the child's physical, intellectual, social and spiritual development.

Curricular areas: The vocational qualification in Child Care and Education and Family Welfare consists of 180 competence points and takes place at The Church Training College. The curriculum comprises compulsory and optional elements. Compulsory units are: (1) Guiding children's growth and care-giving; (2) Family-focused and community-based educational work; (3) Morning and afternoon activity instruction for schoolchildren. Optional units are: instruction in expression skills; guiding children and families in need of support; working in a multicultural environment; Christian education; service provision. The Church Training College also organises apprenticeship training, which is the most common form of Children's Instructor's training nowadays. Ongoing reforms of vocational training legislation also apply to the Children's Instructor vocational qualification (The Church Training College 2016a; Ahteensuu 2016; National Board of Education 2016a; Rajamäki 2016).

When working in church affiliated services Children's Instructors can implement religious education based on Christian values (National Board of Education 2016a).

Special Needs Assistant (*Avustaja*)

Special Needs Assistants work as personal or group/class assistants in various educational and social welfare institutions, typically in primary schools or ECEC centres. Persons who have completed the training programme may also work in after-school activities run by municipalities, parishes or NGOs. Assistants in daycare/ECEC centres are not required to have a formal qualification but it is recommended.

The curriculum of the training for the vocational qualification for Special Needs Assistants (and After-school Club Instructors) consists of the following compulsory units: (1) Occupational work as an Assistant; (2) Supporting and directing growth and development; (3) Supporting and directing learning and activities; (4) Supporting persons with special needs. An optional unit focuses on Entrepreneurship.

Municipalities have some influence on the approaches in the training programme (especially when carried out as apprenticeship training or as competence based qualification) and the curricular areas emphasize early childhood if students are planning to work in ECEC settings. Ongoing reforms of vocational qualifications also apply to those for Special Needs Assistants and After-school Club Instructors (Hasari 2016; Rajamäki 2016).

3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

In Finland, competence requirements are based on formal qualifications. Both employees who work as Kindergarten Teachers (Kindergarten Teachers or Social Welfare Workers) and those who work as Childcare Workers/Nursery Nurses require a regulated qualification award defined by statutes.

However, in upper secondary level vocational training (here referring to Practical Nurses, Children's Instructors and Special Needs Assistants), there is an alternative qualification route, i.e. a competence-based qualification system. This offers the possibility of completing a vocational



qualification partially or wholly through a demonstration of vocational skills which are then considered equal to the regular qualification.

In Finland, there are no formal barriers between vocational training and tertiary level education. For example, after completing the qualification route for Practical Nurse it is possible to apply for a place in tertiary-level education. However, the degree programmes at higher education institutions (universities of applied sciences), such as that for the registered general nurse or the Social Welfare Worker, are more common than university degree programmes. Those who have completed the Practical Nurse's qualification can seek a job in different areas of the social welfare and health care sector. It is the employer's responsibility to assess whether the applicant fulfils the competency requirements of the workplace in question (National Board of Education 2014; Rajamäki 2016.)

4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners

Kindergarten Teacher (*Lastentarhanopettaja*)

Time allocated to field-based studies: Field-based studies refer to practical placement periods which take place in ECEC settings, including pre-primary classes. The term refers to structured and supervised studies and is preferred to the term 'workplace-based learning', which could be interpreted as just being in an authentic workplace setting and assisting centre staff. The time allocated to field-based studies in the Kindergarten Teacher degree programmes at Finnish universities varies between 7% and 11%, which amounts to between 12 and 20 ECTS points out of a total of 180 ECTS points. Most commonly, the field-based element accounts for 15 ECTS points (Onnismaa et al. 2015).

Content focus in field-based studies: At the University of Helsinki¹³, each field-based period has its own character and goals. *Integrative practice* (8 ECTS points) focuses on the planning, implementing and evaluation of early childhood education, in particular on developing skills and reflective competencies in the core content areas of early childhood education (e.g. drama and physical education, music, nature and mathematics). *Final practice* (7 ECTS points) aims to develop the holistic responsibility of the student with respect to planning, implementing and evaluating work in the ECEC centre, including working with parents. In addition, the student becomes acquainted with administration and working as a member of multi-professional teams and networks.

