

## The UK ADDENDUM to the ECERS-R

The ECERS and other Environment Rating Scales are used in many countries across the world. As with any international tool, a commonly asked question is ‘how appropriate is it for our UK context’?

The Environment Rating Scales fit very well with UK guidance and standards, and can help settings and local authorities to meet their obligations under EYFS. However, as with any tool, there are elements which may suit some contexts better than others. In some cases you may find that an individual statement or item does not exactly meet your needs. For example, you might find that a particular element of quality which you find to be important does not appear within an item. Or you may feel that an item is too strict and that the expectations exceed your own. For example, the approach to personal care and hygiene is often more demanding of Early Years Settings than EYFS or Ofsted.

Although it is tempting for individuals to bend the scales to their own requirements, we would not advise doing this on an ad hoc basis. If different users interpret the statements in different ways - keeping the bits they ‘like’ and discarding or adapting the bits they ‘don’t like’ - then we lose the power of comparison. Without consistency in use and definition, it will be impossible to tell whether differences in ratings are due to actual differences in quality - or due to the fact that different observers are interpreting the statements/ indicators in different ways. For the majority of small differences between the scales and UK expectations, we suggest that users rate according to the ‘ECERS definition’ – but adapt the action following an observation as needed. For example, Item 15 (Books and pictures) does not specifically require settings to have books outdoors. If a setting meets all the requirements but does not provide opportunities for reading outdoors, a score of 7 should be given, but during feedback the lack of book provision outdoors could also be raised. It should be borne in mind that no one tool will provide a ‘blueprint’ for quality. Where the scale/s are not perceived as not going far enough, the recommendation is that the scales are used in conjunction with other tools, i.e., as part of a ‘toolkit’ of approaches.

However, there are a small number of aspects of the ECERS (and other scales) which have caused greater debate within the UK. These relate mainly to the way that the scales assess supervision of children and handwashing/hygiene practices, and it is in these areas that greater variation between the ECERS and commonly held UK expectations of ‘quality’ can be seen. For example the Environment Rating Scales generally consider that, in order to be safe, children should be within view of an adult at all times, including when they go to the toilet. In the UK, whilst valuing safety, we might also want to balance supervision needs with children’s need for privacy.

We do not want to create a ‘UK ECERS’ entirely separate from the American scale – we feel that the benefits of using an internationally recognised and validated tool outweigh the benefits of having a tool which is exactly tailored towards our requirements. This is also the position of the American authors, Thelma Harms, Richard Clifford and Debby Cryer. Rather than creating a complete ‘UK ECERS’ we have permission from the authors to create a ‘UK addendum’ to supplement the existing ECERS. This addendum will list the most important amendments which are necessary for ECERS and the other Environment Rating Scales to fit the UK context, and to ensure that use of the scale in the UK gives the appropriate messages to practitioners working with young children.

This document is the first draft of the UK ‘addendum to the ECERS-R’. It has been created using input and comments from over 30 different local authorities. It has been trialled by A+ Education’s training and audit team, who have provided much valuable input and debated long and hard over the

finer points. And finally, the UK ‘addendum panel’ (a sub-group of the UK ECERS Network) had its first meeting in April 2009 to agree the first draft of the document for publication.

Bearing in mind the argument we made above for consistency in use, if we do make UK adaptations to the scales then it is essential that all UK users – as far as possible – use the same adaptations. To this end, we have published this UK addendum on the internet for all to access. It is a work in progress and may evolve over time in response to feedback if there are other issues still to be resolved. We very much welcome your comments and have set up an email address for responses, suggestions and questions ([comment@ecersuk.org](mailto:comment@ecersuk.org)). We cannot promise that we will respond individually to your emails but we will review suggestions regularly to inform future revisions of the addendum. The addendum panel will meet periodically to consider any suggested additions. As the addendum is amended, we will publish the revised version on the website and mark any new additions so that they are clear to see.

