



OECD Project Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care

WHY IS QUALITY IN ECEC A POLICY PRIORITY?

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been a growing priority in many countries. It can make an important contribution to a wide range of social, economic and educational goals, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning for all, and promoting more equitable outcomes and increased intergenerational mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the quality of ECEC.

THE OECD CAN HELP COUNTRIES RAISE THE QUALITY OF ECEC

Earlier OECD work on ECEC already produced a set of policy orientations (*Starting Strong I & II*). These include:

- Governance, co-ordination and management
 - Take a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation
 - Provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services
- Funding
 - Provide substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure
 - Base public funding on achieving quality pedagogical goals
- Research, evaluation, monitoring and data collection
 - Set up a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation
 - Place systematic attention to monitoring and data collection
- Teachers
 - Improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff
- Organisation, curriculum and pedagogy
 - Develop broad guidelines and curricular standards with stakeholders for all ECEC services
 - Encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services
 - Implement a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance

These are all directly, or indirectly, related to encouraging quality. The challenge is to move forward by focussing on how countries can successfully put in place policies that would raise quality in ECEC.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This project will be carried out by the Directorate for Education and will combine international comparative analysis and country-specific policy dialogues. It will also draw on relevant work carried out in the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.

INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE AND POLICY TOOL BOX

The first phase will strengthen the knowledge base on quality in ECEC, building on existing work and research on quality. The knowledge base will include most relevant policy options that will encourage quality and factors that affect quality.

The second phase will transform the knowledge base into a box of practical policy tools for policy makers to help them identify the key challenges, priorities and policy options for improving quality.

The knowledge base and the policy tool box are designed to engage and provide value for all countries, whether or not they decide to undertake a policy dialogue in their country.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC POLICY DIALOGUES

In this phase, the OECD will use the policy tool box to work with individual countries for finding the best policy options for encouraging quality, taking into account the country's present situation and its priorities, and getting the buy-in necessary for successful implementation.

The policy dialogues will be based around one or more forums that the country and the OECD will organise to bring together key stakeholders. The purpose of these forums may vary depending on the different stages of policy development in the country: *e.g.* building consensus on the policy goals and objectives, discussing priorities, developing concrete action plans and informing policy with international statistics and research. In any case, the objective of the policy dialogue is to identify realistic actions that can be taken.

Depending on the country, the policy dialogue may take place at a national or state level. After the forum(s), the OECD would prepare a summary report and concise, action-oriented policy plan. It can be an agreement of priorities, summary of points of agreement and differences, and/or an action plan for implementation.

If countries wish, the OECD can design a follow-up to assess progress on implementing policy plans after an agreed period of time.

ROUNDTABLE AND SYNTHESIS

After a round of country-specific policy dialogues, the OECD would hold a roundtable discussion among countries to exchange country experience and draw out general lessons that would benefit all countries. These could be synthesised into a short publication.

OUTPUTS

The project will produce a set of outputs designed to assist policy making, including:

- The Policy Tool Box for analysing policy options for encouraging quality
- Country Policy Dialogues and Summary Reports of the Forum(s)
- A round table discussion and synthesis report drawing out lessons from the policy dialogues

THE RESOURCES

This project is designed to be financed by a mix of general OECD resources and voluntary contributions.

- Strengthening the knowledge base, developing the policy tool box and organising the roundtable are estimated to cost 400 000 EUR, although the extent of the work actually undertaken depends on voluntary contributions received. To this end, countries are encouraged to support this work through a voluntary contribution of 10 000 EUR each or *in-kind* contributions.
- Policy dialogues would be fully funded by the countries holding them. Costs will depend on the number of policy forums organised in the country, starting at a cost of 50 000 EUR for one policy forum, not including OECD travel costs.

FURTHER READING AND WHO TO CONTACT

Starting Strong (OECD, 2001) and *Starting Strong II* (OECD 2006)

www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood

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