Alongside the field-based periods in ECEC settings, students plan, carry out and observe different kinds of pedagogical sessions with children in a campus-based classroom that has been constructed especially for visiting groups of children at the University of Helsinki. Students also visit ECEC centres beyond the placement periods, e.g. during physical education courses, and organise various activities for children. Students also receive supervision from university lecturers when carrying out these activities. The professional identity of the Kindergarten Teacher (including eight hours observation in daycare centres) is treated as a part of *Pedagogical bases of education* course during the first academic year. The students spend two mornings (three hours each) and one whole day (six hours) in ECEC settings observing the pedagogical activities carried out by the Kindergarten Teacher and his/her professional role. The observation is reported and discussed with other students and the university lecturer.

¹³ The Department of Teacher Education (since 2017 Faculty of Education) at the University of Helsinki has been used here as an example because it has the largest Teacher Education Department in Finland, taking in 120 (140 as from 2017) Kindergarten Teacher students each academic year.

Structure of field-based studies and mentoring support: The Kindergarten Teacher supervisor has a key position in helping students to develop their skills and construct their theory-in-use. It is also considered important that the university lecturer be very familiar with the field of ECEC. Consequently, in ideal cases, the educational background of the university lecturer who supervises student teachers should include Kindergarten Teacher's education (Onnismaa et al. 2015).

Close cooperation with municipalities (ECEC administration) is exercised, particularly in the case of the field-based study periods. At the University of Helsinki a network of placement centres was established in 1996 based on officially ratified contracts between municipalities in the metropolitan area. The consistent and goal-oriented education of field supervisors (5 ECTS points), conducted by the University of Helsinki, has been an essential part of strengthening the coherence of the network.

Furthermore, Kindergarten Teacher supervisors/mentors are invited to the university at the beginning of each field-based period. Once a year, a symposium on field-based studies brings together participants from the entire teacher education department (i.e., including the study programme for school teachers), the cooperating schools and ECEC/daycare centres, to reflect on current developments.

The 'double supervision model' – where the student receives feedback and guidance from both an experienced Kindergarten Teacher in the field and from a university lecturer – depends on there being a sufficient number of motivated supervisors. The aim of collaboration between ECEC centres and the university has been to create a new learning community (Onnismaa et al. 2015).

Recent reforms, trends and debates: Field-based studies have traditionally been considered to form an essential part of teacher education. One issue under debate in Finland is the relation between the length of field-based periods and the overall quality of this component of initial professional studies. To a certain extent, quantity can be compensated with quality. If relatively short field-based periods offer well-constructed practicum experiences linked with on-campus-courses, it can be argued that they are better than long periods where the student is more or less working without systematic supervision. Yet this is only partly true: the reduction of the quantity of field-based studies can pose a risk for quality. Increasing the share of practice in Kindergarten Teacher education is, however, not a durable solution as long as the IPS for Kindergarten Teachers is a Bachelor's degree. Being capable of reflecting on one's own practice and developing practical theories, i.e. having a teacher-as-researcher approach, is the result of a long and arduous process, which requires support and input from supervisors and needs to be closely connected with real-life situations.

Social Welfare Worker (*Sosionomi* (AMK))

Workplace-based learning (*internship*) within the IPS of Social Welfare Workers is allocated at least 45 ECTS points. At the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, students who have decided that they want to work as Kindergarten Teachers conduct their third internship (20 ECTS points) in an ECEC setting. Quality is enhanced by developing the guidelines and support for theory-based professional reflection which is conducted by tutors and Kindergarten Teachers supervising students during their internships. There is an ECEC centre internship network in the metropolitan area of Helsinki for the students of Metropolia and the supervisors are trained twice a year. One challenge is that many of the students choose to do the internship working as supply staff, without a supervising teacher in the same team. That limits the possibilities of peer learning and pedagogical reflection. Tutors at Metropolia are working to solve this challenge and recommend internship as a student, not as a staff member. Since there are approximately 20 institutions offering study programmes for Social Welfare Workers, duration and content of the workplace-based learning element of IPS vary a lot (Tast 2016).

