

# **OECD Country Note**

## *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*

*in the*

*Republic of Korea*

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*The views expressed in the document are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Republic of Korea, the OECD or its Member countries.*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Purposes of the OECD Thematic Review

1. This *Country Note* for the Republic of Korea is an output of the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*, a project launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998. The impetus for the project came from the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers assigned a high priority to the goal of improving access and quality in early childhood education, in partnership with families, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). The goal is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.

2. The Republic of Korea is one of nine countries participating in phase two of the review between 2002 and 2004. During the first phase (1998-2000), twelve countries were reviewed resulting in the writing of separate *Country Notes* and a book publication providing a synopsis of developments across the countries reviewed (see *Starting Strong*, OECD, 2001a). Other countries in phase two of the review are Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Mexico. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches toward the education and care of young children. Some countries have undergone a full review and others have requested a focused review in certain key areas.

3. The scope of the national reviews covers children from birth to compulsory school age, including the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the review has adopted a broad, holistic approach to the study of early childhood policy and provision. Consideration has been given to the roles of families and communities on children's early learning and development. In particular, the review investigated concerns about *quality*, *access* and *equity* with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulations; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; and funding and financing.

4. As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team made up of international experts, who come to undertake an intensive case study visit. After each country visit, a *Country Note* is written that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. This report for the Republic of Korea will be an important input into a final OECD Comparative Report, which will provide a review and analysis of ECEC (early childhood education and care) policy in the nine countries participating in the review as well as the twelve engaged in the phase one review. A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998a).

### The Republic of Korea's participation in the review

5. The Republic of Korea was the fifteenth country to be visited in the overall Review. Prior to the visit, researchers coordinated by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) (The *Korean Background Report*, 2003) prepared a Background Report on ECEC policy in the Republic of Korea. Guided by a common framework accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important

output of the review process, because they provide a state-of-the-art overview and analysis of policy and provision in participating countries. Following authorisation by the issuing countries, they are placed with the *Country Notes* on the OECD website.

6. The *Korean Background Report* is well compiled and rich in information. The report contains numerous useful statistics that describe social context and the current state of early education and care. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of an OECD Secretariat member and four experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (Appendix I) visited the Republic of Korea from 18 to 28 May, 2003. The ten-day visit was co-ordinated by the Korean Educational Development Institute. In the course of the visit, the team interviewed many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice and had the opportunity to observe several examples of early childhood programmes for 0-6 year olds in Korea (Appendix III).

### **Structure of the report**

7. The *Country Note* presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in the Republic of Korea. It draws upon information provided in the *Korean Background Report*, formal and informal discussions, the observations of the review team, and materials collected during and after the visit. In addition to the present introduction which forms Chapter 1, the structure of the report is as follows:

Chapter 2: *Context of ECEC in the Republic of Korea*. The evolution of ECEC in the Republic of Korea is described and also the demographic, labour market and social policy contexts. In addition, we select for comment some traditional elements of Korean society and education to give the reader some understanding of the contextual background for policy-making for children.

Chapter 3: *Overview of current ECEC policy and provision in the Republic of Korea*. The reader will find here a summary of information provided in the *Background Report* of the Republic of Korea, supplemented by data from other sources. Because of the brief nature of the overview, it has been possible to describe only the broad features of the system.

Chapter 4: *Issues relating to policy and practice* outlines the more important issues related to policy and practice in ECEC that were identified by the reviewers in the course of studying the Korean situation. Five issues were chosen for comment: (1) Contextual issues including views of children and families and public funding; (2) System co-ordination and collaboration; (3) Access and equity; (4) Quality assurance and inspection; and (5) Research focus and direction.

Chapter 5: *Conclusions*. This concluding chapter provides some brief remarks and suggestions that policy makers in the Republic of Korea may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision.

### **Acknowledgements**

8. Members of the review team would like to thank all those who participated in the review visit in Korea and gave generously of their expertise and time. We appreciated the hospitable, open and informative meetings that were held throughout the review process and the extensive documentation that each group provided. The site visits breathed life into policy and left us with numerous positive memories of places where staff, parents and children are turning possibilities into realities. We should like to express our very special thanks to the National Co-ordinator of the review, Dr. Jung Na and to her university colleagues, Dr. Mugyeong Moon who co-authored the *Korean Background Report* and accompanied us throughout the visit with Ms. Eun Hee Shim. They provided extensive background information, arranged our meetings and visits, cheerfully explained countless confusing details, and worked tirelessly to make our visit an extraordinary and successful experience for all of us.

9. Throughout the *Country Note*, the analyses and suggestions offered are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a review team—no matter how well briefed—in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. While all the members of the team are experienced as researchers and policy analysts in the field of ECEC, they are clearly influenced by their own cultural perspectives and histories. A short fieldwork period is limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. The survey method employed relies heavily, therefore, on cross-checking approaches and further feedback from experts in the Republic of Korea.

10. The facts and opinions expressed in the *Country Note* are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received every help from the ministries, and from researchers and practitioners in Korea, they have no part in any shortcomings, which this document may present. To mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the *Country Note* will be read in conjunction with the *Korean Background Report*, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

### **Terminology**

11. The term *Korean* is used in this report to denote the Republic of Korea.

12. Age definitions used in this report differ from traditional Korean usage. When the OECD refers to 3-6 year olds, the term encompasses children from their third birthday to their sixth birthday only, thereby excluding 6 year olds. Traditional Korean definitions of children's ages differ from those in Western culture in terms of the starting point. This traditional definition of age is common in Asian culture. When a Korean child is born the child is reported as aged one. Hence a child described in Korea as a four year old may in western terminology be aged three. It should be noted however that many Korean documents that have been translated into English language have already been adjusted for this difference in age construction. It is recommended that readers ask about the way age is defined in Korean translations if it is not made clear (see also below).

13. The two major types of early childhood provision in Korea are kindergarten and childcare centres. In addition, special schools serve young children with special needs over three years of age, and private academies called *hakwon* are also numerous. A description of these forms of provision, including special schools and *hakwon* is set out below:

*Kindergarten:* A school or centre for children from age three to six years, primarily engaged with the education of young children under the guidance of the Korean National Kindergarten Curriculum. Teachers in kindergartens generally have a two-year to four-year Bachelor of Early Childhood Education qualification. Depending on locality, kindergartens operate sessional (part-time) programmes, extended day and or long day programmes. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources (MOE) oversees administration of kindergartens.

*Child care.* These facilities, also known as Children's Houses, provide care for children under age six. The facilities are either publicly established and run by the government and local authorities, privately run by individuals or are work-based and run by corporations or companies for children of employees. Teachers in Children's Houses generally have a one or two-year college qualification, with many having a four-year university qualifications. Childcare centres are generally open for approximately 12 hours per day, six days per week. Other forms of child care facility include family day care *playrooms* set up in private homes to cater for between five and twenty infants and young children. Playrooms are open for similar hours to Children's Houses. The Ministry of Health and Welfare oversees administration of child care facilities, although the Korean government is engaged in a process of shifting this administration and responsibility to the Ministry of Gender Equality from the beginning of 2004.

*Hakwon*: Also known as "Learning Places". These facilities offer programmes for three year olds through to end of secondary school age. *Hakwons* are open for a minimum of 30 days per year, most being in operation for much of the year. In general, they provide curriculum experiences for young children in art, music, gymnastics, languages and mathematics. The teachers may have specialist subject qualifications. Participants often attend *hakwon* after attending a half-day kindergarten or school programme. In particular, children before entering elementary school tend to attend *hakwon* for full day. Although the ministry is supposed to be in charge of *hakwon* facilities, government supervision of curriculum and programme delivery is almost never undertaken in *hakwons*. They are wholly privatised businesses operating in the free market as education enterprises.

*Special school*: A school serving children with special needs from three years of age and upwards. There are nine national special schools in Korea, each providing specialist services for children with particular needs. In addition there are 136 special schools catering for severely handicapped students in kindergarten, elementary and secondary education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2003, p.47). In their undergraduate training programmes, teachers in special schools major in special education and receive a teacher's special education licence. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources (MOE) oversees administration of special schools.

14. The currency of Korea is the won. In October 2003: 10,000 won = 8.49 US Dollar (USD) or 7.335 Euro (EUR). Conversions used in this report correspond to the above values.

## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT OF ECEC IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

### Demography

15. The Republic of Korea comprises almost half of the Korean peninsula having a land area of 99,373sq km, spread north to south over some 500km. Given that 70% of the country is mountainous a high density population of some 46,000,000 resides primarily in urban environments, making a population density of 483/sq km almost twice that of the United Kingdom (243), some five times that of France (106) and 193 times that of Australia (2.5). Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is the political, economic and educational hub of the country, concentrating much of the wealth, industry and technology in this locality. This poses particular challenges for rural services provision.

16. Ethnically, the Korean people are of a single race and speak the Korean language. In the country as a whole, there is a dominant, primary culture and very little cultural or racial variation. Korean language and customs are uniform throughout the country. The Korean language is written using Hangeul script, a regular phonetic alphabet that is easy to learn and reproduce. Korean culture is drawn from combined influences of Shamanism, ancestor worship, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2003).

17. Korea has some 14.3% of its population aged less than nine years. However, like many western countries Korea appears to be beginning a transformation into an ageing or greying society, primarily because of a decreasing birth-rate and improved life expectancy (Korean National Statistical Office, 2002). In 2002, Korea's 1.17 birth-rate per woman is the lowest birth-rate among OECD countries. The authors attribute this result to the high personal cost of education in Korea, decreasing dependence by parents on their children's on-going support, the rising marriage age and increased economic participation by women in the labour market.

*According to a survey by the Korean National Statistical Office (2000), 72.5% of Koreans responded that the cost of education was a burden, with extracurricular work fees mentioned by 56.9%, followed by the high cost of tuition, mentioned by 37.9% being the primary and secondary reasons respectively for this burden. (The Korean Background Report, 2003, p.18-19).*

### Culture

18. Traditional Korean family life encompasses extended family groups, filial piety to parents, grandparents and ancestors, respect for teachers, loyalty to family and faithfulness to friends. Confucian decorum - structured around the enhancement of ethical-moral virtues, patriarchy, social hierarchy and obedience - dominated Korean life and thinking over centuries, and is still subtly subsumed in many forms of human relations (Story & Park, 2001; Kim, 1991; Tae, 1958). Hallmarks of effective governance were "order, stability and subordination" (OECD, 1998b, p.89). In Korean society, the notion of individual rights is considered to be relatively weak compared the emphasis placed on group responsibility and duty. Although rapid modernisation has weakened some of the traditional forms of behaviour and individuals may pursue their lives with less focus on social hierarchy and duty, a deep sense of these traditions is embedded in the culture and foundations of Korean child and family policy. "Changes in beliefs about filial duties, better ability of parents to care for themselves, and trends encouraging preparatory measures for the

later years of life" are reported by the *Korean Background Report* (2003, p.18-19) as already present and deemed to contribute to the decline in reproduction.

