

DENMARK

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the authors

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1. ECEC governance in Denmark

Denmark has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children up to age 6 which includes family day care. ECEC provision at the national level, since June 2019, comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Education (*Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet*). Traditionally, ECEC services were located within the social welfare system rather than within the education system, but during the last decade this affiliation has been challenged and the responsibility for the area has shifted, depending on government formation.

Currently, the Ministry of Children and Education provides the overall curricular requirements and general regulations. The funding and organisation of ECEC provision as well as details of regulatory practices are the responsibility of the 98 local municipal authorities.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Pedagogues (*pædagoger*) are the core pedagogues in Danish centre-based ECEC provision and account for almost 60%¹ of the staff. The remaining staff are mainly Pedagogue Co-helpers, for which no formal qualification is required. Most of these co-workers are young people between 19 to 25 years with an upper secondary leaving certificate who want to spend a year or two in a workplace before they begin to study. The job is quite popular and it is not unusual to have between 200 to 300 applicants for one Co-helper post, even in small cities and rural areas (EPOS and EVA 2013, 28; EVA 2020). The reasons for this popularity are, among other things, that it is a well-paid and responsible job which offers the opportunity to work with children. Some of the Pedagogue Co-helpers go on to take the Pedagogue education/study route.

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Denmark: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogue (Social Educator) <i>Pædagog</i>	<i>Aldersintegrerede institutioner</i>	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	Broad age range (children and adults) during first	3½ years university college, specialising in Social Education

¹ Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut 2020

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<p><i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p> <p><i>Up to 2014:</i> Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	<p>Age-integrated centres 0–5 years² <i>Børnehaver</i> Kindergartens 3–5 years</p> <p><i>Vuggestuer</i> Nurseries 0–2 years</p>	<p>Pedagogical leader</p> <p>Centre leader</p>	<p>year of studies, then specialisation focus on 0–5 years</p>	<p><i>Award:</i> Bachelor's degree in Social Education</p> <p>ECTS credits: 210 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6</p>
<p>Pedagogical Assistant/ Education <i>PAU – pædagogisk assistent uddannelse</i></p>	<p>See above</p>	<p>Qualified co-worker</p>	<p>Broad-based pedagogical approach 0 to 100 years including special education, elder care and family day care</p>	<p>2 years post-secondary vocational education³ <i>Award:</i> Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a⁴ EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3</p>
<p>Pedagogue Co-helper <i>Pædagog-medhjælper</i></p>	<p>See above</p>	<p>Non-qualified co-worker</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>n/a</p>

Box 1

SEEPRO Profile Categories for ECEC Core Professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and 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 Pedagogy Professional** (mainly 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 **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Denmark): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

³ Students under 25 years of age study for 2 years plus 6 weeks. Students above 25 with two years of relevant work experience study for 42 weeks.

⁴ n/a = not applicable

2.2 Centre leader

In Danish ECEC, leaders operate at different levels, depending on local decisions in each municipality / by the centre owner. In general, Pedagogical Leaders have the day-to-day responsibility for the running of a local institutional setting, but in addition, some municipalities / owners operate with Centre Directors responsible for a group of more ECEC settings located in the same geographical area. All leaders are qualified Pedagogues with substantial experience. Further qualification is not a national/general requirement, but an advantage in terms of acquiring and succeeding in the positions. All formal management training takes place as continuing professional development (CPD). Most leaders are encouraged to engage in a theoretical management education after employment if they do not already hold a CPD qualification, e.g. Diploma study programmes in leadership or the equivalent. The understanding of leadership in Danish ECEC is predominantly collective, based on dialogue and with a flat leadership structure. The main leadership tasks are both pedagogical and administrative. Many Pedagogical Leaders prioritise working directly with children on a regular basis.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

As mentioned in *Chapter 2.2*, each local centre has a Pedagogical Leader, who receives a higher salary based on the collective agreements. Other centre-based posts of responsibility are established decentrally by each local authority in cooperation with the ECEC centre. These may include a special responsibility for language guidance, for physical activities or for student mentoring. The special responsibilities are rewarded with a salary bonus.

A ‘professional beacon’ initiative was introduced in reference to the national competence initiatives in ECEC in 2018 (Ministry of Children and Social Affairs 2018). Within this initiative, local centre units apply for funding of the continuing professional development (CPD) of one or more staff members. These are then trained for a post termed ‘professional beacon’ by participating in a three-day course or by taking a diploma-module (Jensen and Preus 2020). The idea of the ‘professional beacon’ post is one of resource building in the organisation through special resource persons leading and inspiring colleagues.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The organisation of co-ordinating and supervisory staff to ECEC centres is established decentrally by each local authority. Pedagogic Consultants are employed by the municipalities, with the primary task of advising and supervising the ECEC institutions. The consultants are Pedagogues with a CPD qualification, and usually have a university degree in pedagogy or similar. Their role is to support the ECEC centre’s pedagogical mandate as formulated in the curriculum, to provide supervision and to support the centre leader in personnel management, cooperation and conflict resolution. The consultants’ duties also include pedagogical advice for the staff in relation to children with special needs. In relation to the administrative level, pedagogical consultants might participate in the development and organisation of pedagogical activities. They may carry out case processing for the administrative management and lead projects relating to policy and administrative initiatives.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff are located off-site and allocated in individual cases by the local authority’s Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling Service (*Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning – PPR*).

Specialist staff who work with individual children in the centres on demand are typically Psychologists, Pedagogical Consultants, Speech Therapists, Language Coaches, Motor Skills Supervisors and Special Needs staff. The range of specialist support staff available depends on the organisation of the PPR in each local municipality and therefore varies across municipalities.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

As *Table 2* shows, Pedagogues are the main staff category in ECEC in Denmark, making up more than half of the workforce. The proportion varies according to the type of provision. The majority of the remaining staff are non-qualified Pedagogue Co-helpers (35.6%) and only 6% of all staff are Pedagogical Assistants with a post-secondary vocational qualification.

Table 2 also shows the percentage of male staff in ECEC centres, proportions that compare favourably with the situation in other countries. 15.6% of all staff and 9.5% of qualified Pedagogues are male workers. Most male workers are unqualified, thus 16% of those working as Pedagogue Co-helpers are men.

With regard to ethnicity, the larger majority (91,7%) of all staff have a Danish ethnic background.

Table 2

Denmark: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in Denmark: qualifications, gender, ethnicity, 2021

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce, in % All centres (municipal and independent)	
Staff with specialist higher education degree (Pedagogues)	54.61	
Staff with specialist post-secondary vocational qualification (Pedagogical Assistants – PAU)	5.99	
Staff with no formal IPE (Pedagogue Co-helpers)	35.60	
Staff with other pedagogical education	1.27	
Trainee pedagogical staff	1.70	
Trainee pedagogical assistants	0.83	
Specialist support staff (e.g., Pedagogical Consultants, Speech Therapists, Psychologists)	Mostly off-site	
Male staff	Proportion among all staff	15.6
	Proportion of all Pedagogues in ECEC**	9.5
Staff with a Danish ethnic background	Proportion among all staff	91.7
	Proportion among all Pedagogues in ECEC	93.8

Source: Denmark Statistik, via email, July 2023

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Pedagogue/Social Educator (*Pædagog*)

Applicants for this study route are admitted to a specialist university college according to a quota system. Quota 1 comprises candidates with the highest grades in the upper secondary examination; Quota 2 comprises those admitted following an assessment of competences and qualifications. There is a third possibility for applicants who do not fulfil the demands of either Quota 1 or 2. They can undergo a competence assessment related to prior experiences and skills. This competence assessment of the applicants' suitability, merits and prior experience may include: general personal qualifications and experience, e.g., work experience, vocational training, work abroad; special qualifications and experiences relevant to the Pedagogue training, e.g., work in social services for children, young people and adults, work in leisure time facilities, in civil society organisations etc.; relevant professional qualifications, e.g. single subject at a higher level exam; local authority, trade union or evening courses.