Practical Nurse (*Lähihoitaja*)

According to the national curriculum guidelines for the IPS of Practical Nurses, workplace-based learning in various social welfare and health care institutions and also in ECEC centres must account for at least 30 credits out of a total of 120 credits (now 180 competence points). There has been no change in the proportion since the move to awarding competence points. Thus, workplace based learning plays an important role in the IPS of Practical Nurses and in some cases, the first year of studies may consist entirely of workplace-based learning (National Board of Education 2010; Koistinen 2016).

Children's Instructor (*Lastenohjaaja*)

In the curriculum of the upper secondary level vocational qualification in childhood and family services, workplace-based learning accounts for 32–38 credits. There is some variation in the duration and content of workplace-based learning periods according to the provider of the training (The Church Training College 2016a; Ahteensuu 2016).

5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

There is no binding national framework for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel. However, Finnish legislation encourages employers in all lines of activity to improve continuing professional development for their employees. The Law on subsidised CPD (*Laki taloudellisesti tuetusta ammatillisen osaamisen kehittämisestä* 1136/2013) articulates the principles of CPD policy for both the public and private sector. The aim of the law is to promote systematic training for employees in order to maintain and further develop professional skills to meet the demands of and changes in the workplace. The employers are required to produce a CDP plan for their personnel in order to be entitled to tax relief or other financial incentives. Nevertheless, there are no legally binding norms for CPD or in-service training.

The CPD of ECEC personnel is mentioned in the new ECEC legislation (Varhaiskasvatustalaki 2015). According to the law (2015), the municipalities are required to ensure the participation of their ECEC personnel in professional learning activities specific to their respective qualifications. When, in January 2013, ECEC administration was transferred to the education sector, the issue of CPD as a requirement was raised, but so far this has not taken place. It remains to be seen whether CPD is taken into consideration when the Finnish National Agency for Education provides guidance and supervision of the national implementation of the new ECEC legislation.

In terms of participation in CPD, a survey conducted by the Union of Kindergarten Teachers in 2015 showed that 20% of the respondents had not participated in-service training during the previous 12 months, whereas 76% of respondents who worked in municipal ECEC services had participated in employer-organised CPD activities. Only 7% had participated in CPD activities not organised by the employer (municipality) (Union of Kindergarten Teachers 2016).

Employees can attend CPD courses organised by the municipalities free of charge. Costs of CPD organised by other entities or companies can be very high. A popular course for Kindergarten Teachers organised by the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education focusing on the teaching skills needed in pre-primary and primary education (25 ECTS points) costs 2,100€ (University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education 2016). Usually employers do not compensate these costs.



According to the above-mentioned survey of the Union of Kindergarten Teachers, popular CPD-themes among kindergarten teachers are: special needs education, multicultural issues, interaction skills and pre-primary and elementary teaching (Union of Kindergarten Teachers 2016).

There are no regulations regarding leave entitlement, payment or time spent on CPD. Usually these decisions depend on the employer who covers the costs when participation is required. On average, an employee in social welfare services spends three to ten days per year on CPD activities (Kallio and Sarvimäki 2006). Data collected in 2015 by Local Government employers indicated that employees with a tertiary education (ISCED 6) spent 3.5 days annually on CPD, whereas employees with an upper secondary level education attended for 2.5 days and centre heads for 4.8 days per year. In 2015, the costs of CPD activities were on average 341€ per employee (1,501€ per Centre Head) in the social welfare and health services. In 2015, overall CPD costs in social welfare and health services amounted to 48 million Euros, and to 78 million Euros if the salaries of the replacement staff were included in the calculation (Local Government Employers 2016d).

Costs of CPD appear to be a great challenge both from the employers' and employees' perspective. Moreover, even if an employee covers the costs of a CPD activity it could be difficult to be granted leave.

Sometimes CPD courses organised by employers do not respond adequately to the needs of the various types of staff working in the ECEC field (Setälä 2017).