From past experience, we think suggested revisions or amendments to the scale will fall into three broad categories:

- Small changes which do not affect the inherent meaning of an item or indicator, or cause significant difficulty in use of the scales. An example of this might be a vocabulary difference (e.g. use of the word diapers rather than nappies), or an addition which is desirable but not essential. These are unlikely to be incorporated into the addendum.
- Adaptations to existing items which are necessary to ensure the scales complement UK guidance and expectations. This is the category most relevant to the addendum and the amendments most likely to be included.
- Large (but important) changes which represent a significant alteration or addition to the scale. For example, one comment made at the first addendum panel meeting was the absence of an item in the ECERS relating to attachment and the key person approach. We are not able to add significantly to the ECERS without changing its inherent nature and characteristics. However, we will gather suggestions for important additions and provide feedback to the US authors, who are always very open to comment. We cannot promise that these changes will be made but will pass on any significant issues raised.

This first draft of the addendum considers amendments in the following areas:

- Supervision
- Handwashing and hygiene
- Meals and snack schedule/nutritional content
- Safety practices
- Assessing interactions between staff and children
- Other miscellaneous items

Items already noted for future consideration include the way ECERS and the other scales assess and refer to provision for children with additional needs. A glossary of translated terms (e.g. ‘child-initiated play’ rather than ‘free play’) will also be included. And finally, future work will also broaden the addendum to cover the other scales – ITERS, FCCERS and SACERS (although many of the suggested amendments are already relevant and can be used).

## HOW TO USE THE ADDENDUM

We suggest that the addendum is printed off and used alongside the published ECERS-R. As well as having a copy in their folder alongside the ECERS manual when observing, users might also wish to read the addendum and make notes on their copy of the scale where there are significant adaptations. As the addendum is amended, we will publish the revised version on the website and mark any new additions so that they are clear to see.

## SECTION 1: SUPERVISION

Safety and supervision of children is a key theme running throughout the ECERS-R. All these ECERS items assess adequacy of supervision to some extent:

- Item 4: Room arrangement for play (1.2/3.2)
- Item 5: Space for privacy (3.2 )
- Item 11: Nap/rest (1.3/3.3)
- Item 12: Toileting/diapering (1.4/3.5)
- Item 14: Safety practices (1.3/3.2)
- Item 29: Supervision of gross motor activities (1.1/3.1)
- Item 30: General supervision of children (1.1/3.1)
- Item 35: Free play (3.2)

### ECERS and ratios

When considering supervision, the starting point for UK local authorities and settings will obviously be whether legal ratios are met. This differs somewhat from the approach taken by the ECERS and other Environment Rating Scales, which do not offer specific guidance on adult-child ratios. This is because the scales are used all over the world, and legal requirements obviously vary from country to country.

ECERS ratings are based on whether the observer considers that children are safe. Since children's safety is also the starting point of the legal ratios in the UK, it is unlikely that a check of legal ratios and an ECERS audit would produce a different outcome when assessing adequacy of supervision. We do not think that an explicit amendment to the ECERS is needed in this case. However, settings and Local Authorities using the tool will of course want to score down on supervision items where ratios are not met and bring this to the attention of the staff, in order that they can address the issue.

### Children within view at all times?

The ECERS-R requires that children are within view of staff members at all times. For example, the 'All About ECERS' clarifications for Item 4 (Room Arrangement for Play) state that 'visual supervision means that staff can see and monitor all children as they play in the indoor space....spaces behind hanging fabric, tall shelves, partial walls and under or in some lofts may be..difficult to supervise....' (pp.26/27).

Practitioners and advisers we have spoken to in the UK feel it is important to balance the (obviously essential) need for supervision with children's need for privacy and space. We suggest relaxing the requirement that children are 'within view' at all times, and instead using the guideline 'within sight or easy hearing'. This means that an adult should be close enough (and aware enough) that they can

quickly respond to children who need help, or to any problems. For activities which might require closer supervision (e.g. gross motor equipment on which children could injure themselves; cutting up fruit with a sharp knife) children should be within view at all times.

How does this impact on individual items?