The Pedagogue study courses are free of charge. During study time at the colleges as well as during their first and fourth practicum the students receive a national student grant and can take out a loan. In 2022, the grant amounted to DDK 6,397 (€ 860) per month and the loan to DDK 4,910 (€60) per month. Most students also work some hours per week, for example as substitute staff in pedagogical settings, in order to have a reasonable standard of living. During the second and third practicum, each lasting six months, the students receive a practicum salary of around DDK 11,745 (€ 1,575) per month.

Table 3

Denmark: Pedagogue / Social Educator

Job title in Danish: <i>Pædagog</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: <i>Quota 1</i> Minimum age of entry: 18 years; one of the following upper secondary leaving certificates: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Studentereksamen</i> (STX) (12 years of upper secondary school)– <i>Højere forberedelseksamen</i> (HF) (examination award of equivalent institution)– <i>Højere handelseksamen</i> (HHX) (higher vocational)– <i>Højere teknisk eksamen</i> (HTX) (higher technical)– <i>Særligt hf-forløb for fremmedsprogede</i> (GIF) (special course for foreign language people)– <i>Gymnasial eksamen fra Duborg skolen i Flensburg</i> (upper secondary from Duborg school in Flensburg, Germany)– <i>Gymnasial erhvervsuddannelse</i> (EUX) (upper secondary vocational) <i>Quota 2</i> A variety of entry routes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– For those with one of the above upper secondary leaving certificates but do not have the entry grade in Quota 1– Social and Health Assistant with specific levels in some upper secondary subjects– Pedagogical Assistant with specific levels in some upper secondary subjects– Examination award in four upper secondary subjects (Danish, English, social studies and an optional subject) with specific levels

Job title in Danish: <i>Pædagog</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaving certificate from a preparing course for immigrants and refugees (FIF) based at some university colleges – An approved upper secondary examination of another country and adequate language skills – An IB-Diploma (International Baccalaureate) and adequate language skills <p>Professional studies: Higher education, 3½ years at a specialist university college</p> <p>Award: (since 2001) Bachelor’s degree in Social Education</p> <p>ECTS credits: 210</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplaces: Age-integrated centres (<i>Aldersintegrerede institutioner</i>), 0–5 years; kindergartens (<i>Børnehaver</i>), 3–5 years; nurseries (<i>Vuggestuer</i>), 0–2 years; other pedagogical fields of work</p>

Pedagogical Assistant (*Pædagogisk Assistent*)

The qualifying courses take place either at a vocational school or a university college. Candidates can either be school leavers, or may take the course as an adult if they are over 25. Before starting the qualifying course, an applicant must have a training agreement with their employer, which may be a local authority, a region or a private pedagogical centre. For the duration of the course, the students receive a monthly salary from their employer of DDK 9,000–12,000 (€1,200–1,600); the relevant salary as an adult learner is around DDK 22,000–25,000 (€3,000–3,350) per month. The studies are free of charge.

Table 4

Denmark: Pedagogical Assistant

Job title in Danish: <i>Pædagogisk Assistent</i>
<p>Entry requirements: 10 years of compulsory schooling; also available as adult education for persons over 25 years</p> <p>Professional studies: Post-secondary/vocational; <i>Foundation course:</i> ½ to 1 year dependent on if the applicant has more schooling or/and relevant employment; <i>Main course:</i> usually 2 years and 1½ months full time, but if the applicant has 2 years of relevant employment and is over 25 years of age, they can omit the foundation course and the practicum periods in the main course.</p> <p>Award: Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Age-integrated centres (<i>Aldersintegrerede institutioner</i>), 0–5 years; kindergartens (<i>Børnehaver</i>), 3–5 years; nurseries (<i>Vuggestuer</i>), 0–2 years; other pedagogical fields of work</p>

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Pedagogue/Social Educator (*Pædagog*)

Course structure and competence specifications

The 2017 ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) on the study programme for the award of the Bachelor’s degree in Social Education regulates the qualification of Pedagogues in Denmark and is supplemented by each university college’s specific course syllabus. The decree specifies

the purpose, duration, exams, syllabus, the merit education as Pedagogue⁵ and the competence goals for the different areas of the programme.

The study programme consists of two parts: a common part focusing on basic professional competences (70 ECTS credits, including one practicum period) and a specialisation part (140 ECTS credits). There are three specialisations: (1) early childhood pedagogy, (2) school and leisure pedagogy, (3) social and special pedagogy.

The specialisation course also consists of an inter-professional course, an optional subject area, a bachelor project and four practicum periods.

The generic competences of all three specialisation areas are linked to the Danish welfare state institutions, the aims of which are laid down in different acts. As in §1 in the ministerial decree of the Pedagogue study programme, it addresses the whole pedagogical field of work and not just early childhood:

The purpose of the education is that the student acquires relevant professional competences, knowledge and skills, to be able to manage, develop and convey development, learning and care assignments in a social perspective, both independently and in collaboration with others (Bekendtgørelse 2017).

The Bachelor's degree is on a par with other professional Bachelor programmes, such as those for school teachers, social workers and nurses.

Curriculum and didactic approaches

The decree states for all education elements the areas and the competence goals, as well as knowledge and skills goals. Since 2014, the decree has formulated competence goals which describe what the students must know and be able to do. The decree does not prescribe curricular areas.

Pedagogues specialised in early childhood pedagogy

...have particular competences to create and develop pedagogical environments and activities, in which optimal conditions are created on the basis of a professional, pedagogical foundation for a stimulating and safe life for children (Bekendtgørelse 2017, Appendix 2).

The designated areas of competence are:

1. Childhood, culture and learning
2. Profession and organisation
3. Professional relations and communications – 2nd practicum
4. Cooperation and development – 3rd practicum

Beyond specific academic knowledge, learning to be a 'competent Pedagogue' is also based on personal qualities. "These include own life experiences, engagement and corporeality, feelings and own values and morals" (Jensen 2016, 24). Personal education formation (*Dannelse* in Danish, *Bildung* in German) takes place throughout the entire study programme; for example, through aesthetic expressions and participating in pedagogical practice (not only through observing) where the students "must dare to invest their own personality" (Jensen 2016, 24).

Understanding pedagogical practice is built on learning to make judgements in a specific situation by drawing simultaneously on multiple sources of knowledge and skills. This needs to be reflected in the didactic approaches used in the Pedagogue education: class teaching, lectures for larger groups of students combined with discussions with students and group work, teaching themes, project work based on students' own selection of subjects and themes with supervision,

⁵ The Merit Education/qualification route is a specific study route for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants wishing to work towards gaining a full qualification as Pedagogue, i.e. a Bachelor's degree.

and so on. Since pedagogical practice is relational, it is important that this is reflected in the didactics.