The spectrum of CPD providers is broad, reaching from university centres for continuing education to private entrepreneurs, and there are no 'main providers' of CPD across the country (Local Government Employers 2016d).

Participation in CPD activities does not automatically lead to recognition in terms of career advancement but certain courses in leadership or in language support, for example, are valued when a Kindergarten Teacher applies for the post of a centre head or a post of responsibility as coordinator for services for immigrant children. Centre heads are not yet required to hold a Master's degree in early education, which is so far only a requirement for higher posts in ECEC administration. However, they must be able to prove that they have completed a certain number of years of working experience. Although not a requirement, the proportion of Centre Heads who have completed a Master's degree has doubled over the past ten years.

Availability and themes of courses for student mentors in ECEC settings or for language support coaches vary. Universities are in charge of organising training courses for student mentors and for recruiting participants. These training programmes are free of charge and employers are expected to grant leave for participants.

In terms of formal advanced courses for Kindergarten Teachers, there is a Master's level study programme in early education available at nearly all universities. At the University of Helsinki, approximately 40 students start this course of study per year, half of them continuing directly after completing their BA studies to become a Kindergarten Teacher.

There have been no large-scale research projects on the CPD activities of ECEC personnel over the past five years. However, the importance of creating a continuum from IPS to working life and developing both induction support and continuing professional development has been emphasised in public speeches and in working groups.

6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

The ECEC law reform (2015) is expected to be completed in the near future and its second phase will define the competence requirements for various professional groups working in ECEC services. ECEC staffing will continue to be regulated by the Act on Qualifications for Social Welfare

Staff (*Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista 2005/272*) until the ECEC law reform has been completed. The Ministry of Education and Culture has reacted to the reduced proportion of Kindergarten Teachers (Bachelor's degree in early education) in ECEC personnel by assigning extra funding to the universities (a 30% increase in all universities as from 2017).

Since the second phase of law reform is still unaccomplished, it is unclear which occupations will be considered as relevant ECEC professions in future. Tensions between the trade unions of various occupational groups in the ECEC sector became apparent during the first phase of law reform. In the context of reduced financial resources universities and universities of applied sciences have been encouraged to cooperate more closely. This has aroused fears in the poly-technic sector of being 'swallowed up' by the universities and of losing their independence. Fears from the university side have centred on a possible loss of funding for high quality research. This is a complicated issue.

There are also tensions around the planned reforms for the upper-secondary level vocational training. Tensions between the social welfare sector and the education sector were already apparent even before the law reform and administration change. It would appear that the habitus of occupational groups with education/training in the social welfare and health sector (Practical Nurses and Social Welfare Workers) has been more favoured by the social welfare administration than the occupation of Kindergarten Teachers (Onnismaa and Kalliala 2010.) It remains to be seen whether the changes in administration and legislation will be reflected within the training and qualification requirements for the occupational groups in the ECEC workforce. Currently, the proportion of Kindergarten Teachers in the workforce has declined dramatically, adding a further dimension of competition with Social Welfare Workers, who are also employed in posts for Kindergarten Teachers.

The training of Practical Nurses has also been under discussion. The vocational qualification in social and health care provides competencies for various fields of work in the social welfare and health sector. Only a part of the training programme focuses on a field of specialisation, such as work with children and young people, or work with senior citizens. The IPS of Children's Instructors also qualifies for Childcare Worker/Nursery Nurse posts in ECEC settings and their training programme is more focused on children and families compared with that of Practical Nurses. Consequently, a need for a more specialised vocational training for co-workers in ECEC centres has been discussed. A large scale reform of the entire upper secondary level vocational training system will be completed by 2018.

According to an independent evaluation report compiled by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Karila et al. 2013), the content of Kindergarten Teacher university study programmes is more relevant for the demands of early childhood education than the training provided for the other occupational groups working in the ECEC field. Further, the evaluation report states that in all curriculum reforms, content relating to changes in society and culture, to changes in the conditions of childhood and growing up, child development and learning, early childhood pedagogy and the organisation of childhood education settings should be taken into account. The report also states that documented curricula should be more transparent and clearly show pedagogical processes, key contents, objectives for professional competencies and assessment criteria for learning and competencies (Karila et. al. 2013).