*Item 4: Room arrangement for play (1.2, 3.2)*

*Item 5: Space for privacy (3.2)*

The All About ECERS suggests scoring down if there are areas around corners or behind high shelving which mean that staff cannot see all children (p.27, photo 4.1.2a/b). Using the ‘within sight or easy hearing’ guideline, we would not necessarily score down for furniture of this kind as long as staff place themselves so that children are within easy hearing (i.e. even if they cannot see the children, adults are close enough that they are aware of what is going on and can respond if there is a problem). However, we would still score down if children play in spaces which are out of sight/ easy hearing (e.g. in a separate room with the door closed, or in an unsupervised space down a corridor). And in some cases, even when children are technically ‘within hearing’, an observer may feel the situation is unsafe and score down. The primary factor for deciding on a score should be whether the observer feels that staff are adequately aware of children and would be aware of any problems which might arise.

*Item 11: Nap/rest (1.2, 3.3)*

The All About ECERS states that ‘children who are resting or sleeping still need to be within sight and hearing of an adult at all times’ (p.105). Again, we suggest relaxing this slightly to ‘within sight or easy hearing at all times’. However, as with the previous two items, observers should be satisfied that children are safe before giving credit and there should be an appropriate system for checking and monitoring sleeping children (particularly babies).

For example, we would give credit if children sleep in a cordoned off area of the main room, which is out of sight but within easy hearing – as long as there was also a system of regular checks in place (e.g. a rota, or a beeper which reminds staff to check sleeping children regularly). However, as in the ECERS/ITERS guidance, if a sleep room is totally separate from the main room and out of hearing (e.g. door to sleep room is closed while children sleep, or sleep room is down the corridor), we would expect that at least one member of staff should be supervising the children. Baby monitors are sometimes used, and may fulfil the ‘within hearing’ requirement but only if a member of staff is easily able to hear the monitor and would be aware if a child awoke or was distressed. If supervising in a busy room, staff may not easily be able to hear a monitor.

*Item 12: Toileting (1.4, 3.5)*

Many settings have toilet areas which are separate from the main room (and therefore out of sight). This would not be considered adequate by the ECERS scale, which is very strict on supervision. The All About ECERS (p.119/120) suggests that indicator 3.5 be scored no if ‘preschoolers go to the bathroom, close the door and staff cannot see the children to monitor them’. As with the other items, we suggest relaxing this requirement and giving credit if children are ‘within sight or easy hearing’ of an adult when in the toilet area, and staff are aware when children need help or when there is a problem.

However, we would still score down for these indicators (1.4, 3.5) if children access the toilet area independently but out of sight/hearing of an adult (e.g. down a long corridor). In this case, adults cannot be fully aware when a child needs help, or able to check that children wash their hands/ flush toilets etc. In many settings, this will always be an issue due to the location of the toilets and there

may be very little that can be done - other than accompanying all children to the toilet (which may cause problems with the supervision of the rest of the group), or taking the whole group together (also not ideal). In this case, we would still score down - since these are the ECERS guidelines - but the setting might quite reasonably decide that they would prefer to continue allowing independent access to allow the children privacy and develop their independence. The authors are very clear that scores on ECERS are a reflection of the choices and professional practices of staff teams and the constraints under which they operate. They acknowledge that it is unlikely any setting will do well on all aspects of the scales and suggest that practitioners need to “understand what they are choosing to do or not do and to balance these choices in terms of what is possible” (All About ECERS p.xiii).

## **SECTION 2: HANDWASHING AND HYGIENE**

The Environment Rating Scales are very strict with regard to hygiene. In general, this is useful as it sets a high expectation and provides a rigorous means of self assessment. However, whilst not undervaluing the importance of hygiene and handwashing, some relaxation of the scales has been considered necessary to fit the UK context.

### **General guidance on handwashing**

The following indicators assess the adequacy of handwashing practices:

- Item 10 Meals/snacks (1.3, 3.3)
- Item 12 Toileting/diapering (1.3, 3.3)
- Item 13 Health practices (3.1)

The guidelines given in the ECERS-R relating to acceptable methods of handwashing are quite rigorous. For example, use of alcohol gels instead of washing hands with soap and water is not accepted by ECERS. According to the ECERS guidance, if handwashing is carried out, but not ‘adequately’ then the above indicators would be scored down. For example if all children wash their hands after using the toilet but none use the soap provided - then we would give a score of ‘yes’ for Item 12 (1.3) ‘handwashing often neglected by staff or children after toileting’.

