

## **REPORT**

### ***INFORMAL CONSULTION OF ECEC MINISTRIES AND NATIONAL STATISTICIANS***

### ***CONCERNING DATA COLLECTION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES***

### ***WITHIN THE INES FRAMEWORK***

***PARIS, 14-15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2002***

***Summary:*** In 1998, the OECD Education Committee set as a goal for the OECD review of early childhood policy the identification of the most relevant types of data and instruments to be developed in support of ECEC policy-making. This work should eventually contribute to the INES (Indicators of Education Systems) project, and move the early childhood field toward shared objectives, terminology and analyses at international level. To further advance this work, the Secretariat invited statisticians and early childhood experts from a small group of countries to an informal consultation in Paris. Four elements of ECEC systems were proposed for examination: access/equity; quality; financing and outcomes. The results of the consultation are encouraging. A common core of international data collection may now be proposed for review to the INES Technical Group in three of the four areas proposed: viz. access/equity; quality indicators and financing.

## **I. Background**

In March 1998, the Education Committee authorised the secretariat to initiate a series of Thematic Reviews in early childhood policy in requesting OECD countries. Among the goals of the review were:

- *To support policy-making and planning in early childhood ministries in the OECD countries;*
- *To contribute to the INES (Indicators of Education Systems) project by identifying the types of data and instruments to be developed in support of ECEC information collection, policy-making, research, monitoring and evaluation.*

One of the conclusions reached by the review was the need to improve significantly data collection and analysis in the early childhood field, if realistic policies were to be pursued, and the benefits of quality programmes made available to children in need of educational support. With this in mind, the sponsoring Education and Training division renewed contact with the Indicators and Analysis Division, and the INES SMG. At the INES Technical Group meeting in Québec, 13-15 May 2002, proposals were made that, as a first step, a small group of committed countries should work together on the collection and comparability of data in the early childhood field, in preparation for an eventual taking in charge of the project by the SMG. These countries would identify four of five aspects of ECEC policy-making where it would be possible to make data analysis more relevant and effective without adding excessively to costs. As part of a long-term strategy, the possibility was evoked of thinking in terms of an ISCED "Minus 0" level that would include children under three.

In line with these suggestions, the secretariat discussed the issue with the ECEC national co-ordinators at a meeting in Oslo in June 2002. Several countries expressed interest in improving present data collection and analysis, and a desire to press ahead with this work. Because of their interest, the Education and Training Division proposed, with the support of the Statistics and Indicators Division, to organise an ECEC data consultation meeting on 14-15 October 2002 at OECD Headquarters. In addition to EUROSTAT which sent a delegate, ministries in nine countries were represented: Belgium (both Communities), Canada, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States. From several of these countries, representatives from national statistics offices, from education ministries and the various Children/Family/Health/ Social Affairs ministries that are responsible for young children were present. In all, the meeting was attended by more than twenty delegates over the two days.

## **II. Objectives of the consultation**

The purpose of the consultation was to bring policy makers and statistical experts together to decide an agenda for early childhood data collection that is feasible and yet adequate to support early childhood policymaking. In most OECD countries, initiatives are under way to improve data collection in the field, a move that is impeded in several countries by the non-regulation of the sector and the extent of private services. Yet, scope exists to share experience and good practice more widely, both improving measurement efforts, and enhancing international comparability.

Against that background, the objectives of the consultation were:

- To take note of the efforts of a broad range of countries to improve their data collection in the early childhood field across four selected indicators;

- To share good practice and to identify the scope for convergence of measurement instruments;
- To identify suitable instruments which are being, or could be used, to compare early childhood services across countries;
- To seek agreement on next steps in expanding and harmonising data collection in the early childhood field.

### **III. Documentation provided for the consultation**

Several expert papers were provided by the Secretariat in advance to participants, among which:

- *Developing Comparable Indicators in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Rostgaard, T., Danish National Institute of Social Research, 2000
- *Data needs in early childhood education and care*, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the INES Technical Group, Québec, 13-15 may 2002

In addition, during the consultation, several PowerPoint presentations were made by the Indicators and Analysis Division, showing the framework of data collection used for pre-primary education, within the INES framework. These presentations can be found in the Annex. The Swedish delegation also supplied the consultation with an outline of the fields - including access/equity, quality and financing - that special surveys and annual statistics cover in Sweden. The USA also provided literature on their new Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) focussed on the Kindergarten Class (essentially 5-6 year olds) of 1998-99. The purpose of the study will be to increase understanding of the factors that affect success in school, and to help parents, teachers, schools and communities develop teaching practices and environments that serve children better.