19. Traditionally Korean education is seen to begin in the prenatal period. The earliest years of a child's life are considered extremely important for the formation of later life habits:

*Traditional beliefs of early education – education in Korea was considered to start from the prenatal period.<sup>1</sup> That is, parents needed to educate their unborn child during pregnancy, considering an embryo as a human being. The essence of 'prenatal education' was that both mother and father are good in their words and deeds because parental deeds, words, and diets are thought to influence their unborn child....Koreans have included ten months of the prenatal period in calculating ages. In 'Korean age', a newborn child is considered to be already one year old, and becomes a two-year-old after his/her first birthday. There is a well known Korean saying 'Habits at three continue until eighty.' This old saying demonstrates that Koreans have long realized the importance of age three for the education of their children. Right up to the present day, Korean parents have remained concerned with forming their children's basic everyday life habits, and in providing early learning experiences as their children reach the age of three (Korean Background Report, 2003).*

20. The current National Kindergarten Curriculum emphasizes traditional values and culture, and these can form a focus in many kindergartens, e.g. many ECEC institutions in Korea make efforts to provide traditional foods for snacks and activities. These underlying dimensions of education and care in Korean centres can offer rich possibilities for finding distinctive ways forward corresponding to the cultural fabric of the country and its people. The review team noted also the great facility of Korean early childhood academics and professionals to relate curricula and pedagogical dimensions of ECEC to western sources such as Montessori, Pestalozzi, Piaget, Fröbel and Malaguzzi.

#### *The place of women in Korean society*

21. Traditional attitudes toward women, their role in society and their expected duties within the household, e.g. with regard to childcare and domestic chores, are still widespread. Steps have been taken to improve the situation of women through the creation of a Presidential Commission for Women's Affairs in 1998, which became a full-fledged Ministry for Gender Equality in 2001. The status of women in the paid workforce has improved, although there are still far too few women in executive positions. In 1980 the differential between male and female wages was "one of the largest among industrialised nations. Ten years later the average wage of women had increased from 43% to 55% of the average earnings for men" (OECD, 1998b, p.99).

22. A system of limited-allowance, parental leave for birthing and child-rearing (0-5 years) was incorporated into legislation with adjustments from 1987 to 2001. The take-up has been extremely low among women and negligible among men. Several reasons are advanced:

- Firstly, many employers are able to recruit women on a part-time or informal basis. Under this system, large groups of women work in the unregulated labour market, and for this reason, are not eligible for maternity or parental leave although they are in paid work;

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<sup>1</sup> Readers should be aware that in Korean society the prenatal period is often included when calculating a child's age. Thus a child reported as being two years old may in western terms be one. Apart from highlighting Korean societal views of the importance of prenatal and early years in a child's life this can place Korean child ages at odds with children's ages calculated in western terms. This report uses the western method of reporting age although documents sourced from Korea may vary on this method of reporting.

- Second, it is reported that many employers reject not only parental leave but also maternity leave and refuse to pay the agreed full salary for the first two months.
- Further, parental leave from work is lowly paid, and is depicted as out-of-step with the culture and conditions actually operating in the workplace. Thus, many workers believe that they cannot take leave without penalty to their future working careers.

Because the uptake has been so low, the government is working to change policies and conditions in an attempt to improve accessibility. From 2003, payments of 300,000/month (US\$255; €220) are made available although it appears that uptake will depend heavily on assurances from employers of reinstatement guarantees and security of work transfer.

### **Economic Context**

23. Korea's economic achievements since the 1950s are remarkable, transforming the country in one generation from a subsistence economy to an economic powerhouse. Essentially a mixed market economy, Korea's rapid growth faltered in 1997, and came under the short-term guidance of the International Monetary Fund. Today, Korea remains relatively strong in a period of sluggish world economic development.

24. It is argued that the large gains in Korean GNP need translation to increased quality of life and improvement in social welfare. Adelman (1997) notes that "housing, pollution, working conditions, safety net, the status of women and political participation, in particular are candidates for further improvements...(p.530). Because working hours are long and women's salaries are low, child care has also become an issue in relation to labour market flexibility and further economic success:

*The year 2002 showed a long average work week of 45.9 hours. The hours are longer, the levels of education are lower, and more hours of labour are required for women when considering work within the industrial and manufacturing sectors." (Korean Background Report, 2003)*

25. Despite these constraints, the move of women into the workforce seems destined to continue; "There is an increase both in the desire by males for a double income home as well as by women themselves for participation in the workforce" (*Korean Background Report, 2003, p.25*). The challenge facing Korean government, as it strives to expand early care and education facilities to meet growth demands, is to focus at the same time on qualitative improvements to the child care services and the working conditions of women with young children.

### **Political and Administrative Context**

26. Korea has a democratic government based upon separation of powers across executive, legislative and judicial domains. The President is elected to office and appoints a cabinet (executive) including prime minister, senior ministers and heads of government. The President's office, *The Blue House*, is the centre of power in South Korea. The Legislative Assembly comprises 273 members, the majority of whom are elected to office and the remaining seats are proportionally distributed among parties winning a set number of seats. (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1991). The judiciary is independent.

27. As a political and administrative imperative, education in Korea from the 1960s to late 1980s underwent a period of massive expansion, corresponding to the rapid economic growth of the country. Since then attention has progressively shifted towards issues of quality and the pursuit of qualitative rather than quantitative growth in education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2003). For most Koreans 12 years of education (6-18) is the norm although gaining entrance to a university drives

Koreans to place high priority on formal preparation at an early age. This, in turn, encourages an individual performance culture that influences early childhood contexts. (For further discussion on the Korean educational culture, see Chapter 4 below)

28. ECEC in Korea evolved as separate systems of “education” and “care,” with contrasting interpretations of the aim and purpose of these services and differing constructions of the child and its needs within the service. Kindergartens are the official education institutions for children aged three to five and are administered by the Early Childhood Education Division within the Ministry of Education (MOE). The sector is supported by the research activities of the Korean Educational Development Unit (KEDI).

29. Whereas “kindergarten” aims to provide an educational programme for young children before entry to elementary school “child care” derived from a child welfare agenda and in the past, has been more aligned with support of poor families and relief for women in the paid labour force. Safety and basic care were fundamental origins of child care programmes. Child care facilities have been administered by the Child care and Education Division within the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW). Since a childcare paradigm shift is taking place from selective childcare (which supports children from low-income families or with both parents working) to general childcare (which provides equal opportunities to every young children), and also public childcare system are to be established by governmental financial support, this area of government management is now to be re-located from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) to the Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE) in June 2004. Research on the sector is provided both by the Korean Institute of Health and Social Affairs (KISHA) and by the Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI).

30. Although separate kindergarten and child care administrations currently exist, Korea is at a crossroads in ECEC administration. Several major policy and provision initiatives are underway, propelled by joint and multi-group ministry committees. These initiatives are described separately in subsequent sections. Child care and kindergarten facilities currently provide varied programmes in terms of daily duration, focus and direction. Some programmes are similar across these two types of service despite their different origins.

31. In addition to (and sometimes instead of) kindergarten and child care programmes, approximately 500,000 Korean young children attend *hakwons* (private educational institutions). *Hakwons* define themselves as academic-focused institutions where children learn particular skills, often in the arts, mathematics, music and languages. Normally private institutions, *hakwons*, have no official status in the statistics or structure of education and care provision in Korea. They do not receive financial support from government (*Korean Background Report*, 2003).

### **Early Childhood Education**

32. Although the first private kindergarten was established almost a century ago in Korea, the first public kindergarten was established only in 1976 (*Korean Background Report*, 2003). Since the early 1980s, early childhood education has developed rapidly with some 8,300 public and private kindergartens centres being established by 2002. A recent MOE report, *Education in Korea* (2003), indicates that the 550,256 children attended Korean kindergartens in 2002, and enrol 26.9% of the range of kindergarten-aged children in Korea (p.35). However, “compared to the remarkable expansion in child care facilities, kindergarten facilities are at a standstill” (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.13).

33. A reason for this modest progress may be government’s conception of early education as being part of the private sphere, and not a public responsibility. At least, it can be seen that public policy promoted the development of kindergartens as a question primarily for private enterprise. In turn, the

private providers focused on the establishment of kindergartens in large urban centres, and in particular in middle-class areas where parents are able to pay for services. Faced with this reality, the Ministry of Education (MOE) began to establish public kindergartens primarily in the rural areas (OECD, 1998b, p.29). Although today, there are more public (50.8%) than private (49.2%) kindergartens, "72% of the classes, 79% of the teachers and 78% of the enrolled children fall within the private kindergarten sector" (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.30). Therefore kindergarten education in Korea is mainly dependent on private resources notwithstanding the *Presidential Commission on Education Reform* (PCER, 1997) suggesting... "kindergarten education should be supported by public funds as much as possible" (OECD 1998b, p.29).

34. Because of the relatively low number of public kindergarten places, the MOE has recently instituted policy to increase availability of kindergarten education. Two policy directions have resulted. The first, addressing costs for selected families under the project *Supporting Kindergarten Tuition for Children from Low-Income Families* (MOE, 2003, p.35), is targeted at increasing opportunity for poor families to send their children to kindergarten, and thus preserve *equitable opportunity for education* (p.35). The second is expansion of half-day provision in kindergartens to extended day provision in order to meet the demands of working parents.

35. In this context of cost and the need to expand opportunity for kindergarten education, free early childhood education was legislated in 1997 for 5 year-olds in the year before formal schooling. The *Korean Background Report* (2003) states that in 2002, some 550,000 3-5-year olds were enrolled in public and private kindergartens (p.36) out of an eligible enrolment of some 680,000 five-year olds (p.37) while in the same year 26,000 children from low income families received free-education benefits (p.70.)

36. Concurrently with implementing the free education for five-year olds, development of provision of full-day (more than 8 hours) and extended day (5 – 8 hours) kindergarten programmes for young children rather than the normal provision of a half-day programme has progressed. As noted below, only a minority of kindergartens offer half day programmes, but this policy direction has already begun to address some of the pressures faced by working parents in reconciling their work and family commitments.

### **Care for Young Children**

37. Child care facilities cater to children from birth to preschool, and the serviced is also offered children in the lower grades after school. Initial evidence of care facilities being established (1920s - 1970s) indicates their purpose was primarily as a form of relief for poor families. These facilities developed mainly under the auspices of child welfare, linked to the Child Welfare Act.

38. The movement of women into the paid labour market, particularly since the 1980s, greatly contributed to the rapid expansion of child care facilities. The Ministry of Labour initiated employer child care facilities through the Equal Employment Act (1987) and several administrative authorities implemented child care policies but there was little coherence across developments. Hence, women's organisations worked to integrate child care by proposing the passing of a Child Care Act (1991). This Act enabled "comprehensive child care service arrangements with a priority for children of working mothers with low income" (OECD, 1998b, p.29). Firms employing large numbers of women were required to establish at least one, on-site day care centre or subsidise child care expenses.

39. Strong government will and financial support for the development of child care facilities contributed to rapid expansion. In 2002, some 770,000 children attended child care services, the majority - 667,000 children (*Korean Background Report*, Table 2-8) – being catered for in private centres. Of these children, 87,000 5-year-olds from low income families received free, government subsidized child care. The Tax Exemption Act and the Income Tax Enforcement Decree (1991) enabled child care service

organisations to receive indirect fiscal support. Concurrently, the revised executive order of the Construction Act loosened restrictions on the construction of child care and other public-interest facilities that spurred child care service, [and] government has been also providing direct subsidies toward the construction and operation of facilities as well as for personnel expenses, including the cost of training (OECD, 1998b, p.29).