The evaluation report stresses that providers of education and training should collaborate at the national level when formulating and developing core curricula. In terms of student selection, the report emphasises the importance of creating a reliable system for evaluating the suitability of prospective students. The report also highlights that in connection with the ECEC law reform competencies for different tasks in early childhood education should be defined more precisely. The establishment of a national cooperation network for initial professional studies in early childhood education is recommended, as is closer monitoring of developments in training in ECEC. Providers of ECEC services and providers of qualification routes should work in closer col-



laboration in organising continuing education in such a way that basic training and continuing education form a coherent continuum (Karila et al. 2013).

According to a press release of the Ministry of Education and Culture in April 2017, more Kindergarten Teachers will be trained and 28 million euros will be allocated for 2018–2021 for the development of the staffing structure for early childhood education. Additionally, 15 million euros will be allocated for supporting the implementation of the vocational education reform in 2018 and 2019 (Finnish Government 2017).

In February 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture commissioned a group of three experts to draw up a ‘roadmap’ of the Finnish ECEC system 2017-2030, giving insights into consequences for staffing structures and qualification programmes (both IPS and CPD). The experts investigated children’s participation rates in ECEC in comparison to other Nordic countries; the effectiveness of ECEC; and the knowledge and skills required of ECEC staff (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017).

The expert group’s findings consisted of short-term and long-term proposals. Short-term proposals were: increasing the intake of students in universities and polytechnic institutions; reviewing the occupational competence requirements, taking into account the needs of ECEC staff; reforming the curriculum for IPS. Long term proposals were: requirement of a Master’s degree for Kindergarten Teachers; specialisation in ECEC for upper secondary vocational programmes; and a career-long approach to CPD within a regulated system for ECEC staff.

For each ECEC centre, the assessed proportions of the different occupational groups are: at least 40% Kindergarten Teachers, and at most 60% Special Needs Teachers, Social Welfare Workers (20–25%) and Nursery Nurses (25–40%) (Karila et al. 2017, 86–87).

7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues

During the past five years, no substantial research projects relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues have been conducted in Finland except the evaluation report drawn by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Karila et al. 2013).

A research project titled *“The formation of occupational identities in encounters between different generations and occupational groups”* was funded by The Finnish Work Environment Fund (Karila and Kupila 2010). The aim of the study was to increase understanding about the cultural and social formation of occupational identities of ECEC professionals at the beginning of working life. Individual, social and cultural processes in encounters between experienced ECEC personnel and “newcomers” were examined and forms of induction training for multi-professional ECEC environments were developed (Karila and Kupila 2010).

Findings of the study indicate that the professional identities of ECEC personnel are shaped in a work environment with high participation and stress levels, changing duties and unclear job descriptions and responsibilities. Under these circumstances, it is a challenge to develop a professional identity as Kindergarten Teacher or Nursery Nurse. Many of the participants mentioned difficulties in fulfilling personal qualitative standards at work. Job commitment appears to be at risk when there are constant changes in the work environment. The findings of the study refer to a “everyone does everything”-working culture which is perceived as confusing and results in fragile professional identities. Additionally, mentoring models suitable in the ECEC context were discussed and recommended as a form of induction training (Karila and Kupila 2010).

Responding to the recent law reform, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) started a national evaluation of the Finnish ECEC system in 2016 that will be completed in 2019. On FINEEC’s website (FINEEC 2017) it is stated:

“The purpose of the evaluation is to promote the preconditions for children’s well-being, development, and learning, ensure the implementation of the law intention and produce information for developing early childhood education locally. In addition, the evaluation is expected to serve as a basis of political decision-making. FINEEC will draw up a long-term evaluation plan as a part of the national early childhood education steering system and implement evaluations in accordance with it. In addition to the national evaluations, FINEEC is tasked with supporting early childhood education providers on issues related to quality management and developing the evaluation of early childhood education together with the providers. FINEEC will draw up an evaluation plan for early education providers and create appropriate models and procedures for quality management and evaluation. In addition to the long-term plan, the project includes drawing up a quality assessment model as well as constructing an audit system and a model for evaluating pedagogic and leadership practices. Various actors on many different levels will produce evaluation information together to support the work on developing early childhood education and the results of the evaluation will be implemented in early childhood education units, at the provider level.”