The alternation between practicum periods and university college periods as two learning places is used didactically. Here it is important to emphasise that the practicum is not only 'practice' but also 'theory'. Likewise, learning in the college environment also comprises both elements. For example: Students need to practise skills in aesthetical forms of expression in pedagogical activities and this happens not only during the practicum periods but also at the university colleges.

"This is a different type of learning process than the cognitive one. The student must achieve skills in, for example, playing an instrument, telling a story, balancing a ball, playing in a sandbox, lighting a bonfire, climbing a tree, and so on" (Jensen 2016, 23).

A **reform** of the Pedagogue IPE is underway, based on a recent evaluation (Agency for Higher Education and Science 2021). The evaluation points to high learning outcomes, but a great variation in the competences of the new graduates, as the study programme includes a broad variation of students. The link between the practicum parts and teaching needs to be more closely connected, and the structure of the study programme with its many goals and short modules needs reconsideration in order to ensure coherent learning processes. Digital education is not mentioned in the 2017 decree, but the area is expected to be included in a future decree.

Pedagogical Assistants (*Pædagogisk Assistent*)

Competence specifications and curricular areas

The ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2022) which specifies details about the Pedagogical Assistant Education (*Pædagogisk assistentuddannelse* – PAU) states the objectives, duration, as well as competence specifications for different stages of the study programme. The course award is a Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant.

During the study programme students acquire the skills required of a Pedagogical Assistant within five designated areas of competence:

1. Practical pedagogical tasks, efforts and activities
2. Pedagogical care and relationship work that supports and strengthens the target group's well-being and development
3. Practical pedagogical work that strengthens the target group's quality of life and motivation for a healthy and active life, through health-promoting and preventive activities
4. Practical pedagogical work with welfare technology, social and digital media that support technological understanding and digital culture
5. Evaluation, documentation, collaboration and communication in relation to the area's organisation in order to develop the pedagogical practice.

Course structure

The study programme consists of a basic course and a specialisation that altogether lasts between three years and six weeks up to four years. The specialisation lasts two years and six weeks full time, with 47 weeks spent in the IPE institution and 52 weeks in different workplace settings.

Practicum periods: At the practicum centre, students are allocated a practicum supervisor who ensures that they work according to the required goals and tasks stated in the training programme.

School periods: The main course comprises both basic subjects such as Danish, community, English (optional) and specific subjects such as pedagogy, nature and outdoor life, digital culture,

movement and sport, health, cultural and aesthetic expressions and activities, pedagogical psychology, communication in the group, work environment and ergonomics. The study programme also has different optional studies.

Pedagogic didactic approaches

The course alternates between practicum and school periods. Through teaching at the IPE institution and the work placement periods, students acquire knowledge, skills and competences to carry out pedagogical care and relational work at an Assistant level. They acquire knowledge about the pedagogical sector and learn about the context for the practical pedagogical work. A mix of pedagogic-didactic approaches is utilised, such as lectures, group work, teaching themes, projects, role play, practical subjects.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Below three types of inclusive approaches for becoming a Pedagogue or Pedagogical Assistant are presented: (1) the Merit qualification route as Pedagogue, (2) the Pedagogic Assistant training (PAU), and (3) the preparatory course for immigrants and refugees (FIF).

Merit qualification route for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers

The Merit qualification route as Pedagogue is a special study programme for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants, leading to the award of the Bachelor's degree in Social Education. The Merit route is described in chapter 6 of the 2017 ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) and follows the same course regulation as the ordinary study route.

The entry requirements are twofold: first, applicants must fulfil the same admissions criteria as for the regular Pedagogue IPE programme; second, they must have at least two years of experience working as co-helpers in the pedagogic field, including ECEC centres. Work experience is defined as either two years of working a minimum of 30 hours per week or working to a total of 3,120 hours during an unspecified number of years in either classical pedagogical institutions or in other profession-related fields such as schools, social work, psychological care, physiotherapy etc.

If the applicants do not meet these requirements, they can ask for a 'real competence assessment' to see if dispensation can be given.

The Merit qualification route considers the students' previous practical experience in pedagogical settings in the form of credits. They do not have to participate in the two six-month placements which are required for the regular study route. This means that they study for three years at a university college, one-year full time and two years part time. This IPE programme is organised under the Open Education Act (Bekendtgørelse af lov om åben uddannelse 2019). Students pay a fee of around DDK 60,000 (€ 8,100) for the full course, which can also be covered by the employer or the Municipal Competence Fund established by a number of trade unions in Denmark. During the first year of full-time study the student may receive a student adult grant (SVU). During the remaining time needed to complete their studies, they often work and may be given (some) time off for studies by their employer.

Merit qualification route for academics (the track change model)

A trial qualification route was initiated in 2021, running until 2027, to help recruit more Pedagogues at a time of shortages of qualified staff in ECEC, schools and other pedagogical institutions. The track change model started at the University College Copenhagen in 2021, at VIA University College Aarhus in 2022, and one more of the five Danish University Colleges will follow.



It is a special study programme aimed at academics who wish to change career. The track change model is aimed at applicants with a higher education degree, at a minimum bachelor's level, who are awarded credits for their previous theoretical qualification level.

If the applicants do not meet these requirements, they can ask for a 'real competence assessment' to see if dispensation can be given.

The qualifying course lasts 2½ years – one year less than the traditional Pedagogue education. It gives students the opportunity to gain practical experience by working 30 paid hours a week in, for example, nurseries, kindergartens or leisure time institutions.

Pedagogical Assistant Education (PAU) route for school leavers and adults

The Pedagogical Assistant Education (PAU) is a *direct admission criterion* for the Pedagogue study route. As a study route for young people, it is mostly attended by school leavers. As an adult further education course for people over 25 years, it comprises three different groups: former Pedagogue Co-helpers, Family Day Carers (the largest group) and people not in regular employment.

The foremost rationale behind this study programme was to attract non-qualified people and, in this way, raise the general educational level in society. Another aim set forward by FOA, the trade union for Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers, is that it is a way of raising the qualification level of the Pedagogue Co-helpers. There is a political interest in the field against the background of the government's aim that 95% of a youth cohort must have a qualifying education.

The demand in ECEC centres for people with a Pedagogical Assistant qualification has not been high, so they constitute overall only a small percentage of staff (see *Table 2*). The employment of staff is devolved to the individual ECEC centres and the current pedagogical culture prioritises young male persons with an upper secondary examination (they are around 19 years or older). On the whole, ECEC centres tend to prefer a short-term contract for Pedagogue Co-helpers of one or two years.

The salary of a Pedagogical Assistant is higher than that of the untrained Pedagogue Co-helpers and their terminal salary is the same as the starting salary of a Pedagogue. This means that some ECEC centres prefer either a qualified Pedagogue or a young, cheaper, non-qualified (male) Pedagogue Co-helper.

Preparatory course for immigrants and refugees (FIF)

The preparatory course for immigrants and refugees, called FIF, has been available for a wide range of qualification routes. The first course addressing the Pedagogue study programme started in 1991 and was called the 'building bridges course'. Since 2019, only refugees and immigrants from non-western countries can be omitted due to a new course. This excludes students from Eastern Europe, who earlier were some of those who greatly benefitted from the courses.

The entry requirement to FIF is an upper secondary leaving certificate. The course runs for 12 months at a university college. For the duration of the course, the students receive a national student grant which may be supplemented by a loan. The aim of the course is to qualify the participants for admittance to the initial professional education route for Pedagogues. Around 80% of the students go on to take further studies, with a majority choosing the Pedagogue route. To be admitted to the Pedagogue study programme they have to complete a 'real competence assessment'. If they are accepted, the graduation rate is just as high among bilingual students as among other Pedagogue students.