40. During this rapid expansion period the Ministry of Health and Welfare moved towards a "report system rather than a licensing system for running child care facilities" (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.14). It is clear that quantitative expansion took precedence over qualitative development in the 1990s with directions since that time moving towards issues of quality. More recently, a focus on integration of early education and child care services is making separate consideration of these areas problematic. The Office of Government Policy Coordination established in 1997 a Committee of Early Childhood Education Reform to connect the two domains. This has resulted in a 'Plan for Establishing Early Childhood Education into Institutionalised Public Education' being passed in the National Assembly in late 1997. The *Korean Background Report* (2003) notes that "kindergartens and child care facilities are becoming similar to each other, providing children with education and care in an integrated way" (p.15). In addition, when age and type of participation are taken into account, "children up to the age of four attend child care facilities more often, while five-year-olds tend to attend kindergartens more often" (p.39).

## CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

### Provision and access

41. ECEC services in Korea include both official and other institutions. Official kindergartens and child care facilities have formal recognition from the ministries, receive subsidies and are reported in the official statistics for this field. The private academies called *hakwons* (or learning places) have a more ambiguous status, and in reality, are not subject to government regulations concerning curriculum, supervision, and programme delivery. Although the National Assembly approved the educational function of *hakwons* in 2001, these institutions are not eligible for financial support from the government and cannot accept or use vouchers made available by government for free education for five-year olds (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.41). However, when data are available, this report will address *hakwon* provision as well as official kindergarten and child care.

42. Kindergartens and child care facilities are provided by national public and by private organisations. Table 1 below provides a summary of usage distributions.

**Table 1. Kindergarten and Child Care facilities**

Classification*	Number of facilities	Number of staff	0-2 year old	3 year old	4 year old	5 year old	Total enrolment
National public kindergarten	4,219 (14.27)	6,243	-	7,990 (3.0)	25,639 (6.9)	86,003 (18.6)	119,632
Private kindergarten	4,089 (13.8)	23,278	-	66,645 (24.9)	146,737 (39.6)	217,136 (47.1)	430,518
National public childcare centre	1,294 (4.38)	10,669	23,184 (13.1)	25,405 (9.5)	27,298 (7.3)	22,577 (4.9)	98,464
Private child care centre**	19,973 (67.5)	77,835	154,370 (86.9)	167,121 (62.6)	171,340 (46.2)	135,453 (29.4)	628,284
Total		118,025	177,554 (100)	267,161 (100.0)	371,014 (100.0)	461,169 (100.0)	1,276,898) all services

Source: Data in this table are drawn from the *Korean Background Report*, 2003, Tables 2.2 & 2.8, 2.17.

**Notes:**

\* National public/ private facilities are classified based on the founder identity.

\*\* Private childcare centres include legal corporations and workplace facilities run by public support. In terms of financial support, approximately 15% of private childcare centres are run by public support, and the rest of 85% are run by parental fees. (See *Korean Background Report*, Table R 2-10) In terms of the numbers of children enrolled in childcare facilities, about 32% of children are supported by the public fund, and 68% are supported by parental fees.

43. It is clear from this Table that ECEC provision in Korea is primarily private. Except for 5-year old children, over 80% of children enrolled are catered for in a private setting. Private settings average some 11+ children per staff member (adult) whereas the national public child care facilities average about 10 children per adult. These numbers seem high relative to other OECD countries, but the global figures do not reveal the reported staff to enrolled children ratio at a particular age level. Child-teacher ratios in child care facilities as set in the government regulations are 1:5 for children under two years, 1:7 for two year olds and 1:20 for children three years and above (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.75).

44. Comparisons of kindergarten and child care facilities were made by Na & Moon (2003) when addressing matters related to integrating policies and systems. Table 2 below is drawn from their work:

**Table 2. Comparison of Kindergartens and Childcare Systems**  
(Extract from Na & Moon, 2003, p.10.)

ASPECT	KINDERGARTENS	CHILDCARE FACILITIES
Legislation	Law for Elementary and Secondary Education Early Childhood Education Promotion Act	Child Care Act
Administrative auspices	Ministry of Education Local Education Authority Elementary Educational Division	Ministry of Health and Welfare Local Family Welfare Authority Family Welfare Division → Ministry of Gender Equality
Objectives	Educating young children and facilitating their mental and physical growth by providing appropriate environments	Caring and educating infants and young children whose parents are employed or ill, and promoting family welfare by supporting parental economic and social activities
Staff	Director, Associate Director, Teacher *2-4-year college graduates	Director, Childcare Teacher, Teacher with a Kindergarten teacher certificate *1-year trainee of childcare, 2-4 year college graduate with childcare-related major
Age cohort	3 to the start of formal schooling	0 to the start of formal schooling, with OSC provided to age 12
Enrolment	Universal (If there are too many children for the available places, lots may be drawn to decide placement.)	Selective (universal in reality) *Prioritised for enrolment 1. Children in extreme poverty 2. Children of low-income families 3. Children of working mothers, single parents, broken families. 4. Others
Enrolment schedule	Beginning of March	Any time on demand
No. of children per class and teacher	Half/extended-day: 30 Full-day: 20	Age 0 –1: 1:5 Age 2: 1: 7 Age 3-5: 1:20
Term period	At least 180 days	All year around except for national holidays (Occasionally, open on holidays by consent between director and parents)
Opening hours	Half-day: 3-5 hours Extended-day: 5-8 hours Full-day: more than 8 hours	More than 12 hours (negotiable according To parents' working hours)
Programme	Based on the national kindergarten curriculum 1. Aimed at development of the whole person including the physical, linguistic, cognitive, emotional, social areas. 2. Play-based, integrated curriculum with five areas: health, social, expression, language, inquiry	Based on recognised childcare programmes 1. Fostering children's physical, cognitive, emotional, social development 2. Nutrition, health, safety and services for parents, exchanges with communities
Fees	National/public: governmental support (\$10-45 paid by parents) Private: \$85-130 paid by parents * 5-year-old children of low income families: governmental support	National/public: governmental support and parental payment Private: \$85-150 paid by parents * 5-year-old children of low-income families: governmental support.

45. In terms of relative access of the population of young children to ECEC services, the *Korean Background Report* (2003) indicates that the total number of 0-3 year olds reported in Table 1 (n = 177,554) is about ten percent of the population of 0-3 year olds in Korea. Similarly, those children of three to six years receiving either public or private child care services (n = 549,194) comprise 28.3% of the whole population of 3-6 year olds in Korea. Children receiving some form of kindergarten education (n = 550,151) are also 28%.

46. Korean ECEC services are increasingly differentiated according to the age of the children. The *Korean Background Report*, (2003, p.38) confirms that although "three- and four-year-old children's enrolment in child care facilities continually increases, five-year-old children's enrolment in child care drops significantly." It would appear that children move from child care to kindergarten programmes at age five years, a trend corroborated by the increase in kindergarten enrolments at that age. At the same time, many children do not seem to have any access. The *Korean Background Report* notes that in Korea "59% of 3-5 year olds attend kindergartens or child care facilities. <sup>2</sup>...A breakdown of participation by age reveals that 42.8% of three-year-olds, 57.8% of four-year-olds and 68.7% of five-year-olds are in attendance" (p.39). These figures suggest that a surprisingly high number – 41% – of Korean children in the 3-5 age range do not access an official ECEC service (kindergarten or child care). It seems likely that many of these children attend *hakwons* or receive educational support from their parents as elementary schooling in Korea is successful and does not report any major difficulties in the first classes of primary school.

47. According to the *Korean Background Report* (Table 2-2), small centre-based facilities, owned by individuals, are the predominant form of childcare provision in Korea. Most (85.6%) open for 9-12 hours per day. 35.4% have fewer than 20 children enrolled, while those having 21 to 39 children comprise the next biggest category (17.1%). Public facilities tend to be larger in size, and generally operate for 12 hours per day. Facilities numbering 66 to 91 children comprise the most numerous category (29.4%).

48. Some city/rural differences have been noted with acknowledgement that service variety and choice is more limited in country locations. Given the demographics, extended family patterns and logistics of provision in rural areas, accredited private providers find investment in country locations unattractive. For this reason, services in rural area are mainly provided by public rather than private agencies, and in general, seem well supervised. Regional and district educational offices have a special role to play in ensuring that ECEC services in rural locations are of good quality. The team was informed that parallel to the public kindergartens, informal childminding by relatives and neighbours exists.

49. Some 11% of the children with childcare places are enrolled in family daycare or home (Playroom) facilities. Both playroom facilities and family daycares receive financial support from MOHW if they cover at least ten under two year olds. Reporting requirements to parents normally include presentation of a monthly programme, e.g. the menu being provided and the provision of parent education sheets that may be pertinent to the age of the children. Family day careers are trained for infant health emergencies, and each home-based programme is 'attached' to a local hospital which can be contacted for assistance if a child is ill. Carers manage sick children for parents because workplaces do not support time-off work for parents to attend to their children directly.

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is less than the percentage deduced from Table 1, that is, about 63.6% are enrolled in early childhood services. This is because children in the Eub, the smallest administration unit in Korea, often go to the kindergarten in the morning and to childcare facilities in the afternoon. In sum, based on Table 1, some double counting may occur. Another reason is that the statistical information provided in the Table comes from two different sources, MOHW Statistics & MOE Statistics, which gather statistical information at different moments.

50. Hours of attendance at kindergartens vary for 3-5 year olds, the tradition being a half-day programme of 3 hours (9:00-12:00). Perhaps this is a key reason for the relative reduction in the proportion of children who access kindergarten services over child care services in recent years. Since 1992, however, Government has recommended that kindergartens offer full-day programmes (9:00-18:00). Clearly longer services facilitate participation by women in the full-time paid labour market, an increasing priority of government in recent years. Under strong encouragement from the Ministry of Education and HRD, more than half (51%) the kindergartens now offer extended hours (9:00-15:00 or 16:00) while 30% offer all-day (9:00 – 18:00) services.

51. Most public kindergartens are relatively small, comprising one or two classes. These kindergartens are normally attached to local elementary schools. Private kindergartens on the other hand are larger, unattached institutions normally containing between three to six classes. Moreover, most of the private kindergartens are owned by individuals (78%) with religious groups controlling some 13% and incorporated companies, the military and others controlling the remaining 9% (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p. 33).

52. Access varies according to children's placement in urban or rural localities. A greater percentage of children in rural (farming and fishing) communities access public kindergartens because such facilities are more prevalent in these localities. A third of 3-5 year-old children in rural areas attend public kindergartens, and 6.3% are in private kindergarten, compared to 5.3% of children from large urban centres in public kindergarten and 24.3% in private. (See Table 2-3, p.31, *Korean Background Report*, 2003). These facilities are more likely to offer extended day programmes.

**Box 1. Seo-am Kindergarten in Gim-Po - A public kindergarten in a rural setting**

Situated within an elementary school serving some 690 children Seo-am Kindergarten caters for 33 x 5 year olds in one class, 10 of whom are in the class for a 'long day' service wrapped around the kindergarten programme which operates from 8am - 3pm, five days per week. Food is provided for the children at the school and access is available for kindergarteners to use the library, seen by the teacher as one of the major benefits of being affiliated to a school. One teacher, a 2 year college graduate, and one assistant manage the programme. The teacher devotes about 10 hours per day to the kindergarten (Mon-Fri) and returns Saturdays to prepare between 8am-1pm.