### **IV. Consultation format and proceedings**

The meeting was welcomed by Abrar Hasan, head of Education and Training, and was chaired throughout by Jean-Luc Heller, assisted by Claire Shewbridge and John Bennett for the various presentations and discussions. The secretariat proposed that during the two-day consultation, the following four themes should be discussed, devoting a half-day to each:

- Access and equity;
- Quality indicators, including staffing;
- Data on ECEC financing;
- Outcomes and measures

To facilitate discussion, the secretariat prepared a first analysis of these themes. For each theme, the secretariat informed the meeting concerning: What type of data is useful for policy makers? What data is already available in the Secretariat or within the OECD countries, both at administrative and survey levels? What is the quality of this data? How can the volume and quality of data be improved? Feedback and

information were provided by the country representatives for each theme chosen, a summary of which can be found in Section 5 below: Consultation Outcomes

Among the general issues raised were:

- The rationale for collecting international comparable data in the ECEC field
- The needs to harmonise terminology, definitions and measurement instruments so as to improve international comparability. The context-dependence of measurement instruments is a real challenge, particularly in the early childhood field where different traditions and a plurality of objectives for these services are a feature.
- The need to maintain flexibility: While the instruments and definitions to be used should ensure comparability, they should provide also for flexibility in national measurement programmes, taking account of local needs and requirements
- An exploration of some of the existing internationally comparable data on early childhood systems, found on various household and labour force surveys, or collected from individual countries during the reviews.

## **V. Consultation outcomes**

### ***1. First theme: Access and Equity***

#### *The current UOE data collection*

The existing joint UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT (UOE) international data collection is already a rich source of data for Early Childhood Education. It uses the ISCED-97 classification of educational programmes, that is designed to measure participation in and financing of publicly or privately managed and/or funded education. The current pre-primary definition states that this level of programme should “meet the educational needs of children at least 3 years of age”.

On the UOE questionnaire there is an option to report enrolments of children under 3 years of age (ENRL1, column 4 – see Annex Table 1). This is to capture children aged two or two-and-a-half years who attend “educational” programmes that are deemed to meet the educational needs of children aged 3 years. However, educational programmes that are primarily designed to serve children aged two years or less must not be counted in the UOE data collection. There is therefore a “gap” in the data by single year of age for children under 3 years.

There is, also, a mechanism for reporting those children enrolled in “centre-based early childhood programmes that do not meet the educational content criteria specified for ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 in ISCED-97. This would include publicly sponsored day-care programmes that do not have an educational curriculum.” (UOE data collection sheet ENRL1, column 5). Enrolments in such programmes can be reported for the age group “under 3 years” and then for each single year of age from the age of 3 years.

In the discussion that followed, it emerged that all countries present would be able to provide data by single year of age for children under 3 years.

*Possible supplementary data collection (see Annex Table 2)*

To better cover ECEC data needs, the countries present deemed that it is probably realistic to collect internationally comparable data on:

- The percentage of children in all centre-based services, by single year of age 0 to 6 years
- The percentage of children in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services, by single year of age 0 to 6 years
- The percentage of children in publicly funded/regulated family day care, by single year of age 0 to 6 years

Further, the disaggregation of access - at least in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services - by special educational needs background as classified according to the OECD framework (see Annex Table 3 and its three broad categories) may be possible in many countries. Such disaggregation is relevant in the early childhood field, as the evidence shows that children in need of reinforced educational support benefit greatly from quality early childhood programmes.

Data could also be provided on the intensity of participation (duration in months per year, and hours per week) for children by single year of age in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services

In addition to basic demographic data, additional background data could also be collected to help estimate the potential demand for ECEC services, e.g.

- Number of households with children age 6 years and under, by working status of parent(s)
- Length of parental leave (maternity/paternity)
- Whether parental leave is paid/unpaid
- The percentage of uptake of parental leave

## **2. Second Theme: Quality**

*The current UOE data collection*

Internationally comparable data are collected via the existing joint UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT (UOE) international data collection for *teaching staff* at both the pre-primary and primary levels of education. Also, enrolment data adjusted to match the personnel data are collected to calculate a *student/teacher* ratio.

Data for **classroom teachers** reported as Full-time equivalents (sheet PERS1 row A4) are used to calculate a student/teacher ratio (see Annex Table 4). The ISCED-97 classification defines **classroom teachers** as “professional personnel involved in direct student instruction”. This would include classroom teachers, special education teachers, and other teachers who work with students as a whole class, in small groups or one-on-one. While the phrase "direct student instruction" is not the most appropriate to describe ECEC process, the term may be used if it is understood that it covers also the typical support to learning work of the early childhood professional.