“The evaluation will focus on the processes related to the implementation of the national core curriculum for early childhood education and the realisation of the early childhood education curricula. Evaluation targets include a) processes related to the implementation of the national core curriculum for early childhood education, b) processes related to drawing up and implementing the local early childhood education plan, c) processes related to drawing up and implementing a child’s individual early childhood education plan, d) contents of the early childhood education plans and e) realisation of the plans in early childhood education” (FINEEC 2017a).

8. General workforce issues

8.1 Remuneration

Kindergarten Teachers (tertiary level qualification) are not paid the same as primary school teachers (who earn on average 3,523€/month). Compared to this, a Kindergarten Teacher’s salary is rather low (2,576–2,589€/month). However, in spite of the relatively low salary, the Kindergarten Teacher study programme is very popular.

Practical Nurses and Children’s Instructors (upper secondary vocational training) working in ECEC centres earn 2,223–2,280€/month. Salaries for the *Special Needs Assistants* are lower (2,020€/month).

It is challenging to live on these salaries independently, especially in the capital area where the cost of living – especially rent level – is high.

Centre Heads’ salaries vary between 2,842 and 3,180€/month on average, depending on the size of the centre. *Deputy leaders* may get 2,546 €/month but the remuneration depends on their responsibilities and varies locally.

Student mentors/supervisors may receive a fee for supervision: e.g. University of Helsinki compensates the supervising Kindergarten Teacher with 120€/student for a four-week practicum period. Polytechnics and vocational institutions in the capital area transfer the fee for supervision to the ECEC/day care centre instead of paying a nominated supervisor. Procedures vary locally.

The salaries of *Special Education Teachers (early years)* vary between 2,668 and 2,779 €/month depending on the responsibilities (Local Government Employers 2016a, 2016c; Union of Kindergarten Teachers 2016).

8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

Table 7

Finland: Staff working in ECEC centres full- and part-time, 2012*

Staff	Proportion
Staff working full-time (38 hours 15 minutes – 38 hours and 45 minutes since February 2017) - all occupational groups	82.2%
Kindergarten Teachers working full-time	96.4%
Staff working part-time -all occupational groups	7.8%
Kindergarten teachers working part-time	3.6%
Staff on leave	9.4%

* Local Government Employers 2016b; Alila et al. 2014

According to the current collective agreement between government and central trade unions, full-time staff in ECEC/day-care centres work 38 hours 45 minutes per week. (It used to be 38 hours 15 minutes/week, but since 01.02.2017 there has been an increase of 24 hours/year according to this agreement. In ECEC centres this amounts to 30 minutes/week). In all municipalities, only 3.6 % of Kindergarten Teachers were working in a part-time post in 2012, whereas the majority was working full time (see Table 7). The situation may change as a consequence of cost cuts which have led to amendments in the new ECEC legislation (2015). Since the entitlement to a full-time place in an ECEC setting is now granted only for children whose parents/guardians are working or are full-time students, some municipalities (for economic reasons) have established various types of “play-group activities” for those children who are only entitled to 20 hours ECEC/week. These “20 hours-children” may also be offered a place as an extra child in an ordinary full-time group. These measures could reduce the need for a full-time workforce.

Parents who are not in active employment are often encouraged to enrol their child in a play-group instead of using the 20 hours in an ECEC centre. Most playgroups are only open for less than 20 hours per week. Only in some cases (e.g. in the City of Helsinki) are they free of charge. Requirements for staff and adult-child-ratios are not legally regulated.

Law amendments also included changes in the adult-child ratio, which is now 1:8 instead of 1:7 (3- to 6-year olds). This may cause changes in the workforce demands in the municipalities that decide to make use of these law amendments and change the adult-child ratio accordingly. Consequently, organising ECEC activities according to the new regulations may lead to an increase in part-time work for both Kindergarten Teachers and Practical Nurses/Childrens’ Instructors (Local Government Employers 2016b; Alila et al. 2014).