The School Principal and Deputy Principal enact the leadership role for the kindergarten, a distinguishing characteristic of rural affiliated programmes, although training and professional development in ECEC for these principals is very limited. The role of Principal and Deputy may vary but in this setting is primarily based around duty of care. The Principal does not determine the direction of curriculum and pedagogical action, although some control over the budget is part of the role. Monitoring the quality of the teacher's work rests with the District Superintendent who visits the school about 4 times per year. The District Superintendent has an elementary school background.

In this kindergarten four year olds are not enrolled because the local parents prefer a kindergarten programme focused on academics. The teacher tries to stress creativity and social interaction through her implementation of the National Curriculum. All teachers interact with parents through an internet-based class home page. Almost all children attending this programme proceed to Year one in the same school site. The Year One teacher admits a relatively small number of additional children (approx. 10%) who have no prior ECEC programme background. The kindergarten and Year one teachers share some texts and other materials and occasionally do special thematic activities (e.g. Christmas) together. Nevertheless the main programme and working processes for kindergarten and year one in this setting are separate.

Some seventy-five 5 year olds in the local area attend a *hakwon* nearby, enabling them to access a shuttle bus to the school site provided by the *hakwon*. Approximately half the children at this school use the *hakwon* transport each day, a further 30% walking or riding bicycles to school with the remaining children being transported by parents. Children leaving the school at 3 p.m. usually attend *hakwon* for a further 1-2 hours. The local area is described as poor with free education being an imperative for all. In terms of education levels, two thirds of the parents are high-school graduates and approximately 25% have college degrees.

53. Korea has in place a system of National Special Schools, spread across the country and focusing on particular kinds of need. These schools are rich in what they offer and exemplary in the high standards they set. Being well designed, equipped with a wide variety of resources and staffed by a diverse group of

specialists the programmes appear both inclusive and dynamic. Despite being special in focus, an integrated approach is taken to programmes in the early years: children demonstrating normal development as well as diverse development are among the population of children enrolled.

#### **Box 2. Kyung-Jin School for special children - Il-San**

A suburban area on the outskirts of Seoul hosts one of the national schools for children with special needs, the Kung-Jin school. The whole plant is relatively new, well kept and well equipped: a magnificent and spacious schoolyard with a shop, large kitchen, lawns, borders, children's gardens, hard-top walking routes, a playground, a soccer field and all sorts of landscaping. The school has an active re-cycling programme where children bring 're-cycle' goods, sort and provide them to local re-processing industries.

The school serves 280 children ranging in age from kindergarten to high school. Three kindergarten classes are in place and are integrated with 3 "regular" children to every one "special" child, a pattern used in all national special schools. For each 20 children two teachers are in place, one regular and one with special education training. This school specialises in children with autism. These integrated classes are very popular among the parents of "regular" children as they like the idea of children growing up together, and the quality of the school and its facilities attracts these parents.

The headmaster and his team have inspiring ideas about the pedagogy for children with autism. Their first objective is to increase the self-esteem of the children. Activities to put this into practice rely heavily on physical experience, and the staff are expected to teach by role-modelling. Children with autism become deeply involved in solo-sports like in-line skating and skate-boarding. School staff are involved in these activities as well, and the vice-headmaster himself enjoys skating and boarding with his pupils. Another remarkable activity is in the sensory-motor field. During physical education children (and the teacher of course) often walk bare-foot along the paths on the premises, and as a special treat they walk a flint-road! The children in this school seemed very happy and involved and the staff most dedicated. But most joy is gained when their school-leavers (at the end of high-school) find a job and place in society. Often this result is obtained.

### **Curriculum**

54. Three types of curriculum are in place in ECEC programmes: *National Kindergarten Curriculum* operating in all kindergarten facilities and structured with five major domains and around ten themes that are explicated in a set of teaching manuals; a *child care programme* that includes basic components on care, education, nutrition, health, safety, services for parents and exchanges with communities; and *hakwon programmes* designed by individual *hakwon* centres to teach specific aspects of Korean language, basic mathematics, piano, art and similar specific subjects.

55. The *National Kindergarten Curriculum* is the most authoritative and widely applied curriculum in ECEC in Korea. This curriculum, begun in 1969, has a five-year revision cycle. The sixth revision came into place in early 2000. The content covers five major domains of learning (physical health, social relationships), expression, language and inquiry), arranged in two levels. Teachers follow this curriculum by reference to twelve teaching manuals including an overview manual, one for each of ten themes and materials for full-day programmes. Implementation of the curriculum through the identified themes is clearly apparent during observation visits to any kindergarten.

56. In terms of its overall structure, documentation, regulations for operation and actual practice in the field, the child care curriculum appears more loosely structured in comparison with the kindergarten curriculum, although the five domains listed for 3-5 year olds in the kindergarten also form the basic elements for teachers planning the child care programme. "The child care plans need to include individual and group activities and active and quiet play in order to develop children's cognitive, social, physical and linguistic abilities, including activities necessary for biological needs such as nursing and toilet use." (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.65). A difference can be seen, however, in the delivery of the curricula, possibly because of the generally lower standards of recruitment and training in the childcare sector, and the less favourable working conditions of childcare staff.

**Box 3. Go-Eun Child Care Centre, Seoul - A public child care facility sharing space with a service for the elderly**

The only public child care centre in the area, Go-Eun is 20 years old, catering for 2mths to 5 year olds, and sharing a building with the elderly (upstairs). There are 89 children in the service. The centre hopes to obtain the whole building for their needs in view of a 24hour care programme (Monday-Saturday) soon to open to cater for nurses, construction and business workers needing this level of support and who view the benefit to their children as "more time for getting an education". There is no age-limit for the 24 hr programme. Government support for building re-development and an additional worker is available for this programme.

The broader child care programmes offered in the centre follow the National Kindergarten Curriculum augmented with art, traditional music, science and gymnastics in the afternoons. The 24hr programmes will be similar with a relaxed plan after 6pm. Ninety eight percent of the children re-enrol each year, thereby spending several years in the centre. The teachers are required to complete daily activity plans in advance each day and to self-evaluate. These plans are given to the Director who reads and checks progress. The glass doors to each class were seen as helpful for the Director "to observe without disturbing". The eight teachers in this centre had varied training backgrounds, one being 4 year, 6 x 2 year and 1 x 1 year qualified. The teachers work 12 hour days and attend college after the day finishes. All staff have done College for at least one year in their after hours time. Four of the teachers had between 5-11 years of teaching experience. Teachers for the centre are easy to find, as many teachers prefer to work in the public sector.

Staff viewed a full day programme (compared with traditional kindergarten) as an advantage because the teachers and children are not under pressure, and there is time to observe. Teachers feel that there is time to compensate in the afternoon if children miss something in the morning learning experiences. No children designated as having special needs were said to be in this centre.

Most children move from this centre to the local elementary school, where staff are said to be positive about the children because they have experience with interaction and play. Staff from the school and centre do not visit each other's sites, although the Director visits all children who have 'broken families' to see that they settle when they move on to school. The centre caters for some girls from a local orphanage (for girls from birth to 18).

Staff have frequent consultations with parents and keep folios of children's work which are sent home monthly. A visitor from the local district office comes to the centre twice per year, checking some 50 items each time. The items address both facilities and the educational programme, including the Director's management of staff, financial management, development of teaching materials, and staff development. Each teacher develops a list of teaching material for presentation.

## **Funding**

57. The review team endeavoured to obtain a full picture of funding of ECEC services in Korea, taking into account the three major types of ECEC provision, the different contributors, average family income and gross domestic product (GDP). However, the complex mix of contributions from parents, employers, national and local government could not be fully delineated, particularly in the context of relative contributions by each of the parties.

58. Although the education sector as a whole is said to be a top priority in Korea (Ministry of Planning and Budget interview 22/5/03), investment per student in education follows more or less the OECD average. The situation is much less favourable for the early education of young children which receives only 1% of the Ministry of Education budget, despite urgings by the Commission of Education Reform to increase this share to 3-5%. In Korea, the comparative funding per child in pre-primary education, relative to GDP per capita, stands at 0.13% compared to the OECD average of 0.17% (OECD, 2003, *Education at a Glance*). Each secondary school pupil receives double this investment, and a student at tertiary-level three times as much.

**Table3. Expenditure on educational institutions per student (2000)<sup>3</sup>**

Annual expenditure on educational institutions per student in equivalent US dollars converted using PPPs, by level of education, based on full-time equivalents

	Pre-primary education (for children 3 years and older) <sup>1</sup>	Primary education <sup>2</sup>	All secondary education	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	All tertiary education	Tertiary-type A and advanced research programmes
<b>OECD countries</b>						
Australia	m	4967	6894	6694	12854	14044
Austria	5471	6560	8578	10947	10851	x(7)
Belgium	3282	4310	6889	x(5)	10771	x(7)
Canada	6120	x(5)	5947	x(8)	14983	16690
Czech Republic	2435	1827	3239	1624	5431	5946
Denmark	4255	7074	7726	x(4,7)	11981	x(7)
Finland	3944	4317	6094	x(5)	8244	8426
France	4119	4486	7636	6207	8373	8230
Germany	5138	4198	6826	10148	10898	11754
Greece <sup>1</sup>	X(2)	3318	3859	1400	3402	3643
Hungary <sup>1</sup>	2511	2245	2446	3223	7024	7098
Iceland <sup>1</sup>	m	5854	6518	m	7994	7548
Ireland	2863	3385	4638	4234	11083	x(7)
Italy <sup>1</sup>	5771	5973	7218	m	8065	8136
Japan	3376	5507	6266	x(4,7)	10914	11302
Korea	1949	3155	4069	a	6118	7502
Luxembourg	m	m	m	m	m	m
Mexico	1385	1291	1615	a	4688	x(7)
Netherlands	3920	4325	5912	5006	11934	12004
New Zealand	m	m	m	m	m	m
Norway <sup>1</sup>	13170	6550	8476	x(5)	13353	x(7)
Poland <sup>1</sup>	2278	2105	m	x(4)	3222	3252
Portugal	2237	3672	5349	a	4766	x(7)
Slovakia	1644	1308	1927	x(4)	4949	4949
Spain	3370	3941	5185	x(5)	6666	6712
Sweden	3343	6336	6339	4452	15097	x(7)
Switzerland <sup>1</sup>	3114	6631	9780	7199	18450	19491
Turkey <sup>1</sup>	m	m	m	a	4121	x(7)
United Kingdom	6677	3877	5991	x(5)	9657	x(7)
United States <sup>2</sup>	7980	6995	8855	x(7)	20358	x(7)
<b>Country mean</b>	<b>4137</b>	<b>4381</b>	<b>5957</b>	<b>4075</b>	<b>9571</b>	~
<b>OECD total</b>	<b>4477</b>	<b>4470</b>	<b>5501</b>	~	<b>11109</b>	~

Note: x indicates that data are included in another column. Numbers after text denote:

1. Public institutions only.

2. Public and independent private institutions only.

3. Year of reference 1999.

Source: OECD, 2003. See Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/edu/eag2003](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2003)).

59. Korean government support to ECEC comprises 0.13% of GDP, with central government providing approximately 30% of this budget and the sixteen local authorities providing the remaining seventy percent. Child-care subsidies comprise 3.6% of the Ministry of Health and Welfare budget and early childhood education comprises 1% of the Ministry of Education and HRD budget. It is unknown

how these budget proportions compare when viewed alongside other department functions and in relation to the size of population groups eligible for the services (e.g. population of 0-6 years olds, 6-12 year olds and so on). Local authorities have direct taxation powers, and obtain proportional augmentation of their funding to ECEC from the national government. Thus, because the Seoul area has greater wealth than other provinces, its government can provide relatively more support to early childhood services than other regions.