There has been much discussion on this topic within the UK, and the following suggested guidance for UK users of the ECERS is a mix of the ECERS requirements and some minor relaxation in places:

- We have retained the ECERS requirement that hands should be washed with liquid soap and warm water (All About ECERS p. 123).
- All About ECERS suggests that children should rinse their hands under warm running water for around 10 seconds (p.123). While hand-washing obviously needs to be adequate, we would not expect observers to count the length of time children rinse their hands.
- We do not expect children or adults to turn off the taps with a paper towel to minimize contamination (All About ECERS p.115).
- The ECERS/ITERS suggests that hands are dried with individual paper towels rather than with a shared towel or air dryer (All About ECERS p. 124), and thrown into a hands-free/swing bin. We suggest scoring down for use of shared towels as these are not hygienic. If air dryers are used and seem to be used well (i.e. children’s hands are dried sufficiently) we suggest that observers do not score down. If a hands-free/swing bin is not provided, then to give credit it should be clear that hands are not re-contaminated after washing and drying.

- We suggest that the following practices do not promote sanitary conditions and best practice and should not be counted as examples of adequate handwashing:
  - Bowls of shared water (e.g. several children wash hands in the same water).
  - Shared towels for drying hands.
  - Bars of soap rather than liquid soap.
  - Use of wipes instead of hand-washing before meals, after going to the toilet or after touching anything contaminated (e.g., wiping noses, contact with other bodily fluids).  
*NB: see exception to this in the list below.*
  - Alcohol gels as a regular alternative to hand-washing. Hand-washing routines should be in place before meals, after going to the toilet or after touching anything contaminated. In some cases (e.g. outdoors, where access to a sink is difficult or impractical) gels may be an appropriate alternative – see exceptions below). However they are not appropriate where hands are dirty, for example after messy play/ digging outside (gels only sanitise and cannot remove dirt).
- We suggest that the following would be acceptable:
  - Wipes (rather than hand-washing) for wiping hands after eating/after messy play.
  - Alcohol gels or wipes for cleaning hands after wiping noses (indoors or out) or other occasions when access to a sink is difficult (e.g. when out on trips).
- The ECERS does not require gloves to be worn when changing nappies or preparing food. However, if gloves are worn, ECERS does not consider this to be a substitute for hand-washing and would expect that adults change gloves and wash their hands between every nappy change (All About ECERS-R p. 115). We are relaxing this very slightly. If gloves are worn, they should be changed between every child. However, if care is taken when changing gloves to ensure that hands are not recontaminated, observers should not score down for lack of hand-washing. Gloves should be disposed of appropriately. If the observer is happy that the change of gloves and or handwashing is hygienic, credit can be given. If gloves are not worn, then hands should always be washed. Hands should also always be washed (or gloves changed hygienically) between activities such as changing children and food preparation.

In general, we would be looking for handwashing routines to be in place. Do not score down for individual lapses, if routines are clearly in place but a few children ‘slip through the net’ (unless the lapse is very serious, such as not washing hands after cleaning up a child who has soiled her/himself).

### **Item 10: Meals/snacks**

#### *1.3 and 3.3 (sanitary conditions)*

The ECERS manual does not give specific guidance as to how many problems should be observed before scoring down at the inadequate level (1.3). However, the training DVD suggests that we would score ‘yes’ to 1.3 if one major problem is observed (e.g. children not washing hands before meal times). The ITERS suggests not scoring down at the inadequate level unless three major problems are observed. For consistency, we suggest scoring ‘yes’ to 1.3 (for both ECERS and ITERS) if two or more of the following serious problems are observed e.g.:

- Food preparation surfaces/areas not clean;
- Tables not sanitised before children eat;
- Food served on table-tops instead of plates (even if tables have been cleaned);
- Contaminated food served (e.g. after being dropped on floor, food out of the fridge too long);
- Many children or adults do not wash their hands before eating or preparing food;
- Many children get involved in play, sit on the floor or re-contaminate hands in some other way after washing hands rather than going straight to the table;