8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

Various forms of induction support in the field of education have been discussed and induction training for Kindergarten Teachers was recommended in the evaluation report drawn by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Karila et. al. 2013; see also Karila and Kupila 2010). Consequently, a peer-group mentoring project for recently graduated Kindergarten Teachers started in collaboration between the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki in 2014. In the first phase of the project, university lecturers trained 25 peer mentors and the first mentoring groups started in Autumn 2014. Overall, 159 recently graduated Kindergarten Teachers and Social Welfare Workers working as Kindergarten Teachers have participated in peer-mentoring groups, which have been adopted as a regular working method in ECEC services in the city of Helsinki. Kindergarten Teachers’ peer group mentoring draws on the ideas developed in the



Finnish Network for Teacher Induction (2016)¹⁴ (Onnismaa et al. 2016) and is described here as an example. There are various forms of induction support and orientation to work in municipalities but no common policy so far.

Collegial support has proved to be vital for Kindergarten Teachers who have full teaching responsibility from the very beginning of their career (Onnismaa et al. 2016). In addition, other municipalities in the capital area have shown interest in developing induction measures for recently qualified Kindergarten Teachers as a measure to increase job commitment and improve occupational health.

Creating a collegial induction support system for new Centre Heads has also been discussed in the city of Helsinki. A mentor training programme for Centre Heads, integrating experiences from the peer group mentoring, started in spring 2017. Since many Centre Heads will retire in the near future, peer group mentoring is expected to be an efficient way to support young Centre Heads when they start working in their new post.

The City of Helsinki started planning support measures (arranged e.g. by occupational health services) for Nursery Nurses working in ECEC centres even though collegial support is usually available on a daily basis for new Practical Nurses/Childrens' Instructors, since there are others within their occupational group in the centre. Consequently, Nursery Nurses do not suffer from the same 'professional isolation' as Kindergarten Teachers often do.

8.4 Non-contact time

According to the nationwide collective agreement, approximately 8% (about three hours/week) of a Kindergarten Teacher's working time should be allocated for planning and preparation work, evaluation, etc. Practices vary from municipality to municipality and a sufficient amount of non-contact time is not always granted. This appears to be another reason – beside the low salary – that increases Kindergarten Teachers' willingness to leave the profession (Onnismaa et al. 2013). According to the new legislation, all children in ECEC centres (as well as 6-year olds in pre-primary classes) must have a 'personal curriculum' which is based on observations conducted by the staff as well as on conversations with each child's parents/guardians. Drawing up the 'child's personal curriculum' is by law defined to be a Kindergarten Teacher's responsibility. All these duties require non-contact time, which is not always granted even though it has been regulated by the collective agreement and the new legislation emphasizes the role of the Kindergarten Teacher as pedagogical team leader. Team discussions and staff meetings require some non-contact time for all team members, including Nursery Nurses and Assistants.

8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

The personnel in Finnish ECEC centres is ageing, with many approaching retirement, and staff shortages can be anticipated in the near future to some extent.¹⁵ In addition to the large num-

¹⁴ *Osaava Verme* is a collaborative network between the Finnish teacher education institutions, including the vocational teacher education institutions and teacher education departments of universities. The main goal is to develop and disseminate the peer-group mentoring model (PGM) to support new teachers. Peer-group mentoring (PGM), known in Finland by the acronym *verme*, is a Finnish approach to supporting new teachers in their early career. PGM brings new teachers together to share and reflect on their experiences and to discuss the day-to-day problems and challenges they face. The method has been piloted by the funding of the Finnish Work Environmental Fund in 2008–10 and is being continuously developed by The Finnish Network for Teacher Induction '*Osaava Verme*'. PGM groups usually meet once a month to discuss work-related issues. The PGM approach draws on the constructivist view of learning, which maintains constructing knowledge based on prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs. Peer discussion is therefore an essential element in creating shared understanding of the work of teachers (Finnish Network for Teacher Induction '*Osaava Verme*' 2016).