60. Parental fees are regulated by market forces in kindergarten, child care, and *hakwon* services, although the Ministry of Economics allows no greater than a 5% increase in fees per year for the kindergarten. For this reason, many kindergartens adopt an “extras” charging system in order to obtain additional funds directly from the parent users. In terms of cost per hour, private sector kindergartens are normally the most expensive, followed by private child care, public child care, and public kindergarten)<sup>3</sup> The *Korean Background Report* (2003) notes that..."78% of the enrolled children fall within the private kindergarten sector, of which the burden of finance falls on parents entirely" (p.7).

61. Child care fees vary across local authorities, who designate the fee levels. There is a marked difference between private and public child care fees in the various areas. Overall, in a context where the average family income after tax (based on a single income family of four) is approximately \$US2,000/month, reported child care fees per month average 232,000 won (US\$197; €170) for infants, 192,000 won (US\$163; €141) for 2-3 year olds and 119,000 won (US\$101; €87) for 3-5 year olds. According to some associations interviewed, unless fees are waived, the percentage of family income that can be assigned to kindergarten/child care among low income families may vary from a minimum of 20% to average 30-50% to a maximum of 80%.

62. The Korean government is committed to giving priority to fee support structures and policies for low income families. Fee support is channelled through the Ministry of Planning and Budget where, to obtain such assistance, families must meet strict criteria around the number of members (n = 5), monthly income (<\$US1,000; <€870), and total assets (<\$US20,000; <€17,400). Approximately fifteen percent of families receive fee support. What is not clear is whether kindergartens and child care facilities (*hakwon* cannot access funded places) view the incentive of government funding for children from a low-income family to be sufficient to deter offering that place to a child whose family can pay fees and extras.

63. Public kindergarten programmes, at least for five-year olds, are gradually moving to become free for all children. *Korean Background Report* (2003, p.74) report annual tuition fee ranges in public kindergartens of 0-360,000 won, that is, free up to \$306 or €264. Fees paid by parents for private kindergarten programmes vary from 90,000 (\$US76; €66) to 150,000 won (US\$137; €110) per month.

64. It seems apparent that considerable ambivalence exists regarding whether to provide funds to private ECEC facilities in Korea. For a sector heavily dependent upon private provision for places while also being in need of overall expansion to enable universal access, the question of how to arrange financial support to the various sectors, both public and private, is indeed pressing. Some progress is being made: Korean parents may now claim taxation deductions for kindergarten, child care and *hakwon* fees. "In 2002, tax deductions range from 1,000,000 won (US\$849; €733) to 1,500,000 won (US\$1,373; €1,100) per child" (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.26). Some companies also provide limited fee support for pre-elementary aged children of workers.

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<sup>3</sup> Data are not available on the relative costs and range of fees in *hakwon* services compared with child care and kindergarten.

## **Regulatory framework and quality assurance**

65. Since 1997, when severe pressure for rapid expansion of child care facilities resulted in Korea changing the Child Care Act of 1991, new child care provision could be established and administered under a notification framework rather than the original licensing process. When the licensing process was discarded and the reporting requirement adopted, new centres simply notified the local area office of establishment. Once a centre is established, staff qualifications and adult-child ratios, as described in the Act, apply and must be met. However, it seems that parents are seeking higher quality services and there is some consideration within the relevant ministries of reverting to a stronger licensing process in view of greater emphasis now being placed on quality development rather than quantitative expansion.

66. With regard to space requirements in ECEC services, both public and private services have the same legal requirements. However in relative terms, the private sector is said to have facilities that provide a smaller amount of space per child. In terms of our experience in other countries, a number of explanations are possible: first, for reasons of economy, private providers adhere to minimum space requirements whereas the public sector allows for more space to enhance programme quality and flexibility. Second, municipal authorities, faced with the need to have services, may overlook rigorous space requirements in the case of centres that fulfil this need. Third, enrolments in each sector may not correspond exactly to the number of children present, that is, more children than actually enrolled may be present in private centres, and fewer children than the official enrolment figures may actually attend the public centres on a full-time basis. A fourth reason advanced is that government funding is available to public centres - but not to private centres - to address contextual factors related to quality. Part of this funding may be devoted to improving spatial as well as equipment needs. But these are hypotheses that need verification. The important point that the team wishes to make is that in some centres, space seemed insufficient for the number of children present and as a result, the quality of the programme for children suffered.

### *Monitoring and Inspection*

67. Systematic external evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy in Early Childhood services is limited to the kindergarten sector, primarily through the school inspection mechanism established and maintained by Ministry of Education and HR officials. Attention is given to content, methods used and environments with apparent emphasis on teachers' written plans for the weeks/months in review. Teachers themselves are also expected to evaluate the progress of each child against the curriculum objectives for each learning area. Weekly, monthly and annual reports of children's progress are generally maintained in kindergarten services.

68. Visits related to quality inspections are made by local area superintendents who must visit each centre twice per year. For example the review team met one superintendent who was responsible for some 109 kindergartens in her area (one hundred private and nine public, including the Buk Seong kindergarten described in Box 4 below). The superintendent visits each centre twice per year to "check curriculum and improve the quality of instruction". During these visits, she observes, listens to staff and reports to them at the end of the day. The superintendent's work is facilitated by use of a checklist. In addition, aside from the external inspection system, the Kindergarten Director plays a key role in monitoring quality, particularly structural elements related to class groupings, recruitment and support of the teachers, training and development of staff and the number of children the programmes can sustain.

#### **Box 4. Buk-Seong Public Kindergarten, Seoul**

Buk-Seong kindergarten is one of 36 public kindergartens not attached to elementary schools. There are 146 children in attendance, two classes of fours, three classes of fives, one special class and one long-day class. Eight teachers work with the children, six attending regular hours (8:30-17:30) and two ensure staffing of the full day programme (until 20:00) and extended programme (7:00-15:00). Including the Director and Vice-Director, there are 13 staff in the centre. Three staff hold Master's degrees and the remaining teachers are four-year degree holders, three of whom are now studying in graduate programmes. Staff in the centre were inspired by programmes they visited in Sweden and work towards such models for their centre.

Programmes for the children are three hours in duration and, except on Wednesdays, lunch is not provided. Teachers therefore have five hours per day for preparation, said to be common in Seoul kindergartens, whereas in rural areas teachers work with children for longer hours. Twenty children in the centre take the full-day programme. Parents take part as volunteers in classes and on field trips. Families using this centre are said to be mainly middle income. Low-income families, it was said, tend to use child care facilities where they can get more financial assistance. In addition, child-care services operate all year round, which is not the case for kindergartens.

The number of children in this kindergarten has decreased and there is no waiting list. Because the centre does not provide a school bus, children attending are locals who walk or are dropped off by their parents. Priority of access is given to five year olds, and where numbers are low, fours are taken into the programme. There are no three year olds in this kindergarten. The Director explained that "although three year olds have an entitlement, in practice they don't have access because of the priority to fives." The teachers plan programme activities using the required National Kindergarten Curriculum. Planning is done individually or as a team, depending on the topic. Informal daily 'get togethers' and weekly formal meetings occur where the Director takes the opportunity to give supervision to the staff. Daily activity plans of staff are presented to the Assistant Director for review of the objectives, the details and evaluation. These plans are checked and signed and then inspected by the Superintendent.

#### **Staffing, qualifications and salaries in ECEC services**

69. Kindergarten services are primarily staffed by college graduates with 70% from two-year college and 30% from four-year university programmes. Child care teachers variously are high-school graduates with a one-year training qualification, two-year colleges (59%), and four-year colleges (17%). One of the distinguishing characteristics of 'public kindergarten teacher' status in Korea is that candidates must meet requirements to be a public official (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p. 43) and therefore most (66%) of the public kindergarten teachers hold a four-year degree. In addition, the great majority of teachers in public kindergartens (almost 76%) have more than 10 years experience. In contrast, nearly 80% of teachers in private kindergartens have less than 5 years experience. The attrition of private kindergarten teachers – and even more so, of personnel in the childcare sector - appears to occur during the first five years of service. This can be explained by the fact that private kindergartens do not in general hire highly experienced teachers because of the burden of their high salaries, and by the fact that the profession is primarily female. Corresponding workforce data shows that the participation of women in the labour market drops from full-time employment at a time when they have families (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.24). Although we did not receive figures on the issue, it seems safe to suppose that the opportunity costs of leaving the workforce are more than offset by saving the high childcare costs that continued full-time employment would require.

70. Because public kindergarten provision has been diminishing, relative to childcare, in its coverage of the three-five-year population, the largest proportion of young children in Korea are supported by ECEC teachers who hold two-year college diplomas. In sum, the majority of Korean young children who attend ECEC services are in private sector services, the area in which qualification levels are relatively low. In addition, a considerable challenge exists for child-care staff to take courses to upgrade their qualifications. To take further courses is seen as a private responsibility and in most instances, must be undertaken – not within child-care hours – but after a work-day of 10 or 12 hours is completed! In those conditions, staff are

denied a realistic opportunity to improve their professional skills, as many child-care personnel are women with families of their own.

71. Starting salaries for kindergarten and child care teachers vary substantially. Kindergarten teachers in national public kindergartens have similar status to elementary and secondary school teachers and earn relatively high salaries compared to other ECEC teachers, approximately 19,000,000 won/year (basic salary of 14,600,000 won/year plus allowances) starting (US\$16,131; €13,936). Teachers in private kindergartens, according to the *Korean Background Report* (2003, p.78), are paid monthly salaries in four broad bands: "below 600,000 won (US\$510; €440) (13.2% of total private kindergarten teachers), 610,000 (US\$518; €447) to 800,000 won (US\$679; €587) (45%), 810,000 (US\$688; €594) to 1,000,000 won (US\$849; €733) (29.7%) to over 1,000,000 won (12.1%)".

72. Starting salaries for teachers in national public child care facilities are approx. 986,000 won (US\$837; €723) per month with child care teachers working in private facilities earning some 60-70% of that earned by national public child care teachers. Although salary levels relate to different qualification levels, the disparity across the sector is significant. In addition, it was noted by the review team that child care teachers spend almost 100% of their day (approximately 12 hours) working directly with the children, whereas kindergarten teachers frequently had about half of their day for preparation, staff meetings and other administrative tasks.

### **Pre-service education and training**

73. Despite rhetoric underlining the importance of continuity between care and education, current approaches to ECEC teacher education are highly compartmentalised, giving a dominant focus either to kindergarten education (3-6 years) or to child care (0-6 years). The division can be seen too in the hierarchy of institutes available for training: child care training institutions which operate one-year programmes (i.e. 80 institutes offering courses of at least 1,000 hours); two/three-year (2002) colleges and four-year universities. The great majority of these training institutes are private. Prospective kindergarten teachers are "trained in a total of 156 educational institutions, of which 90 are two-year colleges and 66 four-year universities" (The *Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.77). The two-year colleges and one year institutes are frequented mainly by students preparing for work in child care programmes. These colleges were reclassified as departments of early childhood education in the 1980s. As noted earlier, the majority of ECEC staff are two-year trained.