- Cutlery is dropped and a clean replacement is not offered (or cutlery is not re-washed before use);
- Children who help prepare food or eat ‘messy’ or ‘wet’ food with their fingers do not have hands wiped afterwards if this is needed (wipes are fine here). If children do not handle food directly, or only eat ‘dry’ foods (e.g. breadsticks) they do not need to have their hands wiped after meals. The observer should not be overly rigorous here, but should consider whether the children are moving on to other activities with sticky hands. In contrast to the All About ECERS (p.93) we suggest that children’s faces do not necessarily need to be wiped after every meal unless very messy.

At 3.3, we suggest scoring ‘yes’ if no serious problems observed and sanitary conditions are a clear part of the daily routine. For example, don’t score down if a few children ‘slip through the net’ and don’t wash their hands.

Generally, the same criteria apply for café-style snacks or snack bars as for group meals/ snacks. We would not expect the table to be sanitized (i.e. sprayed) between children (as in All About ECERS p.94). However, children should not be expected to eat at a messy table, so the table tops should be wiped between children if needed.

We do not require a particular method for cleaning tables before meals/snacks (as in All About ECERS p.93/94). However, it should be sanitary (e.g. table wiped with clean cloth, clean table-cloth put down). If tables-cloths are used then either a clean cloth should be used for each meal/snack or tables should be sanitized. If used, then table-cloths must be sanitary, e.g. cleaned before use, stored hygienically etc.

### **Item 11: Nap/rest**

#### *1.2/3.1 (sanitary conditions)*

The ECERS-R (and also ITERS-R) considers that it is unhygienic for children to sleep in close proximity to each other, and would score down at 1.2 and 3.1 if cots/mats are placed close together (less than 18” apart) unless they are separated by a solid barrier (All About ECERS p.105). For the UK, we suggest not scoring down for the distance between cots or mats if the only issue is the proximity of children to each other. However, if the spacing of beds causes other problems with hygiene (e.g. mats are so close together that staff or children have to walk on the sheets to access the beds) observers should still take this into account and score down.

The other hygiene requirements remain unchanged (i.e. we would still score down if children do not have clean bedding to sleep on etc).

#### *5.3 (distance of cots/mats)*

The distance between beds is also considered at 5.1, where ECERS expects that they are at least 3 feet apart or separated by a solid barrier. We have relaxed this slightly and suggest observers give credit if there is enough room for adults and children to access the beds easily (e.g. 18 inches apart).

#### *Use of buggies and prams*

ECERS does not provide specific recommendation about whether it is appropriate for children to sleep in prams/buggies, although since children are required to have clean bedding for sleeping then there would be a hygiene issue if different children sleep in the same buggy without clean sheeting. Although not considered in ECERS/ITERS, practitioners should be aware of the implications of children sleeping upright for long periods of time.

## Item 12: Toileting/diapering

### 1.1 (sanitary conditions in relation to nappy changing)

There is a very detailed procedure for nappy changing outlined in the All About ECERS/ITERS (e.g. All About ECERS p.113). We would not require that this is followed step by step, but suggest that the following should be used as guidance when scoring:

- The nappy table should be sprayed/ cleaned between each child.
- Potties should be cleaned after every use with hot water, detergent and disinfectant and dried properly.
- If hands are soiled when removing a nappy, they should be wiped before handling the new nappy.
- Nappies should be disposed of properly, into a dedicated bin – either in a nappy sack/bag, or directly into a ‘Nappy San’ bin. Ideally, the nappy bin should be hands free but this is not vital if it seems appropriate and hygienic.

### 1.2 (basic provision)

EYFS guidelines state that there should be 1 toilet for every 10 children. This can be used as a suitable guide for this indicator in determining whether provision for toileting is adequate. NB: there are obviously a number of other provisions which also need to be made - see All About ECERS p.112.