The course is for people with a minority ethnic background, “... who because of their language, culture and so on are not ... ready to seek entrance to the Pedagogue education by way of the formal route” (Jørgensen 2010, 203). The course is based on preparing this group of students for learning about Danish educational culture and introducing them to Danish pedagogy.

It is only possible to join FIF with a foreign high school diploma. Some students are refugees with a professional qualification. Some families are reunited and plan to settle in Denmark. Some are women who have lived isolated lives in Denmark and want to explore the society in which they must bring up their children so that they can manage better. And some are men who have acknowledged the necessity of getting involved in pedagogical work with, for example, young people from their own culture. Jørgensen (2010, 204) points out that many ethnic minority students do not have the same notion of the Pedagogue occupation as a female occupation, which could be explained on the one hand through the fact that pedagogy generally speaking is not seen as an occupation in many of their countries of origin, and on the other hand through the fact that many students see an obvious need for male Pedagogues with an ethnic background.

The course has two main objectives. One relates to personal and social aspects, helping the students to become aware of and describe their own identity and integration process and to view themselves as active participants in the current Danish environment. The second objective is to learn about the educational culture at a Danish Pedagogue university college. Thus, the individual students need to be introduced to methods and study techniques that are applied in these colleges. Moreover, students should understand the past and current views of children and childhood that characterise Danish pedagogy.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Regulations for the practicum (*praktik*) during the Pedagogue study programme are stipulated in the relevant ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) and implemented by the university colleges and individual ECEC centres.

According to the decree, the practicum consists of four periods totalling 75 ECTS credits, meaning that it takes up more than one third of the total course duration. The first practicum takes place in the second semester during the common course attended by all students and comprises 32 working days of six hours per day on average (10 ECTS credits). The second and third placements start in the third and fifth semesters, each lasting for six months (30 ECTS credits each). The students work on average 32½ hours per week. The fourth practicum takes place in the seventh semester in connection with the student’s bachelor thesis and consists of 16 working days of six hours (5 ECTS credits). The decree also stipulates three study days during the first practicum and ten study days during each of the second and third practicum periods. Study days are organised by the university colleges. The decree says that the “purpose of the study days at the university college is to support the student’s acquisition of the competence goals” (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 8). The decree also states the possibility for students to take their second or third practicum abroad.

The ministerial decree has two detailed paragraphs (one on the role of the hosting ECEC centre and another on the role of university colleges) quoted in full below.

Role of the ECEC centre

The practicum centre devises a practicum description, which must contain the following elements:



- 1) *Description of the centre, including purpose, user group description and standard methods*
 - 2) *Education plan for the practicum periods. The plan must comply with the competence goals for the relevant practicum period, including suggestions for relevant literature, organisation of practicum guidance and collaboration with the university college. The education plan is devised in joint cooperation with the university college.*
- Sec.2. The practicum centre is responsible for the student receiving supervision during the practicum in accordance with the competence goals for the practicum period.*
- Sec.3. No later than upon 2/3 completion of the first, second and third practicum periods, the practicum centre must conduct a meeting with the university college and the student, after which the centre must make a statement declaring how the student may fulfil the competence goals for the practicum period in question (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 9).*

Role of the university college

- Prior to each practicum period, the university college must prepare the students for the upcoming practicum period, including methods of study and relevant competence goals.*
- Sec. 2. During the study days of the practicum period, the student receives formal training and supervision at the university college.*
- Sec.3. After completing the practicum period, the university college must continually include the students' practicum experiences in the education. Furthermore, the university college must include the statement from the practicum centre in the student's further supervision process (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 10).*

The university colleges appoint a supervisor, who provides information for the student about the choice of practicum, the competence goals, the relevant literature, etc.

The students' skills and competences

The decree states the competence goals of each practicum as well as the knowledge and skills specifications. For example, the following are the competence goals for the 2nd and 3rd practicum within the specialisation in early childhood studies (see also *Chapter 4.2*):

Competence Area 3: Professional relations and communication – 2nd practicum period

This area focuses on relational work, interaction and communication in pedagogical practice with 0 to 5 year-old children, including the significance of children's diverse life conditions with respect to well-being, relations and communication.

Competence goals: The student knows how to create relations with individual children and with the whole group, can support the children when they interact with each other, can support the development of children's communicative competences, master professional communication and reflect on their own abilities to communicate and to initiate and sustain relations.

Competence Area 4: Cooperation and development – 3rd practicum period

Here the focus is on systematic and knowledge-based reflection and contributing towards development and innovation within pedagogical practice.

Competence goals: The student is able to plan, implement, document and evaluate activities and learning processes in a focused way that supports the child's wellbeing, learning, intellectual growth and development. In the context, the student must be able to challenge existing practice in professional terms, to look for and assess alternative options and to contribute to the development of pedagogical practice (Bekendtgørelse 2017, appendix 2).

Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

The 2017 decree does not specify details of the students' self-evaluation during their practicum. Each university college includes practicum regulations in their syllabus and in a written practicum booklet which describes in detail the decree, regulations, practicalities and so on.

Before the practicum, the students write down their own competence goals and the knowledge and skills they wish to achieve during the practicum period. The goals are discussed with and approved by both the supervisor teacher at college and the practicum supervisor/mentor. During the practicum period the student keeps a daily diary or portfolio, and uses this at the practicum supervisor meetings during the study days and also later on in their studies.

The aim of the fourth practicum, added with the 2014 reform, is to do fieldwork research and produce data from their work in the ECEC centres for use in their bachelor thesis. Here students are encouraged to use different research methods.

The three other practicum periods end with an examination. For the first and second, the examination is conducted internally by the practicum supervisor in the ECEC setting and the practicum supervisor from the university college; for the third practicum an external examiner is also required (Bekendtgørelse 2017).

The **supervising staff at the ECEC centres** are qualified Pedagogues. The competences required for this position are not nationally regulated. All practicum supervisors receive a practicum bonus based on collective agreements between trade unions and local municipalities. It is possible, but not mandatory, to attend relevant short-term courses, a higher education diploma course (introduced in 2013) or a Master's degree course in Pedagogical Supervision. Field experts estimate that many attend the short courses but few take a diploma and even fewer a Master's degree (Jensen 2015).

A practicum supervisor who works directly with the children, i.e. is a regular member of staff, is appointed by the Centre Head. It is estimated that planned meetings between the supervisor and the student take place (during regular working hours) for an average of one hour per week. Supervision is also part of the daily work and other Pedagogues can give supervision in a more situated and informal way than in a planned meeting (Jensen 2015).

Reforms, trends and debates

There is an ongoing debate about the specific roles of learning in the workplace (practicum) and learning at the university college and about the cooperation strategies between the two learning places. There are two prevailing major discourses: a learning discourse (focusing on learning in the workplace) and an academic discourse (focusing on the learning at the university college) and there is a continuing effort to integrate the two (see Jensen 2015 for different understandings of practicum).

Since 2014, the decrees have placed more responsibility on the practicum centres regarding student evaluation, which can be seen as a strengthening of the learning discourse. The ECEC practicum centres play an important role as a learning space and there is an ongoing debate about whether they have enough resources and competencies to fulfil that role – not only concerning student evaluation but in general.