¹⁵ According to the 2014 statistics on the personnel in municipal health and social services (personnel of ECEC services was included), 28.5 per cent will reach the age of 65 by 2025, and it is likely that most of them will retire. By 2030, 43.1 per cent of the 2014 personnel will reach the age of 65. In 2015, ECEC personnel was on average 44.2 years old. The proportion of employees under 30 was 15% and the proportion of employees over 50 was a little more one third (Local Government Employers 2016d; National Institute for Health and Welfare 2015).

ber of all employees who will soon retire, there is a more specific concern about a shortage of Kindergarten Teachers. This has been developing gradually due to the lack of monitoring the need nationally and, consequently, the numbers of students in universities have not been proportional to the demand. In the capital area there is a shortage of approximately 500 Kindergarten Teachers and there is also a demand for Special Education Teachers for the early years. Another distinctive feature relates to the increase of the proportion of Social Welfare Workers in the ECEC field which has developed in tandem with the growing teacher shortage. One reason for this situation originates from the education policy of the last few decades and the structure of tertiary level education in Finland. In a so-called dual model, universities and polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) should not provide study programmes for occupations which already have a university-based qualification route. Due to certain historical and political reasons, the Social Welfare Worker qualification has remained in the qualification requirement statutes for Kindergarten Teacher posts. Polytechnic degree programmes for social services annually train a considerable number of Social Welfare Workers who can apply for a Kindergarten Teacher post while the number of new students in universities has been more strictly regulated nationally (e.g. in 2014, 390 Kindergarten Teachers and 710 Social Welfare Workers eligible for work as a Kindergarten Teacher graduated across the country).

The shortage of university trained Kindergarten Teachers appears to apply mostly to ECEC settings for 0- to 6-year olds, not to the pre-primary classes for 6- to 7-year olds), where Primary Teachers may also work. The fact that all teacher categories graduate from the same university departments can be an enhancing factor in terms of creating a continuum from ECEC to primary school (Karila et al. 2013).

9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

While the new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki* 19.1.1973/36 - 8.5.2015/580) emphasises pedagogy in ECEC, it can be considered somewhat alarming that the majority of ECEC staff has a professional training for the social welfare and health services (Practical Nurses and Social Welfare Workers). This imbalance is likely to worsen in the near future when many practitioners with the Kindergarten Teacher qualification will retire. The proportion of Social Welfare Workers is larger among younger employees.

The Minister of Education and Culture has recently reacted to this imbalance with the measures for strengthening the Kindergarten Teacher study route at universities already mentioned (30% increase in student intake as from 2017). There is a long-term objective to improve the relative proportions of Kindergarten Teachers and Social Welfare Workers but the effects of the prospective changes in education policy demand time. It also remains to be seen whether the changes in adult-child ratio in ECEC settings following the latest law amendments will cause changes in the demand for both Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery Nurses. The law now guarantees 20 hours ECEC a week for all children instead of the former full-time place. Only children whose parents/guardians are working or studying are now eligible for a full-time place ECEC.¹⁶ Not all municipalities have implemented this reduction as yet, but if they do, the demand for staff is likely to decrease.

If the proposals introduced in June 2017 in the project of developing a ‘roadmap’ for the Finnish ECEC system (see *Section 6*; Karila et al. 2017) are put into practice, major changes regarding

¹⁶ “20-hours-ECEC” is not necessarily organised every weekday for four hours/day but the parents may choose e.g. two ten hours’ days. Some municipalities have also started to organise e.g. seven hours’ days three times a week for these children. In the ten hours/day model children can be placed in groups as “extra children” (part time adult-child ratio is 1:13). In three days/week-models Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery Nurses work with these children three days and the rest of the week they work e.g. as replacement staff in other groups.

ECEC staffing in Finland can be anticipated. The expert group's proposals indicate that there is likely to be a growing demand for Kindergarten Teachers and a decreasing demand for Social Workers and Nursery Nurses (Karila et al. 2017, 86–87). It remains to be seen how the trade unions and political parties receive the proposals.

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