### 1.3 (handwashing)

See the general guidance on hand-washing given above. In addition, specific points which relate to this indicator include:

- Hands should be washed before leaving the toilet area/nappy room and touching other objects/children. Adults who check nappies should also wash their hands afterwards (unless there is no possibility of contamination). However, we would not expect every child’s hands to be washed after a nappy change unless they have been obviously contaminated (contrary to All About ECERS p.115).
- We do not expect observers to check that adults wash their hands after going to the toilet.

## Item 13: Health practices

### 3.1

This indicator covers all hand-washing outside of toileting/meals and snacks. To score yes, ECERS requires that the hands of adults and children should be washed 75% of the time when needed. All About ECERS (p.124) gives a very specific list of times when hand-washing is needed, the majority of which we are retaining with some relaxation of the guidelines. We suggest that hands should be washed:

- After messy play such as painting or gluing when needed (wipes can be used, but alcohol gels would not be appropriate);
- After digging/ planting, playing in an outdoor sand-pit or any other messy outdoor play (wipes/gels not acceptable);
- Before and after cooking (wipes only acceptable afterwards, not before);
- After touching/playing with anything which might carry germs e.g.: playing with or feeding animals/pets; dealing with cuts, scrapes, vomit or other bodily fluids; touching bins; cleaning up spills on the floor; wiping noses (gels/wipes not acceptable except after wiping noses, or on occasions where access to a sink is particularly difficult - see general guidance on hand-washing);

- Most general guidance on hand-washing also suggests that hands should be washed after coughing or sneezing. While this procedure should be in place, it would be very difficult for staff to ensure children wash their hands after every sneeze or cough, so observers should not be overly zealous when assessing this. Encouraging use of tissues when coughing or sneezing is good practice;
- When adults are applying suncream to children, hands should be washed between different types of creams. If a child applies their own cream, they should wash their hands.

Contrary to ECERS/ITERS, we would not necessarily expect all hands to be washed on arrival, after 'clean' activities outdoors, or before or after water play.

### 3.4 (*procedures to minimize contagious diseases*)

We do not expect staff to have TB tests every 2 years, or to ensure that children have immunizations. However, we suggest asking:

- Whether there is a policy/ guidelines relating to contagious diseases (e.g. exclusion periods);
- Whether the procedures for children who are ill or infectious are discussed with parents.

Give credit if both of these are in place.

## SECTION 3: MEALS AND SNACK SCHEDULE AND NUTRITIONAL CONTENT

### Item 10: Meals and snacks

#### 1.1/3.1 (*inappropriate/appropriate schedule*)

We suggest using the definition of 'appropriate' used in ECERS (All About ECERS p.89), i.e. that children should be given nutritious food every 2 to 3 hours:

- Session of up to 4 hours = 1 meal/snack
- 4-6 hours = 1 meal
- 6-12 hours = 1 meal and 2 snacks or 2 meals and 1 snack.

In general, if children receive food according to these guidelines, this is acceptable. However we would also expect that:

- There should be some flexibility according to individual needs. If any child shows obvious signs of distress (e.g. through hunger) then score down.
- Observers should score down if children are refused food (e.g. told that the snack bar has closed and they should have come earlier). As in the ECERS guidelines, we would consider that it is fine for children to be asked to wait for a short time, e.g. 15 min until lunch time.
- If children have to wait for food, for example due to poor organisation, mark this in Item 34 Schedule (5.4). If children do not appear distressed by the wait then do not score this down as an 'inappropriate schedule' in Item 10. However, if it causes obvious distress or the result is that children are hungry, then score 'yes' to 1.1 and 'no' to 3.1.
- If snack bars are offered, children should have a reasonable chance of accessing the food. For example, if the opening of the snack bar is not announced and very few children access it (and so have food less often than is suggested in the guidelines above), then score down under indicators 1.1 and 3.1. Staff should be aware of which children have been offered (and accessed) the snack and which children have not. Do not score down if some children decide not to have snack because they are not hungry (but could clearly have done so if they wanted to and were aware of the possibility).

- ECERS (All About ECERS p.90) suggests that children should have access to water or be given water on request, in order to give credit at 1.1/3.1. EYFS states that fresh drinking water must be *easily available* at all times. We suggest the following guidelines: if water is visible and children are given a drink when they request it then give credit at 1.1 and 3.1; but in order to give credit at 5.3 children should have free access to water.