The 2014 decree added a fourth practicum where the students are required to produce data during their work in the centre and analyse and integrate these into their bachelor thesis. This can be seen as a step towards integrating the tasks of practicum centres and university colleges and as a strengthening of the academic discourse.

An earlier recurrent theme of debate was about whether students should receive payment during their practicum. Currently, students receive a practicum salary paid by the employer during the two six-month practicum periods (i.e. the second and third). The paid practicum was introduced following the former generalist study programme reform in 1992. "For the students this means a double role: on the one hand being a student, on the other hand an employee and a regular member of staff" (Jensen 2015, 160). Some argue that the students are not allowed to

be students; fewer argue that they really learn the conditions of work. For the first and fourth practicum periods, students receive student grants.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

A national framework exists in terms of recognised courses and awards relating to the continuing professional development of ECEC staff, but not in terms of a general CPD entitlement or of an annual allocation in terms of the number of days to be spent on CPD activities. Nevertheless, some CPD activities may be obligatory, e.g. those for the centre team as a whole, or some courses provided by municipalities regarding current reform initiatives.

In terms of career development, a profession is dependent on both vertical and horizontal possibilities of mobility. Formal strategies of further training/professional development for Pedagogues have a relatively short history. This has something to do with the traditional 'flat structure' (non-hierarchical) in the ECEC centres and the presence of a large number of non-qualified staff. An informal estimate is that around 25% of Pedagogues participate in formal CPD activities, whereas the remaining 75% get through their career with only a few days of competence development per year.

One of the reforms initiating increased further training from the early 1990s onwards was the Open Education Act (Bekendtgørelse af lov om åben uddannelse 2019). The Merit qualification route to become a Pedagogue as well as the Diploma studies and Master's degrees (see below) are provided for under this Act. The Act aims to help adults combine work with further related studies. Students are granted a degree or an education certificate and have to pay a fee for the study programme.

Before the early 1990s, CPD tended to be initiated by the ECEC Centre Leader or staff. Today, many initiatives come from central and local authorities and – as budgets are low – do not leave much space for centres' or individual staff's needs or wishes for CPD. Field experts talk about a centralisation and standardisation of CPD and not all Pedagogues find that they benefit from some of the courses on offer (Ahrenkiel et al. 2012).

Overall, the leader of a centre is responsible for the staff's professional development. CPD can be discussed during the obligatory annual appraisal reviews (*MUS-samtaler*). The Centre Leader, in collaboration with the team in the setting, may also compile a competence development plan for all staff. Furthermore, local authorities sometimes provide professional development courses for the entire staff team in an ECEC centre, for part of the team, or for individual staff members who need to strengthen competences in specific areas, e.g. language or inclusion.

CPD for Pedagogues/Social Educators

The main providers of CPD are university colleges (*professionshøjskoler*) and the municipalities, but may also be vocational schools and private firms/organisations (Hjorth-Weber 2012).

A distinction can be made between (1) short-term courses of between one to seven weeks' duration and (2) a long-term study route over a period of two or three years. They include various diploma studies as well as Master's degrees.



Short-term courses

Short-term courses primarily serve as an improvement strategy for the work in pedagogical settings. The competences in focus are linked to everyday work routines. BUPL, the trade union for early childhood staff, argues that both the course fee and the time needed to attend the course must be covered by the employer. The trade union recommends two weeks of CPD per year for all Pedagogues.

Course topics are diverse: outdoor life, music, storytelling, movement and language, environmental assessment by children, etc. The main providers of such short-term courses are university colleges, local authorities, and private organisations. No formal academic credits are given for short-term courses. If Pedagogues participate in more than six weeks of full-time studies over a period of two years, they have the possibility of having a 'real competence assessment' in order to apply for Merit points for enrolment in a Diploma study course (see the following paragraph for details of Diploma studies).

Long-term further studies

Long-term further studies have a double purpose: to enhance the pedagogical work in general and to give the Pedagogue in question new career opportunities.

Diploma study programmes

Diploma studies are for adults with a short-cycle or further higher education degree and are primarily an additional qualification for a specialised area of work in pedagogical settings, e.g., a Diploma in Public Management (Hjorth-Weber 2012). Typically, Pedagogues choose one of the available pedagogical diploma qualifying courses, which have in common:

- A duration of two to three years of part-time study, which sometimes can also be taken full time in one year (60 ECTS credits)
- A relevant qualification and at least two years of work experience as admission criteria
- A course fee ranging between DDK 59,000 – 110,000 (€8,000–15,000) in 2022
- In most cases, a possibility to combine studies with employment. The fee may be covered by the employer and they may get (some) time off from work to study.

Around 30 different pedagogical diploma study courses exist in different subjects or subject areas relevant to the pedagogical working field. Diploma studies are also followed by other Bachelor-level professionals such as school teachers and social workers. The providers of these professional development courses are university colleges and universities.

Centre Leaders

A trend, also pushed forward by a tendency to have one leader for several centres, is that Centre Leaders are more likely to study for a diploma or take courses for other types of competence development. There are no national/general requirements for leaders of ECEC centres. Most leaders are experienced Pedagogues. During recent years, however, national initiatives including the national government, municipal authorities and trade unions, have funded diploma study programmes in leadership for the whole public sector in order to raise the quality of the welfare institutions.

Two diploma courses exist for leaders in welfare institutions: Diploma in Leadership (DIL) and the public diploma in Leadership Education (DOL). The difference between these two is that the first is provided by university colleges; the second by both university colleges and private providers. Both diplomas are awarded with 60 ECTS credits and consist of different modules.



Master's degree/PhD

In Denmark there are two types of Master degrees: Continuing Higher Education and Ordinary Higher Education (EQF/ISCED Level 7).

Most Pedagogues who take a Master's degree do this as Continuing Higher Education. Entry requirements are a Bachelor's degree and at least two years of relevant job experience. A Master's degree comprises one year of full-time study (60 ECTS credits) and is followed on a part-time basis, since the students are working at the same time. The students have to pay a fee. The Master's study programme has to be completed within six years. Studies are research-based but also include the students' experiences from their daily work. Fees are sometimes covered by the employer, either partly or fully, and students may be given time off for studying. The main provider is DPU – the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, which offers a range of Master's degrees in the field of pedagogy and education. DPU is also a research centre in education and pedagogy in Denmark. Other universities also provide relevant Master's courses for pedagogues.

The other type of Master's degree, a Candidate degree in Ordinary Higher Education (120 ECTS credits), lasts two years and is often taken soon after completion of the Bachelor's degree. DPU and other universities provide a range of Master's degrees relevant for Pedagogues. The admission criteria are a Bachelor's degree and very good grades. Many Pedagogues apply for a Candidate degree course, but there are few places for this. The students are not required to pay a fee and they can apply for a State Education support grant (*Statens Uddannelsesstøtte, SU*) while studying.

Master's studies can be followed by a PhD course.