74. Coursework details and practicum requirements vary across institutions, with no common validation process for accrediting of ECEC courses in place. In one-year programmes, students must address five areas of learning: liberal arts (5%); infant and child care (30%); child care practice subjects/curriculum (30%); theories of child welfare (15%); and 4 weeks (200 hours) of child care practicum (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.79). In two, three and four year programmes, the level of theoretical background varies according to length of programme. The primary focus of the programme (child care/kindergarten) varies according to the traditions of the institution offering the course. Currently, some attention is being given to the reform of four-year kindergarten courses so that all types of ECEC services (child care / *hakwon* / kindergarten / early elementary) are addressed in a more integrated way. In broadening the scope of current programmes it seems that some teacher trainers are significantly challenged by the inclusion of content on infants and toddlers (0-3years) and by the issue of integrating care and education (Academic Association meeting, 26/5/03).

75. In addition to the child care / kindergarten segmentation described above, there is a clear division between ECEC (birth to five-year-old) training programmes and elementary school training programmes. During our meeting with the Academic Associations (26/5/03), we raised the prospect of designing coordinated pre-service training programmes for teachers of both elementary and early childhood years,

providing a predominant option for teachers opting for one or other stream. However, the Korean Early Childhood Association is cautious about such prospects, and raises the question of how elementary teachers could work effectively in kindergarten when their training does not address kindergarten philosophy, curriculum or pedagogy. The Association for Child Study is keen for the elementary and kindergarten pre-service education areas to cooperate more in an effort to break down the barriers between these sectors and the consequent discontinuities for children's education.

76. There is no formal system of advisory committees or external auditing processes surrounding ECEC teacher training programmes. In university based programmes it is up to the professors and their selected committees to oversee the structuring, development and modernisation of training courses. Students have some voice in this process through submission of petitions seeking course changes or additions, although no formal process appears to be in place to track student course experiences and the link of course experience to preparedness for the workplace upon first appointment. In the two-year colleges, staff manage the development, revision and modernisation of programmes. It is clear that the type of programme originally established by the training institution (child care or kindergarten focus) predicts the type of focus currently available. Mechanisms to ensure collaboration across the sectors (child care, kindergarten, elementary) are not in place.

#### **Data collection, research, and evaluation**

77. A number of valuable data sets and statistics on ECEC provision in Korea are available in different ministries, institutes, and provinces. Because the ministries have separate bureaucracies and specific priorities to address, the collection of data related to ECEC service provision and development is fragmented across many domains. Statistics on kindergarten are collected by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI). Statistics on child care are collected centrally by the Child Care Information Centre, supported by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Further data on services and policy related to young children and families are available from the National Statistics Office. In addition, data are collected by individual researchers attached to universities and other research institutes. Data collection is mandatory for kindergartens and child care programmes. In brief, Korea has a wealth of information and evidence which tracks ECEC service expansion over time, describes usage and access to particular services and points to areas of concern or underdevelopment. However, no formal process of data sharing and coordination is in place. Data collection and research undertaken by the different ministries appears to support the research agendas of the individual ministries, and is generally disseminated only to those who work in the relevant ministry. Areas of research do not seem to be directly linked to policy and practice or strategic planning at higher inter-systemic levels.

78. Topics of research appear wide-ranging and include attention to service expansion, structural dimensions of quality, teacher training, play and curriculum. Some comparative research has been undertaken across care and kindergarten settings but this type of study is deemed more sensitive. There does not seem to be an emphasis on applied or action-research.

## CHAPTER 4: ISSUES RELATING TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

79. Korea has seen in recent decades the rapid development and expansion of early childhood education and care services. The transformation from very limited availability of ECEC services for children and families to present coverage, combined with a strong will to ensure full and free access for five year olds, has been a real achievement. Because of the pressure to build provision to match the remarkable economic growth of the country – and at the same, government reluctance to lead the field – the private sector has taken a major role in the establishment and operation of kindergarten and child care services. The Korean government is now challenged to enact a system of on-going policy development, legislation, quality management and review that encompasses public, non-profit and private-for-profit provision, including the *hakwons* (at present outside the formal regulatory frameworks for ECEC). In the present chapter, the OECD team has chosen for review some of the issues that we consider need clarification and action if a coherent high quality system: is to be established:

- Views of young children;
- Views of women's roles and early childhood services;
- Linking ECEC funding with downstream economic, labour market and educational outcomes;
- Co-ordination of care, education and *hakwon* services;
- Improved access and equity;
- Quality issues;
- Co-ordinated research and data collection focussed on policy and quality issues.

### 1. Views of young children

#### *Young children and the culture of education pressure*

80. As we are aware that views about children and how best to rear them vary widely across generations and cultures (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), we base our analysis of views about young children on the opinions expressed by Korean persons and associations whom we met during our visit. Korean parents continually referred to the pressure they felt to send their children to educational institutions, there to learn academic subject matter as early and as intensively as possible. Several perspectives were given on this matter, in particular the explanation that because social status is measured by eventual entry to university, parents endeavour to do everything possible to assist their children to pursue higher levels of education. In many instances, entry to a prestigious university is considered a family imperative and imposes action from the birth of a child. Reinforcing the desire for educational achievement was the fact that Korean society has only low levels of social security. In order to deal with this fact, citizens work hard to attain the highest level of education possible and thereby secure an assured future free of poverty. Lower levels of education predict unstable employment or employment in sectors with longer working hours, lower wages, and lower status.

81. What results from this context is the phenomenon of parents working long hours to pay for supplementary education for their children, with corresponding pressure on children to perform. Many parents state their dislike for the stress and anxiety caused by this "vicious cycle", not least in the early childhood period when fees – for most families – are extremely high relative to income. Concern is expressed too in education circles about the utility of the focus on academic content at such an early age and its long-term effects on children. It is argued that parental goals for children and the educational and societal structures feeding them need to be reformed, and that this can only occur in the long term. In the meantime, many parent and other associations are working to ensure that the better interests of young children are understood and find an echo in public policy.

82. However, where young children are concerned, there seems to exist in Korea ambiguous and contradictory views about what is in the best interest of children from birth to six. The review team met surprisingly little discussion about the appropriateness of baby nurseries as compared to providing effective parental leave which would allow mothers to look after their infants in the critical first year of life. Again, in the care sector, access to services is not viewed as a right for children, but as a fee-based service for working parents or for children deemed in need of support for social reasons. In the education sector, the same pattern imposes, even for the five-year olds, all of whom still do not have free and full access to early education.

83. In both sectors, representations of childhood remain dualistic. Professionals and parents routinely assume that from the age of three onwards, young children are to be viewed predominantly as *pupils* who - despite the injunctions of the *National Curriculum* - should focus on pre-determined learning outcomes, generally linked to literacy and numeracy. For children under three years, health, hygiene, safety and child development are the primary goals, and inputs of quality (ratios, staff qualifications, etc.) are stressed far more than content and outcomes for children. These representations of children are nurtured more by tradition than by evidence, and do not correspond to the best research available today, as summarised in the opening lines of *Eager To Learn* (Bowman *et al.*, 2000), published by the American National Research Council:

*Children come into the world eager to learn. The first five years of life are a time of enormous growth of linguistic, conceptual, social, emotional and motor competence. Right from birth, a healthy child is an active participant in that growth, exploring the environment, learning to communicate and, in relatively short order, beginning to construct ideas and theories about how things work in the surrounding world. The pace of learning, however, will depend on whether and to what extent the child's inclinations to learn encounter and engage supporting environments.*

84. The review team met members of government, the administrations, professional unions, parent and carer associations, who aim to protect children's rights and improve the quality of learning in centres for young children. Advocacy was based on achieving growth in free public ECEC provision, strengthening public education as a whole and promoting quality teaching and learning in the early years, the latter being more strongly based on holistic childhood development and the most up-to-date learning research. Several representatives referred to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by the Korean government and the need to pay careful attention to enhancing children's lives through a welfare society. Members expressed concern that young children were not really at the centre of policy-making, and that present ECEC provision was based more on ensuring wage competitiveness through women's work rather than on the best interests of children.

## **2. Views of women's roles, parental leave and equality of opportunity**

85. Like their counterparts in many parts of the world, contemporary Korean women wish to work outside the home to fulfil themselves, and to live an achievement-oriented life. In fulfilling this wish, they are often supported by their men to find work outside the home. The preference for dual-income families is

fuelled not only by a desire to emancipate women, but to have increased family income and the means to pay for costly, out-of-home services for young children. The burthen falls especially on young mothers to find work that can pay the full costs of extra-domestic care and early education. Some commentators link the difficulties faced by these young women to the low fertility rates of Korean families. Whatever the reason – demographic trends are usually complex – the fact that fewer Korean women are having children is causing concern. In other countries, pressure is reduced on women and young families by a sufficient supply of affordable early services. This is not always the case in Korea, where most services are in the private sector where effective capping of fees is difficult to impose.

86. In addition, workplace culture and practice militate against women with young children. Little flexibility is accorded to them to accommodate family needs, especially those related to child rearing. Korean women – as in most other countries – carry the main burthen of domestic and childrearing tasks, but compared to many countries that have invited early childhood reviews, supports to help them reconcile work and family responsibilities are still relatively weak.

87. Another phenomenon that needs attention is the significant proportion of Korean women in casual employment, and/or in jobs imposing long hours and low pay. Labour imbalance along gender lines is further reflected in the predominance of women in the low-paid childcare sector, where it is routinely assumed that centres will employ only female staff. In sum, having children disrupts predominantly women’s professional activity and employment outlook, and it is not surprising that the participation rates of women in the work force continues to show an “M” shaped distribution, sagging during the child-bearing age of 25 to 34 years (*Korean Background Report*, 2003, page 24). Family responsibility has still little impact on men in terms of employment rates, daily duration of work, or engagement in practical arrangements to ensure extra-domestic care of young children.

88. To enhance gender equality and encourage childbearing in a positive way, the Korean authorities introduced parental leave measures in 1987. However, parental leave arrangements, though available in various forms, have witnessed little uptake. Reasons proposed to the review team by ECEC organisations, parent groups and NGO members include:

- The replacement salaries offered to women on leave are too low to sustain the family or to make it interesting for a parent to stay at home. There is a need, according to our informants, to increase leave allowances to at least sixty percent of average salaries;
- Return-to-work conditions are uncertain. In many instances, young mothers lose work status and previous position, even though by law their employment status should be protected.

Because of the unsatisfactory nature of parental leave, infant care services are in high demand, and appear inadequate both in number and in the quality of pedagogical support offered to them. A vicious circle has been created in which mothers can no longer care directly for their infants (0-12 months), but must continue to work in order to pay for low quality, unregulated private arrangements – all this in contradiction to the emphasis placed on careful childrearing found in Korean tradition.

89. In such a situation, equality of opportunity for women also suffers. High drop-out rates of young women from the labour market, the large number of women in part-time or irregular work, the low participation of older female cohorts are signs, among others, that traditional patterns of gender inequality still survive in Korea. The team was also informed that irregular female work is increasing because of the preference of businesses to hire cheap labour. An example given to the team was that of official employment status being rescinded by an employer, by firing staff and then re-hiring the same workers at a lower salary and without benefits. We have no means of judging the veracity of the example, but in conditions such as these, women in Korea have no longer the right to access remunerated parental leave.