#### *1.2/3.2 (nutritional content of meals)*

ECERS uses the USDA (US Department of Agriculture) guidelines to determine whether meals and snacks are of adequate nutritional content. The guidelines seem reasonable (and fit well with UK-based guidance such as the School Food Trust guidelines) but are rather detailed. We suggest using a simplified version of the USDA guidelines to determine minimum nutritional adequacy during an audit/observation, using the following 4 categories:

- Milk (or other calcium product);
- Fruit/vegetables/fruit juice;
- Grains/bread/starch (incl. cereal/pasta/noodles/rice/potatoes);
- Meat/alternative protein (incl. fish, cheese, soy, yogurt, nuts, pulses, egg).

So as a general rule:

- In sessional provision (with just a snack time), snacks should contain two of the above components (as suggested in ECERS);
- If children stay for a half day including a snack and a main meal, then children should be offered at least one serving/portion from each category during their time at the setting;
- In a full day care setting where children stay all day and receive two main meals (e.g. lunch and tea) plus one or more snacks, they should receive two portions or servings from each of the four categories over the course of the day.

ECERS suggests that the same nutritional standards should still apply, even when parents provide food (All About ECERS p.90) and that the food parents supply should be supplemented by the setting if the children's nutritional needs are not being met. While this is obviously the ideal in terms of ensuring children receive a balanced diet, it is not a common expectation in the UK. We suggest using the EYFS guidance, i.e. that providers inform parents about what food can be stored safely and about appropriate food content. If inappropriate packed lunch contents are observed, then the auditor should ask whether the staff talk to parents about food nutrition. It should be clear that the setting promotes healthy eating. If staff show an awareness of this issue and have a strategy in place, then do not score down on the basis of one or two children with an inappropriate meal. However, settings should have some provision for dealing with a child who has not been provided with any food.

## **SECTION 4: SAFETY PRACTICES**

### **Item 7: Space for gross motor play**

#### *1.2, 3.2*

ECERS provides very detailed guidance on safety of the outdoor area, and the elements which should be checked (see All About ECERS p.62-63, or the US ECERS website). We suggest that observers do not necessarily measure all fall zones, safety surface depths, distances to the floor from the bottom of slides (etc) systematically. However, observers should check that all these aspects look adequately safe.

## Item 14: Safety practices

### 3.3 Essentials needed to handle emergencies

This indicator is obviously not tailored exactly to our UK requirements, since the ECERS is used internationally. For example, the following are suggested in the ECERS guidance (ECERS manual and All About ECERS p.140):

- **Telephone available** (on-site and accessible but not necessarily in room).
- **Emergency numbers** (i.e. who to contact in an emergency) posted so they can be easily seen by staff, parents, supply staff etc.
- **Contingency arrangements for staff absences and emergencies**
- Well stocked **first aid kit** with appropriate content easily accessible.
- **Transport** readily available to transport an injured child for medical treatment.
- **Written emergency procedures**
- **Appropriate fire precautions e.g.**, fire alarm, smoke detector, fire extinguisher, fire blanket; fire and evacuation procedure.
- **Information about special medical needs or food allergies.**

There are a number of more specific requirements given in the EYFS guidance. For example:

- In relation to fire precautions, EYFS states that fire exits should be clearly identifiable, free from obstructions and easily opened from the inside, and that regular evacuation drills should be carried out (and details recorded in a fire log book of any problems encountered and how they were resolved).
- Emergency contact details of parents and carers.
- Information about who has legal contact with the child and who has parental responsibility.
- Advance written permission from parents to the seeking of emergency medical treatment.
- At least one member of staff with current paediatric first aid on the premises at all times when children are present and on outings.
- Record of accident and first aid treatment kept, and a system for informing parents of injuries sustained or first aid given.
- Providers should take essential records and equipment on outings, e.g. telephone numbers for parents, first aid kit, mobile phone.
- Policies/procedures relating to safeguarding children, such as missing child policy.