CPD for Pedagogue Co-helpers (*Pædagogmedhjælper*)

The non-qualified Pedagogue Co-helpers have various CPD possibilities. The initiative to participate may come from the Pedagogue Co-helper, the Centre Leader or from the local authority as part of a competence drive among all non-qualified employees. They can apply for the following options:

- The IPE for prospective Pedagogues
- If they have more than five years of work experience, the Merit qualification as Pedagogue
- The Pedagogical Assistant qualification
- Short-term AMU-courses. AMU (Danish Adult Vocational Training Programmes) is the vocational education system that provides many different courses: a pedagogical basic course (three weeks), children and nature (five days), play and learning with digital media in early childhood centres (five days), parent cooperation (five days) and so on. Here the non-qualified can acquire skills to be used directly in pedagogical work and are awarded a certificate. The providers of the courses are vocational schools and university colleges. The studies are free of charge. The leader must approve participation. The Pedagogue Co-helpers take the course during their working time and often continue to draw their regular salary. The centre may apply for economic compensation to be used for a substitute worker (FOA and KI 2014).

Key content focus of CPD

Thematically, CPD is offered in a myriad of different fields encouraging ECEC staff to excel within a wide range of topics. Popular topics currently in focus in CPD activities are themes related to the strengthened pedagogical curriculum adopted by the Danish Government in 2018 – for example play, outdoor activities, early intervention or a CPD course to qualify as a special resource

person ('professional beacon') to cooperate with the management in the implementation of the strengthened pedagogical curriculum in daily ECEC pedagogy and practice.

Research projects on CPD

Two large-scale research projects on CPD were carried out in 2012 and 2013, one focusing on Pedagogues (Ahrenkiel et. al. 2012), aiming to explain why a large part of the workforce does not attend CPD. The other on the Pedagogue Co-helpers (EPOS and EVA 2013) explored a potential need for development of existing qualification pathways for Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants.

Additionally, in 2020 a Danish study was published on the CPD of ECEC personnel (Jensen and Preus 2020). They examine the ways in which the position of 'professional beacon', introduced in the context of national competence initiatives in ECEC in 2018, was constructed in practice by centre leaders, employees and the professional beacons themselves, in order to identify challenges, possibilities, and dilemmas related to the position. Based on several interviews from professional beacons, leaders and colleagues, the article shows that the professional beacons are constructed in specific and multifarious ways, closely connected to the context and the negotiated positions in which they participate in the local collaboration: professional beacons as light-casters, experts, facilitators and change enforcers.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Nearly all Pedagogues are members of BUPL, the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators, and many Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers are members of FOA, the trade union for Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers. Benefits include six weeks of annual holiday leave, one year paid maternity and parental leave. All staff groups pay for an obligatory occupational pension.

Average monthly salaries for full-time staff in different job positions in early childhood centres are as follows (BUPL 2021):

- Non-qualified staff: DDK 27,000 (€ 3,600)
- Pedagogues: DDK 32,000 (€ 4,300)
- Department leader / deputy leader: DDK 36,000 (€ 4,800) and
- Centre leaders: DDK 44,000 (€ 6,000).

Posts of responsibility such as the Centre Leader, Deputy Leader, or Pedagogical Leader of a smaller unit receive a higher salary based on the collective agreements. The practicum supervisor receives a bonus.

A qualified Pedagogue earns only minimally less than a school teacher. The salary increases with seniority. It is possible to live on this salary without additional support, e.g. living as a single parent with one child in a major city, but the living standard very much depends on the cost of housing.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

According to collective agreements, full-time staff work 37 hours per week.

In 2020, 40% of Pedagogues and 38% of Pedagogical Assistants in ECEC worked full time. 59% and 60% worked part time and 1% and 3% were hourly employees. Pedagogue Co-helpers stand out markedly in that 21% are employed by the hour. This is partly due to the fact that no formal education is required to work as a Pedagogue Co-helper and that Co-helpers are widely used as substitute staff (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriets Benchmarkingsenhed 2021).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

The 98 local municipalities, the funders and providers of ECEC have an organised system that supports the staff to improve and monitor the quality of their work. This may take place through on-site mentoring, meetings, and consultancy as well as through off-site experts, for example Speech Therapists, Language experts and Psychologists. Municipalities employ Pedagogic Consultants who are mostly experienced Pedagogues with additional training (see also *chapter 2.4*). They are used by the centres when staff conflicts arise, to support children with special needs and other difficulties, and much more. Newly qualified staff are included in the general support to introduce them to the work.

7.4 Non-contact time

Pedagogues do not have any official preparation time, but the issue is often debated in a trade union policy context. The current debate is primarily concerned with the fact that new tasks and increasing documentation requirements lead to fewer quality hours with the children. Time for staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking etc. is locally decided. An increasing number of administrative tasks are taken care of while being together with the children.

In general, the increased requirements and new tasks in pedagogical work have led to a deterioration in staff-child ratios in Danish ECEC institutions, more time where one qualified member of staff is alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

One particular research study problematises the fact that even though Pedagogues spent 78,5% of their time together with children in 2017 compared to 72% in 1973, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that child-staff contact has improved between 1973 to 2017. Rather, it points to the fact that administrative work has been decentralised, so that Pedagogues no longer *only* spend time together with the children, but rather tend to constantly multi-task to a high extent (Pade and Glavind 2021). The multi-tasking compromises close contact and pedagogical attentiveness towards the children.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The Pedagogue study route is the largest study programme in Denmark: 4,781 applicants were fully enrolled in 2021. In comparison, the School Teacher Education enrolled 2,556 applicants, 4,112 were enrolled at the Danish Nursing Education and 2,226 were enrolled to study Social Work. Nevertheless, the popularity for all welfare study programmes has decreased over the last five years, and Denmark is facing a situation of shortage of qualified ECEC staff.

In the period June–November 2021, 3,500 (30%) of Pedagogue posts advertised were not occupied and 700 (20%) of jobs for Co-Helpers remained vacant (Styrelsen for Arbejdsmarked og Rekruttering 2022).

The full coverage in early childhood services, the political adoption of minimum standards for staff-child ratios and a prospect of more than 45,000 additional children aged 0–5 in 2030 has led to an urgent need for new recruitment strategies.



General recruitment strategies

Trade unions call for national recruitment strategies, in combination with better working conditions and higher wages. A working time survey from 2019 shows that part-time Pedagogues are willing to work more hours if standards improve. A large proportion of part-time employees mention a harsh working environment as a reason for their part-time employment (BUPL 2019). Since 2017, there has been an elevated awareness of how the increased requirements in pedagogical work (for documentation, for example) have led to less favourable staff-child ratios, more time with one adult alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

In December 2021, an amendment on staff-child ratio minimum standards was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Lov om ændring af dagtilbudsloven 2021). As from 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022).

Municipalities are encouraging all their experienced Pedagogical Co-workers to enrol in the merit qualification route. Recently, a merit qualification route for academics (the track change model) was initiated as a trial qualification route from 2021–2027 to help recruit more Pedagogues at a time of acute shortage (see *Chapter 4.3*).

Recruitment of male pedagogues in ECEC

The Pedagogue study programme has been able to attract a relatively large number of male students, 26% of the total intake currently (in 2021). In 2000, the relative share was 17%. However, as shown in *Table 2*, the share of them working in early childhood centres is not that high; mostly they prefer to work in other kinds of pedagogical settings.