### 3. Linking ECEC funding and downstream economic, labour market and educational outcomes

90. In our discussions with the ministries, the OECD team understood – at least from certain officials – that some move away from the neo-liberal economic position of viewing the provision of early years services as being primarily a matter for parents and the market to decide, may be possible. In parallel, the Canadian economists, Cleveland and Krashinsky (2003, p.5), have noted two broad reasons why government should become involved in financing ECEC services and supports to families.

*The first is to transfer resources to families with young children. Raising children is expensive and families with young children are typically themselves young; the incomes and assets of these families are low relative to what they may be in later life, and relative to the high cost of raising young children.*

*The second is to protect and promote the public interest in the raising of children and the functioning of families. Although most families are dedicated to raising children they will not always make decisions which are ideal from the social point of view, whether these are decisions about the care of their children or the employment of family members.*

*While governments seek to preserve a wide scope of freedom for parents to decide what is in the best interests of children and family members, ECEC policies must provide incentives and financial support for them to make decisions which are most positive for the long-run interests of children, families and society. This may involve the provision of accessible, good quality ECEC services with or without parent fees.*

The authors go on to argue that both education and ECEC services need provision through the public sector because "private markets fail to deliver the appropriate amount of it to those who need it most" (ibid., 2003, p.7).

91. In OECD countries today, the linkages between equality of educational opportunity and early childhood services are widely recognised. Increasingly, countries deem it necessary to provide high quality early stimulation and learning opportunities for the children of low-income or isolated groups, and when possible, to organise opportunities to socialise and learn for all young children. However, the *Korean Background Report* (2003) is obliged to report that only one percent of the education budget in Korea is invested in kindergarten education. Relative to the significant groups of children still needing access to early education services, the review team considered this proportion to be small and out of step with rhetoric regarding the importance of ECEC, and with the 1997 directive to extend free kindergarten education to all five year olds. Given the data provided in the *Korean Background Report* - even when taking into account the expenditure by the Ministry of Health and Welfare on free child care places for five year olds - the total number of five year olds receiving free public provision (kindergarten n = 47,736, child care n = 86,982) is small relative to the population of five year olds (n = 698,375).

92. Yet, economic analyses from many other countries indicate that investment in early years services brings not only proven benefits to the children and families they serve, but also to governments and national economies (OECD, 2002). The following paragraphs list some of the more recent evidence:

#### *Analyses showing educational returns from early childhood investment*

- *Success For All: long-term effects and cost-effectiveness* (Borman, G. and Hewes G. in AERA Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Washington, Vol. 24, No. 4, Winter 2002). *Success For All* is a comprehensive elementary school reform programme designed to promote early school success among at-risk children. It is widely replicated in the USA, and serves over 1 million children in 2000 schools. In addition to offering an intensive, pre-K and K programme, it provides mechanisms to promote stronger links between the home and the school, and to address social behavioural and health issues. Relative to control groups, and at similar cost, *Success For All* children complete elementary school at an earlier age, achieve better learning outcomes, have fewer

retentions or special education placements. The authors underline that for success to continue, similar programmes need to be used throughout primary and lower secondary schooling.

- The *Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers* (Reynolds *et al.*, 2002) – Opened in 1967, the Centers are located in public schools and provide educational and family support to low-income children from ages 3 to 9 years. Using data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, and comparison group children born in 1980, Reynolds and his team show that participation in the Centers was significantly associated with greater school achievement, higher rates of school completion, with significantly lower rates of remedial education, juvenile delinquency and child maltreatment. Cost-benefit analyses indicate that in 1998 dollar values, the programme provided to society a return of \$7.14 per dollar invested by: increasing economic well-being and tax revenues; reduction of public expenditure on remedial education, criminal justice treatment and crime victims.

#### *Analyses showing social, economic and labour market returns from investment*

- The Müller Kucera-Bauer study: *Costs and benefits of childcare services in Switzerland – Empirical findings from Zurich*, (2001) shows that the city's public investment of 18 million SF annually is offset by at least 29 million SF of additional tax revenues and reduced public spending on social aid (Müller Kucera and Bauer, 2001). Where affordable childcare was available, the rate of hours in work almost doubled, especially for single-headed households with one or more children. In sum, publicly funded childcare resulted in 1) Higher productivity and earnings due to maintaining productive workers in work. 2) Higher contributions to social security and savings; 3) Less dependency on social assistance during both the productive and retirement ages (without affordable childcare, many families would fall below the poverty line).<sup>4</sup>
- *The ongoing Berruetti-Clement et al. study* (1984, 1995-6, 2001) evaluates the educational and economic returns of a high quality pre-school programme (Perry Pre-school) on a sample of Afro-American children. Key findings were that the children from the Perry Pre-school programme had better school records, improved labour market entry and higher incomes than the control group of similar children. In a cost-benefit analysis of the data, Barnett (1995) estimated that the cost-benefit ratio for the investment in the programme was almost 1:7.
- *The North Carolina Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention* (Masse and Barnett, 2002), which began in 1972, has been subject to numerous studies. The various researches show positive cognitive and social results for the children (mostly disadvantaged) in the project, some of whom gained entry into four-year university programmes. The Masse and Barnett cost-benefit study of 2002 finds that every dollar invested in high quality, full-day, year-round preschool generated a four dollar return to the children, their families and all taxpayers. Among the study's findings:
  - Participants are projected to earn about \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who did not take part in the programme.
  - Mothers of children who were enrolled can also expect greater earnings - about \$133,000 more over their lifetimes.
  - School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special or remedial education.
  - The next generation (children of the children in the Abecedarian project) are projected to earn nearly \$48,000 more throughout their lifetimes.
- *The 2001 report issued by the National Economic Development and Law Center* in the US assesses the impact of the childcare industry on the economy of California. Apart from enabling parents to

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting conclusion of this paper is that as most of the returns on ECEC investments go back to the Federal authority, cantons and municipalities in Switzerland are reluctant to invest in ECEC services

work and earn higher incomes, the childcare industry contributed \$65 billion to the total value of goods and services produced in California - just over four times as much as the motion picture industry. Licensed childcare directly employed 123,000 people, including teaching and non-teaching staff, and maintained a further 86,000 jobs in transportation, publishing, manufacturing, construction, financial services, real estate and insurance (P. Moss, 2001).

- *The Canadian cost-benefit analysis* issued in 1998 by a team of economists at the University of Toronto estimates the costs and benefits of establishing a national quality childcare system for Canada (Cleveland and Krashinsky, 1998). Although the authors make conservative assumptions about the magnitude of positive externalities, they conclude that the substantial public investment envisaged would generate important net benefits for Canadian society.
- Labour market/taxation studies: The provision of education and care services has allowed most OECD countries in the last decades to maintain the labour market participation of women, with a corresponding widening of the tax base. In Norway, for example, the increase has been from about 50% female participation in 1972 to well over 80% in 1997 (Kornstad and Thorensen, Statistics Norway, 2002). In particular, women of 25 to 40 years have greatly increased their participation.

93. In sum, a strong economic rationale exists in favour of publicly funding early childhood services (ESO/Swedish Finance Ministry Report, 1999; Sen, 1999; Urrutia, 1999; Van der Gaag, 2002; Vandell and Wolfe, 2000; Verry, 2000). Significant employment can be generated immediately, tax revenues increased, and important savings made in later educational and social expenditure, if children – especially from at-risk backgrounds – are given appropriate developmental opportunities early enough in life. The consequences of not investing sufficiently in services can also be considered. If childcare is regarded as a private family responsibility, the result will be – in modern economies – the abandoning of the labour market by many women (often highly educated), an insufficient supply of services for those who need them, a fragmentation of services, a lack of equity vis-à-vis poorer families and overall poor quality of provision.

94. The OECD team estimated also that the ratio of benefits to costs in the present system is probably rather low, as services are linked more to labour market considerations than to child outcomes. A majority of the centres – characterised by small size, low training and low salary rates – can provide only minimal benefits to children in the domain either of child development or appropriate learning. By their nature, early childhood services are expensive as low child-staff ratios and qualified staff must be present to ensure quality. However, the educational, economic and labour market benefits can be high if structures and programmes ensure child and family outcomes.

95. The review team wondered whether current frameworks could deliver these benefits either for children, parents or communities. Because of high fees, it seemed doubtful that they were providing sufficient support to modest-income families in which mothers wished to take full-time, official employment. It seemed also to the team that whereas some services were linked to accountability measures and inspections, the majority of services operated under lax regulatory standards and low funding levels. These services provided little assurance that child development and learning were being enhanced. Experience from other countries would suggest that quality will not be raised – especially in a situation dominated by private providers - unless the government steers the system energetically, through policy initiatives and funding. This would require from the different ministries in Korea co-ordinated policies, and larger policy teams than are now in existence.

#### **4. Cross-ministry collaboration and service integration**

96. Similar to many other countries, Korean history has seen the emergence of different service types – kindergarten, child-care and *hakwons* - under the auspices of different ministries or spread across the public-private divide. Separate systems and cultures within the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the

Ministry of Education and Human Resources and the Ministry of Gender Equality result in strong vertical integration within each sector, but correspondingly low levels of inter-departmental co-operation and system planning across these sectors. The public-private divide is also evident, and raises many questions about standardisation and regulation of quality. A striking example is the separation in policy and practice of the *hakwon* sector from public education. Although *hakwons* make up a large portion of Korean education, they receive little finance or guidance to improve its reception of young children. The Korean MOE, which is supposed to supervise the operation of *hakwon* actively, does not do so in reality due, it is said, to the shortage of human resource. The review team wondered: Are there guidelines setting minimal standards for the reception of young children in these institutions? How are the subjects most highlighted in *hakwon* services - mathematics, art, music and languages – introduced to young children? How do the two sectors contribute to children's learning?

97. The review team is aware of recent efforts to co-ordinate across agencies, in particular through the Office of Government Policy Coordination (OGPC) in the Prime Minister's division. However, although kindergartens are working to include a greater care orientation and extended hours of operation, and child care centres are striving to provide programmes that enhance children's learning, little collaboration or dialogue between the responsible ministries was in evidence. At field level, the same situation applied, with little evidence of networking and common training initiatives between local services. It would seem reasonable that some consensus should now be reached on reformed service types that would allow integrated policies, common professional profiles and shared training.

98. To clarify these and other questions, the review team met numerous stakeholders in ECEC services in Korea, including members of the National Assembly, who had deep understanding of the political process surrounding the current Early Childhood Education Act and its movement towards registration with government. Given the tension between the care and education sectors and the lack of consideration of the *hakwon* sector in the debate, progress towards better co-ordination is slow, with many more incremental steps than some would wish. Clear agreement was evidenced concerning the implementation of free education for five year olds. As an agreed priority, it could rapidly be implemented if the political will existed. Extension of free educational provision to four year olds and further consideration of three year old provision is less clear as the care, education and *hakwon* sectors have different perspectives on how to proceed. There are indications that MOE support to 'education' for 3-4 yr olds from low-income families is being considered, but this falls short of the free morning education provision offered to 3- and 4-year olds in most OECD countries.

99. Meetings with association and non-government organisation members revealed much questioning about the shift in the leadership of child care services from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Gender Equality. Many felt positive about the change as it calls attention to the issue of equal opportunity for women in the labour market and in Korean society in general. However, other members pointed out that the proposed change does not make progress on the fundamental issue of cross-ministry collaboration and service integration at field level in the best interests of children. In sum, direct collaboration between the education and care sectors may be left unchanged. Others suggested that better progress might be made by enabling one ministry to administer birth to age three focused services and for all services for three to six year olds to become the province of education. Yet others expressed the opinion that kindergarten programmes should be integrated with elementary schools, and programmes for 0-4 year olds comprise the early childhood sector.