Observers will not have time during an ECERS observation to check that all of these requirements are in place, and the ECERS is clear that the list is not exhaustive (All About ECERS p.139). We suggest checking and listing visible evidence (e.g., fire procedure posted, fire equipment and exits, first aid kit, emergency numbers posted, phone available) and also asking a selection of questions during the interview to establish whether the setting has planned for emergencies. However it is not feasible to check all of the items on the list and the ECERS should not be considered to be a comprehensive and complete assessment of emergency procedures. Scoring yes to this indicator will not necessarily mean that all EYFS requirements are met. Settings should use the EYFS as specific guidance in this regard.

*(NB: in the ITERS Safety Practices item, the list of indoor safety hazards specifies that changing mats should have a lip of at least 6 inches to stop young children falling off the table. Although we would not require observers to check that the lip is 6 inches, there should be some arrangement/barrier/lip which stops children - particularly babies - rolling off the changing mat.)*

## SECTION 5: SCORING INTERACTION

For several of the ECERS items which relate to interactions, we are given specific guidance on the number of times a particular behaviour needs to be observed to give credit. For example, to give credit

for Item 18 (5.3), two examples of staff adding information to expand on ideas presented by the children must be observed. While this helps us to be consistent, it is important that we do not feel constrained by these guidelines (e.g. ‘forced’ into giving credit where we do not feel that practice is of a reasonable standard because the required number of examples were seen). For example, two instances might be seen very early on during an observation and then none seen for the rest of the observation. In this case, the interaction could not be considered ‘usual practice’. The observer should not feel that they are having to listen hard to gather the necessary number of examples.

We suggest considering the ‘number of times observed’ guidance as minimum guidelines. In fact, since the guidance usually states that ‘*at least*’ x instances should be observed then this approach works quite well. This means it is possible to not give credit for a particular indicator – even where the required examples have been seen – if the observer feels the practice is not ‘usual’.

However, it also important to give credit where credit is due and not be overly strict when scoring interactions. If a requirement is being met then credit should be given even where there is still room for improvement. For example, it may be apparent that some staff interaction is of a higher quality than others. ECERS rates interactions in a ‘global’ way, and so the scoring of interactions items relates more to whether children’s need are being met – rather than to whether all staff members are of an equal standard. It might be, for example, that in a team of four staff members, two are very skilled at asking open-ended questions while the other two are less skilled. Since ECERS rates in global way, if the observer felt that - on balance - the children’s needs were being met by those two staff members (i.e. all children had a reasonable chance of accessing that experience regularly) then credit can be given even though all staff are not at the same level. In fact, this represents a fairly ‘real life’ scenario. If there is disparity between staff members, this can be raised during discussion/feedback.

## **SECTION 6: OTHER MISC ITEMS**

### **Item 3: Furnishings for relaxation and comfort (7.2)**

We suggest relaxing the requirements for ‘many soft toys’ (indicator 7.2). Observers should score based on their overall impression of whether the soft toy provision meets the needs of the children (taking into account their age). For example, ten soft toys might be appropriate for a group of ten 3 year olds, and also appropriate for a group of 30 4 ½ year olds.

### **Item 15: Books and pictures (5.1)**

In order to give credit for a ‘wide selection of books’ (indicator 5.1), examples of books showing different races and cultures are needed. The ECERS-R scoresheet combines these into one category (races/cultures), while the All About ECERS (p.150) lists this category as ‘different races and cultures’. We suggest only giving credit at 5.1 if there are at least 2 examples of books representing diversity in race and 2 representing different cultures/languages. Some examples representing different abilities are also required by ECERS. We suggest that at least one example should represent a disability other than visual impairment in order to give credit at 5.1.

### **Item 27: Use of TV/Video/Computer**

All technology should be included here (e.g. whiteboards, digital cameras) not just PCs and TV/video. Score the item n/a if none are used (in future we may consider altering this to score 1 if none are used).

### **Item 43: Opportunities for Professional Growth (7.3)**

Score 7.3 as n/a

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***References:***

*The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R):  
Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998)*

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Cryer, Harms and Riley (2003)*

*The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)  
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