The recruitment of male Pedagogues for ECEC centres has been on the agenda for years and related strategies have been carried out. The 2014 Pedagogue education reform did put gender on the agenda and all students must learn about gender issues. A variety of recruitment initiatives have been taking place, and the experiences are compiled in a handbook for inspiration (Wohlgemuth and Hviid 2016). In 2016, the ministry launched a campaign for recruiting more male Pedagogues into early childhood centres (Ministry of Children, Education and Equality 2016), but the efforts have yet to be evaluated. A qualitative study from 2021 points to five factors that are important to male pedagogical staff, which need to be at the centre of efforts to recruit male employees: focus on the core task; high professionalism, focus on diversity; special fields of interest (outdoor life and movement); presence of other male employees (Rambøll 2021).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Strengthening ECEC through a revised curricular framework and competence development initiative

In June 2017, a political agreement “Strong day care – all children need to join the community” was adopted by the Ministry of Children and Social Affairs (Ministry of Children and Social Affairs 2017), and subsequently a revised Act on Early Childhood Education and Care came into force in July 2018. The amendments were accompanied by a strengthening of the legal requirements to work with a strengthened pedagogical curriculum (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

These include a much more detailed description of the content of the curriculum, which has not previously been seen in the Danish ECEC arena (Aabro 2019). As part of the realisation, the Ministry of Children and Social Affairs allocated extra funds for a national competence development initiative.

Staff from both municipal and private institutions could apply for the funding in a model where one or more Pedagogues in an ECEC centre were to be trained for a function that was categorised as a 'professional beacon', through either three learning days or a pedagogical diploma module (Jensen and Preus 2020). The new phenomenon is based on an idea that some management tasks are delegated to special resource persons as organisational intermediaries in the sense of distributed management (Spring and Spring 2020). Pedagogues can qualify as a professional beacon on the basis of a completed CPD course. The function is remunerated with a salary supplement – see also *chapter 6*.

The 2018 amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care are solidly based on the Danish ECEC tradition, so most ECEC settings were familiar with many of the initiatives in the strengthened pedagogical curriculum, whereas some were entirely new. Central elements are:

- A common pedagogical foundation with key elements (e.g. play, communities of children and a broad concept of learning) constituting the understanding and approach to work on children's wellbeing, learning, development and formation in ECEC
- Establishing a pedagogical learning environment throughout the day, including in routine situations, planned activities and child-initiated play
- Detailed descriptions of the six curriculum themes as well as new, broad pedagogical objectives for the relationship between the learning environment and children's learning for each theme
- The pedagogical curriculum should relate to vulnerable children, cooperation with parents on children's learning, transition to school as well as cooperation with the surrounding community.
- An evaluation culture has to be established in all local ECEC settings (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

In December 2021, an amendment on minimum standards for the staff to child ratio and strengthened inspection was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022). The amendment to the law was adopted together with the release of financial resources that could be applied for the implementation of minimum standards over a number of years. The amendment intends to maintain quality in ECEC and ensure that staff-child ratios are not aggravated due to elevated costs of ECEC in the municipalities with an increasing number of children attending ECEC in the future.

Evaluating the initial professional education of Pedagogues

In 2020, the Danish Government initiated an evaluation of the Pedagogue Education, published in 2021 as a part of an overall quality plan for Danish ECEC to make the pedagogues even more skilled and even better able to practise and develop their practices. The evaluation is a follow-up on the reform of the pedagogue education from 2013. Four themes were evaluated: learning culture and study environment; knowledge base; practicum; and the competences of newly qualified staff. The main findings indicated:

- A great variation in student backgrounds and biographies
- Potentials for more graduates to be better qualified for practical pedagogical work



- High study intensity and number of classes but low level of feedback
- An emphasis on profession-oriented knowledge
- Internship (practicum) is seen as a central feature of learning but links between the university colleges and practicum institutions are not sufficiently close
- Study programmes with too many goals and an insufficient number of in-depth modules
- Students are not adequately qualified to work in social and special education
- Female and male students thrive equally well, but choose different areas of specialisation (Agency for Higher Education and Science 2021).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

An increase in research in ECEC has taken place during the last 25 years or so. Research takes place at universities, at university colleges, or in various research centres. ECEC stakeholders commission research.

Many research projects relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues have been conducted over the past five years and the three presented are selected examples. One is published only in Danish language, two are in English – one of which has been carried out since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Effective pedagogical work in ECEC settings

Source: Charlotte Ringsmose, and Lone Svinth 2019 (see *References*).

Background: Research points to a number of well-documented suggestions on pedagogy that are effective in promoting the well-being and development of children in vulnerable positions. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the translation of these suggestions into pedagogical practice in ECEC. Also, a knowledge gap exists on how big a role the administration might play in the development of effective ECEC services – especially for children in vulnerable positions.

Aims and methods: The study investigates how Danish ECEC institutions located in so-called socially disadvantaged residential areas with a relatively high number of children living in vulnerable conditions create an environment that reduces inequality among children. The project is based on observations of pedagogical work and interviews with leaders and staff in five home-based settings, 15 ECEC institutions and 10 municipal administration departments.

Selected findings: The project points to a number of factors that seem to increase all children's well-being and development opportunities in ECEC. Effective ECEC is characterised by a strong leadership, with leaders who set a clear direction without being too dominant, and who believe in the staff. Leaders who have a plan and are good at engaging, create a safe and humorous atmosphere and offer support and respect when needed.

Moreover, in effective ECEC institutions the pedagogical staff are very sensitive towards individual children's needs, professionalism in the staff group is high, employees are proud of their work and eager to join new initiatives and professional dialogues. Also, effective ECEC settings are characterised by an awareness of not lowering the expectations of the children in spite of their vulnerable positions, creating participation chances for all children, a sense of openness

and competences in dealing with behavioural issues and conflicts arising through physical closeness, touching and soothing, and friendly recognition of the child by addressing unwanted behaviours with respect and acknowledgement.

Implications: The study points to a challenge in the development of effective ECEC in institutions with many children in vulnerable positions. When the need is greatest, it seems to require an extra effort to develop quality. Even if effective ECEC institutions are located next door to less effective ones, transfer does not seem to occur in spite of visits, courses and/or observations. More knowledge is needed on how to work on developing quality in less effective institutions.

‘Academics’ as play and the social as discipline: school readiness in Denmark

Source: Bjørg Kjær, Dil Bach, and Karen Ida Dannesboe 2020 (see *References*).

Background: Denmark has a tradition of kindergarten pedagogy focused on children’s play, sociality and individual interests. Political emphasis on global competition, however, has led to reforms in early childhood education and care (ECEC) since 2004.

Aims and methods: Based on ethnographic fieldwork in three kindergartens, the study analyses how ECEC reforms have affected the priorities of parents and pedagogues regarding school readiness. To understand how this is negotiated, researchers draw upon Lareau’s distinction between childrearing as ‘concerted cultivation’ or as ‘the accomplishment of natural growth’.

Selected findings: The study shows that parents and staff consider the social as the most important thing for kindergarten children to learn and as something that the adults must cultivate – often in a strict manner. Moreover, both parents and pedagogues state that academic competences are not important to cultivate because an interest in academics will grow naturally. Adults just have to support academic activities through play when the children choose to engage in them. However, academic competences are actively cultivated in practice.

Implications: The political focus on formal learning from 2004 onwards is not incompatible with the emphasis on the social in Danish ECEC, but occurs in the practices of everyday life, in more organised activities and specially themed activities. Despite a strong conviction that a child’s interest in academic skills will develop on its own, adult-initiated work to cultivate this also takes place in ECEC. Here, a dominant discourse regarding enjoyment is activated, particularly when pedagogues and parents talk about including the academic in play. Thus, demonstrating motivation for school in conjunction with conforming socially seems to be the culturally enacted definition of school readiness in a Danish kindergarten context.

