

Dear colleagues and friends,

75 years ago, in late September 1947, the first students entered the doors of the newly established school for early childhood education, today known as Queen Maud university college.

This year we are celebrating the thousands of early childhood teachers educated, we are celebrating the important work they, and the staff at QMUC, have done through 75 years, and most of all, we honor the importance their commitment and competence has had for children's well-being, development and childhood, for families and society through 75 years.

In this context, it's also important for us to celebrate you, our international partners, and our close collaboration, knowledge development and sharing through many years. It's with great pleasure and honor that I welcome you to this conference and our anniversary.

So, why are international collaborations so important for us?

QMUCs vision and motto is **For a Better Childhood**, and educating competent, caring, and dedicated early childhood teachers is still the college's main task. We aim to be a leading actor nationally and to be internationally recognized within the field of early childhood education and care, and we want to increase our global reach. To achieve our goals, we strive for high quality in research and teaching.

I would argue that a good international cooperation is a prerequisite for us to achieve our goals and vision. Neither our research nor our education and teaching will be in the forefront without international collaboration and, also important, some competition.

In addition to the fact that international cooperation is important in general to ensure high quality in research and teaching, I would like to point out some areas in particular that make it crucial for us to cooperate widely and globally:

In Norway the kindergarten is a part of the education system and 9 out of 10 children attend kindergartens, the government's goal is 10 out of 10. Thus, the kindergartens are essential for children's well-being, learning and development. At the same time, the society has changed and become much more multicultural and diverse.

Due to these demographic changes, our kindergartens and the local and national government need to increase the diversity among staff and to expand their knowledge and experience of different cultures and their views on children and childhood. QMUCs role is to contribute with high quality research, innovations, and high-quality education.

To facilitate this, we need international collaboration within research, education, and teaching **where diverse cultural perspectives are incorporated**.

To gain intercultural knowledge and understanding, communication skills, and global awareness, we also need **international learning environments** for both students and staff.

To achieve both, we need international partners and collaboration across continents – we need you.

Another aspect I would like to mention in particular is the global consideration.

We all have a responsibility to contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and as a higher education institution within early childhood education and care, we can contribute to several of the 17 goals by working for the best interests of children.

For us to be able to contribute as much as possible, we need you.

*Together we'll be able to create good international learning environments and teaching, we will contribute with knowledge, quality, and capacity within the field of early childhood education and care. Together we'll challenge the status quo of the field - for a Better Childhood for ALL children.*

Dear colleagues, it is indeed an honor for me to welcome you to our international conference:

Early childhood education and care in the 21. century – what's next?

Welcome! Thank you for listening