Data are also collected for **teacher aides**, that is “non-professional personnel who support teachers in providing instruction to students”. This would include teacher’s aides and other paraprofessional personnel employed full-time or part-time in the education system. It excludes student teachers or other non-paid personnel. These personnel are not included in the calculation of the student/teacher ratio. Again, although early childhood pedagogical experts would have some difficulty with the definition - and even the title "teacher aide" or with the decision not to include them (when trained) in the child/staff ratio - the important point to retain is that the role of this personnel is understood to include learning support and care provision for young children.

*Possible supplementary data collection (see Annex Table 6)*

To better cover ECEC data needs countries deemed it realistic to calculate in a comparative way across countries child/ (contact) staff ratios. "**Contact staff**" would encompass the current ISCED-97 classification for both instructional personnel categories (Classroom teachers and Teacher aides).

- Child/ (contact) staff ratios in public pre-school services (children aged 0 to 6 years)
- Child/ (contact) staff ratios in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services (children 0 to 6 years)

Focusing on staff in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services, the following data could be collected on the level of staff qualifications:

- Initial training requirements for contact staff
- Level of specific training for directors
- Level of ongoing professional development (days per year)
- Average gross annual salary for full-time contact staff

Information exist for initial training requirements for contact staff in the publication “Starting Strong” (See Annex Table 5).

### **3. Third Theme: Financing**

*The current UOE data collection*

Internationally comparable data are collected via the existing joint UNESCO/OECD/EUROSTAT (UOE) international data collection for financing at both the pre-primary and primary levels of education. Also, enrolment data adjusted to match the finance data are collected to calculate an *expenditure on educational institutions per student* ratio.

With the current data collection we are able to calculate:

- Expenditure on educational institutions per child enrolled for both primary and pre-primary education (from the age of 3 years and above)

- Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP for both primary and pre-primary education
- Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions for both primary and pre-primary education

*Possible supplementary data collection (see Annex Table 7)*

To better cover ECEC data needs, the delegates thought it realistic to collect internationally comparable financial data for:

- Public investment in other centre-based ECEC services not currently captured in the ISCED-97 pre-primary definition, i.e. services that are not predominantly educational, and/or services aimed primarily at children under 3 years of age;
- Financial support to children with special needs background in publicly funded/regulated centre-based services, by OECD Special needs Category A/B and Category C (see Annex);
- Average expenditure per attendance hour in the following types of service: crèches; family daycare; other centre-based services for children below 3 years of age; pre-primary education for children three years or over.

Also, data should be available to detail the cost to families with children in publicly financed centre-based services:

- Cost per child in publicly financed centre-based services (by hour) for low income families, middle income families and high income families.
- Percentage of children in publicly financed centre-based services receiving subsidised services.

#### **4. Theme Four: Outcomes and measures**

It seems that little comparative work has been undertaken at an international level on outcomes for young children. The feeling of the meeting was that in the time given for the discussion, little progress could be made, as the goals - and hence the outcomes - set by countries for their early childhood services differ widely. In view of the progress already agreed for the other themes, the Secretariat accepted this position.

## **V. Follow-up**

### ***Further work on the themes discussed***

- It was suggested that the January 2003 workshops in the Netherlands provides a further opportunity to explore in depth the theme of *Financing*, with a view to clarifying how comparable international data on financing might be undertaken;

- Likewise, the theme of *Outcomes and measures* needs further work within the early childhood group before its submission to the statistical group. With this in mind, the ECEC Project will explore within the

ongoing series of early childhood workshops for the national co-ordinators, whether some preliminary work could be undertaken on this theme.

### ***Dissemination***

This report will be disseminated to the country representatives present at the data consultation. It will also be distributed to all the countries involved in the second round of ECEC reviews and knowledge base activities.

### ***Institutional Follow-up***

During the INES Technical Group meeting in Australia 9-11th December, 2002, the next steps for launching a supplementary data collection will be discussed. This report will serve as a sound basis to identify key areas where:

1. The existing ISCED-97 definitions do not meet data needs for ECEC;
2. Further definitional work must be done to allow expanded international data collection;
3. An internationally comparable data collection may be possible.

Finally, although the issue was not put to the meeting, the suggestion was made in the concluding remarks to keep this group together for consultation purposes, and to advance the ECEC data collection agenda in a manner that could take into account the different approaches of all the OECD countries.