Child well-being in early childhood education and care during COVID-19: Child sensitivity in small, fixed groups

Source: Anette Boye Koch 2022 (see *References*)

Background: Child well-being in Danish ECEC provision has been intensively studied and debated since 2007, when well-being was incorporated into the Danish Act on Early Childhood Education and Care as an overall aim. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all usual pedagogical routines and practices were set on standby. A great concern was whether pedagogues would be able to ensure the children’s subjective well-being during a pandemic, or if the children would suffer harm either due to the risk of infection or to the human consequences of the strict regulations.

Aims and methods: The study explored subjective child wellbeing in Danish ECEC during the time of COVID-19. It was initiated to follow the reopening in 2020 until 2021. Two ECEC institutions were followed first-hand to observe the impact of the pandemic on pedagogy and child well-being. Observations and qualitative interviews were conducted with follow-up interviews and an online survey a year later.



Selected findings: The uncertainty and increased external control during COVID-19 did not appear to negatively affect either the pedagogy or child wellbeing. The pandemic caused pedagogues to work in a more child-sensitive way with elevated staff-child ratios and children in small, fixed groups. Pedagogues experienced more peace in their work from the fact that the parents did not enter the institution. Grouping the children into small units resulted in more concentration and retention of children with a tendency to outward attention. Many learning activities took place in an outdoor environment. Excursions were more frequent, more informal and in smaller groups of children, with plenty of time to stop and talk and include children's perspectives. The non-negotiable COVID-19 structure provided more predictability and a greater sense of security for many children.

Implications: The COVID-19 study speaks to an ongoing public debate in Denmark about ECEC quality, pedagogue professionalism and politically defined standards for a minimum number of staff members per child. It manifests how the core values of Danish early childhood pedagogy remain deeply rooted in a pedagogical culture. In spite of strong political efforts to impose a learning regime on Danish ECEC settings during the last two decades, the values that imperceptibly characterise the Danish Pedagogue profession persist and trump the school logic and pre-occupation with academic skills during an acute situation.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Increasing challenges for ECEC personnel

Over the last ten years, staff in early childhood centres have been required to take on more and more tasks, arising from the realisation of the national government's policies, such as producing learning plans, the strengthened pedagogical curriculum and the resulting implementation policies in the municipalities. According to ECEC staff, parents also tend to demand more and politicians call for the early detection of children with special affordances and a higher quality pedagogical work in general. A paradox is that the staff-child ratio has deteriorated and also the proportion of qualified pedagogues has decreased among staff. Both are key factors for quality in early childhood centres and key factors to be able to live up to the required policies.

Many of the new tasks demand highly educated staff. One example (from the 2020 Act) is the new construction outlined earlier in this report, where management tasks are delegated to special resource persons (professional beacons) as distributed management. The post of responsibility is awarded on basis of a successfully completed CPD course and remunerated with a salary supplement.

The strengthened pedagogical curriculum requires among other things new efforts and more documentation than ever before. Systematic evaluations are demanded. Language assessment and stimulation are high on the agenda. Collaboration with parents has always had a high priority, and parents demand it even more. New organisational changes and development of the learning environment by inclusion of children's perspectives, etc. – all these demands require time and a high professionalism among the staff.

A response from politicians is to demand higher quality in the Pedagogue Education. An evaluation of the pedagogue education from 2021 (see *Chapter 8*) calls for, among other things, higher levels of feedback, better cohesion in the educational programme and a stronger connection

between practicum settings and the IPE institutions. The responses from trade unions and pedagogues are to demand better working conditions, higher wages and improved staff-child ratios. A critical response from many pedagogues to governmental and educational efforts to provide better knowledge, new methods and concepts of how to reach higher quality ECEC is: We are already sufficiently qualified, and we do know how to practise good pedagogy. But it does not help, if we do not have sufficient time and working conditions to practise what is needed!

Staff to child ratios

A comprehensive workforce challenge is to deal with the fact that increased requirements and new tasks in pedagogical work have led to a deterioration of staff-child ratios in Danish ECEC institutions, more time where one pedagogical staff is alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

After heavy debates for years, a law on staff-child ratio minimum standards was finally included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care in December 2021. Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022). Although the number of staffs has increased overall, there is still a large proportion of pedagogues who feel that they are not able to provide the needed care to all children (Pade and Glavind 2021). 63% of all pedagogical staff experience on a daily basis that they either do not have time to comfort, solve a conflict, support a child in play or discuss problematic issues regarding a child with a colleague (Glavind and Pade 2022).

In a 2019 survey based on a representative sample on everyday life in early childhood centres, 20% of almost 700 Centre Leaders report that no more than two adults are present at the same time all through the day both in a *vuggestue* (0–2 years) group of ten, or in a *børnehave* (3–5 years) group of 20 children. Staff are also alone with the group during certain times of the day (Glavind and Pade 2019b).

Between 1972 and 2018, the staff-child ratio in early childhood centres deteriorated markedly. In 2018, the number of children per the adult was around 10–11 in kindergartens and just over 5 in nurseries, if looking at the number of adults and children present. If deducting the time during which the adults solve other tasks, while at the same time keeping an eye on the children, the figures are more likely to be 13 children per adult in kindergartens and 6–7 children per adult in nurseries. The main reasons for the increased number of children per adult in ECEC settings include the implementation of economic austerity measures, new management methods, and unrealistic assumptions about how this will affect everyday life in ECEC settings (Glavind and Pade 2019a).

Dalsgaard, Jordan, and Petersen (2016) analysed the 2014 staff-child ratios in the 98 local municipalities. Their study shows huge differences between municipalities: in one municipality among those with the best ratios, the ratio was 1:3 for children under 3 years of age and 1:5.2 for children aged 3 to 6 years; in another among those with the best ratios, the ratios were 1:5.4 (0–2 years) and 1:9.4 (3–5 years).

Recruitment challenges

The increasing number of children means that the number of places in ECEC institutions needs to be increased by approximately 60,000 over the next ten years. As the adult-child ratio must also be improved, the number of pedagogical staffs must be increased by more than 12,000 full-time employees compared to the present. In 15 years, there will be approximately 80,000 more children in care than now (Glavind and Pade 2022). The increased need for pedagogical staff means that it may be difficult to secure trained staff. A large number of municipalities seek to

counteract this by supporting merit educations or by focusing on more students for the pedagogical basic education.

The popularity of the Pedagogue Education is not as high as it used to be. Once again in 2022, the education was the most popular in Denmark with 4,608 applicants as their first priority in quota 1 (see *Chapter 4.1*), but this is 18% fewer than the year before, and 23% fewer than in 2019. The decrease in the number of applicants is problematic at a time when society is screaming for more educated staff in ECEC institutions. The Trade Union BUPL warns that society is facing a welfare catastrophe if the Pedagogue Education does not become an attractive choice for more potential students: "In many ECEC settings, only half of the staff are educated pedagogues, and the municipalities simply cannot find enough pedagogical staff for the vacancies," says BUPL chairman Elisa Rimpler, referring to the fact that more than one in four pedagogue positions advertised from September 2021 to February 2022 was not occupied (BUPL 2022).

The trade unions call for national recruitment strategies, in combination with better working conditions and higher wages. A working time survey from 2019 shows that part-time pedagogues are willing to work more hours if the standards improve. A large proportion of part-time employees mention a harsh working environment as a reason for their choice to work part time (BUPL 2019).

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