100. In this context of differing opinions and interest positions, it may be useful to review the trend in other OECD countries. In the last decade or so, there has been a move toward appointing one ministry to administer all services for children birth to age six. For example, New Zealand (1986), Spain (1992), Sweden (1996), and the United Kingdom (since 1998), have all opted for responsibility given to the Ministry of Education. In yet other countries, full responsibility has been given to other ministries:

Denmark and Finland to the Ministry of Social Affairs, and Norway to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The trend suggests that what is important is not *which* ministry takes responsibility, but that overall policy guidance by *one* ministry with a major focus on quality provision is a key to success. The integrated model avoids the separation between education and care, which condemns the care sector in many countries to be the poorer partner, with low recruitment standards, low salaries, under-resourced premises and weak pedagogical programmes. At the same time, integration prevents early education from limiting programmes to 'readiness for school' and from using methodologies that are more suitable for primary school children than for children who are still in a more experiential stage of reasoning and learning.

101. Many countries have devoted research time and collaboration to further develop the concept of service integration in order to understand better how services related to care, education, health, parenting and overall family support and well being might be most effectively provided (Kagan & Neville, 1993; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Bertram *et al.*, 2003). A recent five-country study led by Bertram & Pascal (2003) sets out a variety of insights on integrated ECEC services, including their theoretical justification, establishment, composition, funding, quality management leadership and staff development. In that project, integrated ECEC services are described as follows:

*...the term 'integration' has recently begun to be used in several countries to describe modes of joining together the disparate state, voluntary and private providers of services to address the needs of young children and families in a more efficient, effective or economic way. ...Providers from different services (education, care, health) can be encouraged to integrate, that is to see how their individual services can be holistically organised to more completely meet family needs by emphasising collaboration rather than the competition of their services. Thus, providers from different sectors collaborate to offer integrated 'menus' of services from which families can choose. These collaborators may be providing education, care, or health services, adult education and parental support or indeed many other services. (Bertram, Pascal *et al.*, 2003, pp.8-9).*

## **5. Access and equity**

102. At first view, there seems to be a reasonable degree of provision and parent choice in Korea across the public service, private providers and *hakwons*, but usage patterns and the gaps in provision do not support such a conclusion. According to the *Korean Background Report* (2003), Korea has one of the lowest *public* provision rates among OECD countries. It reports (p. 39) access figures of 42.8% for three year olds, 57.8% for four year olds, and 68.7% for five year olds in attendance in recognised kindergarten or child care facilities.

**Table 4. Percentage of children enrolled in early childhood services in selected OECD countries**

	<b>% COVERAGE FOR 3-6 YEARS</b>	<b>% COVERAGE FOR 0-3 YEARS</b>	<b>YEAR OF DATA VALIDITY</b>
France	99	29	1998
Netherlands	98	(6)	1998
Belgium	97	30	2000
Italy	95	6	1998
Denmark	91	64	1998
Spain	84	5	1998
Sweden	80	48	1999
Norway	80	40	2000
United Kingdom	(79)	(34)	1997
Germany	78	10	1998
Portugal	75	2	2000
Austria	68	4	1998
Finland	66	22	2000
<b>Korea</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2002</b>
Ireland	56	(38)	2000
Greece	46	3	1999

Source: OECD *Employment Outlook 2001*. Brackets indicate data inaccuracies. Figures were provided by national sources, including the Korean figures from the *Korean Background Report*, 2003.

103. No doubt, if *hakwon* enrolments were added, enrolment figures for 3-6 year old children in Korea would improve, but in present circumstances, *hakwons* have only minimal public regulation and are not obliged to follow quality standards in matters concerning the reception and holistic development of young children. Because of the doubtful nature of at least some of this provision, it seems clear that many Korean parents do not have reasonable and affordable opportunities to choose an ECEC provider who meets family need in terms of hours of operation, affordability in terms of fees and quality in terms of the scope and nature of the curriculum provided.

#### *Access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds*

104. In an open education market, strongly dependent upon specific private fee-paying services, it is rarely possible to secure access, affordability and quality for the children of low-income families (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003; Kamerman, Neuman, Waldfogel & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These families face in addition the 'poverty trap' where income earned by labour is extremely low, and yet may result in loss of targeted (means-tested) government benefits surrounding ECEC service access. Among these families are:

*The families that are usually viewed as being at increased risk for poverty, dysfunction and disadvantage include: lone parent families with children, especially those headed by single, unmarried women and teenage mothers; unemployed parents, especially those experiencing long term (more than one year) unemployment; families with only one wage earner, and that a low earner, and large families (those with three or more children). (Kamerman, et al., 2003, p.17)*

105. Access to ECEC services for these groups depends essentially on the availability of free/low-cost publicly funded services. However, the possibility of accessing services may also be affected by the local

mix of services surrounding a low-income family. Kamerman *et al.* (2003) highlight policies that make a difference to mother and child outcomes, at least in the American context. In addition to early childhood services, income transfers and maternal earnings, the authors highlight the importance of policies that promote: employment (particularly maternal employment); parental leave, and policies that help prevent teenage pregnancy and parenting. Earlier and more sustained early childhood services help to ameliorate disadvantage and enhance child outcomes, particularly for families considered 'at risk'.

106. The review team noted the efforts of the Korean government to support low-income families, and recognises that these efforts are a step toward addressing the inequities faced by children in Korean society. Families with very low income are targeted in Korea for funding support so they can take part in child care services that would otherwise be outside their capacity to purchase. The *Korean Background Report* (2003, p.69) states that children in families who meet criteria for consideration under the Livelihood Protection Law, namely very poor families, single parent families and welfare institution children, and families deemed to be low-income (<1,250,000won/month US\$1,065; €914) are assisted to access services.

*As of 2002, the government supported childcare fees for 154,560 children, 20.1% of a total of 770,029 enrolled children. The percentage of support for 0-2 year olds is 15.5% (27,439 out of 177,544 children), and that for 3-5 year olds is 19.1% (112,925 out of 592,475 children). Out of 154,560 children supported by the government, 51,016 children (33%) of the livelihood protection families are exempted totally while 103,554 children (67%) of low income families are exempted from 40% of their childcare fees. (p.69)*

#### *Children with special needs*

107. From our brief description of special needs education in Chapter 3, it seems the children with serious organic handicaps (in OECD terminology, Category A children) are screened and well looked after in Korea's special schools. Children without organic handicaps but with special needs (Category B, or children with learning or behavioural difficulties that are not linked to organic causes) are, in principle, included in mainstream services, but full data concerning the number and range of children of such children across ECEC services was not available to the OECD team. The *Korean Background Report* provides a figure of about 5000 special needs children receiving support either in special schools or inclusive services, but this figure is probably far below the actual number of children who need support. Low coverage of special needs children is not surprising in a system dominated by private providers, who in general, have little interest in accepting such children. Estimated percentage coverage figures (through special funding) across basic education in the Netherlands and Korea give the following picture:

**Table 5. Percentage of children supported for special needs in the Netherlands and Korea<sup>5</sup>**

	Category A	Category B	Category C
Korea	0.45%	0.03%	14%
Netherlands	0.93%	0.28%	19%

Category C children are those from disadvantaged or second language backgrounds. Compared to about 14% of Korean five-year olds who receive a free educational place either in a kindergarten or a childcare service, over 19% of the basic schools in the Netherlands receive special funding to further assist socially disadvantaged children. This funding is in addition to the pre-school service provided free for all Dutch children from the age of four years, and to at-risk children from the age of three.

## 6. Quality issues

### *Structural aspects of quality*

108. Structural aspects of quality such as adequate funding, staff qualifications, training, group size and curriculum implementation have been noted in our description of the Korean ECEC system in Chapter 3. These variables combine to shape the child's experience in the childcare centre or kindergarten. Each has an important impact on the quality of the developmental experience offered to children in early childhood centres. The reality of many children spending perhaps twelve hours per day, six days per week for five years in early services before entering school is a reminder to pay heed to such quantifiable proxies of quality. Roughly calculated, it can be said that many Korean children will spend some 17,000 hours in child care/kindergarten, before going on to spend perhaps 14,500 hours in elementary and secondary school combined. We make this comparison to stress the importance of the quality of daily experience children should have in child care settings.

109. Questions were raised during the course of our visit on each of the variables mentioned above. We were informed that outside the public kindergarten system, state investment in young children is low; staff qualifications are uncertain; training – as we shall discuss below – is not always adequate; group size is high, and regulations concerning personnel, space and the implementation of the curriculum are not always applied. In sum, although one can understand the urgency in the late 90s to increase the number of service providers, the move towards notification instead of accreditation at that point has not assisted the quality of programmes offered to children in the childcare sector in Korea. Even if the measure facilitated the growth in services during the 1990s, the need for firmer quality assurance mechanisms is now integral to Korea's expressed commitment to quality improvement. The challenge will not be easy as the

<sup>5</sup> Children with special educational needs may be divided into three categories:

**Category A** are children with organic disabilities - such as blind and partially sighted, deaf and partially hearing, severe and profound mental handicap, multiple handicaps. These are conditions that affect students from all social classes and occupations, and are considered in medical terms to be disorders attributable to *organic* pathologies, that is, in relation to sensory, motor or neurological defects. Countries normally fund in this category, 5-10% of the school populations.

**Category B** are children who have difficulties in learning which do not appear to be directly or primarily attributable to factors which would lead to categorisation as 'A' or 'C'. For instance, students with benign learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia...) and traumatised children are classified here. They constitute a small percentage.

**Category C** are children whose educational need arises primarily from socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic factors. There is present some form of background, generally considered to be a disadvantaged, for which education seeks to compensate. Countries may fund in this category 5-30% of the school population.

conceptual division of early childhood services in Korea into early education for the older ones and childcare for the younger children perpetuates a false dichotomy in programming and training – with public early education tending to have strong funding, a clear sense of programming, quality control and adequately trained teachers, while private schools and childcare (which cater for the vast majority of children) can often be characterised by loose programming, insufficient regulation and lowly paid staff.

**Box 5. Han-Mi Kindergarten in Il-San - A private Reggio Emilia kindergarten**

The Han-Mi Kindergarten demonstrates that a private kindergarten can reach high quality levels, if it is well-directed and has a sound pedagogical vision for the children. The centre caters for 275 children aged between 3 and 5 years, in a suburban setting outside Seoul. The families are from middle and lower-middle income bands. Parents fund the programme entirely through fees, as no government subsidy is available for a private kindergarten.

A feature of this centre is that it applies the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach. The goal is not to adopt a foreign programme – the centre follows the National Curriculum – but to follow the Reggio Emilia principles of constructive education, staff reflection and documentation to provide a programme of high quality. In sum, children are considered to best construct their knowledge in voluntary groups supported by trained adults; staff work in teams and continually reflect together about what they do and why; and the work of children and the centre is continually documented, with a strong emphasis on the production of children. Documentation indicates not just what happened and what was done but focuses on the value and meaning of this work to the children. "We are showing a philosophy", the staff informed us, "of making children visible, not just keeping records of what happened" In this way, the centre has been able to move beyond a dominant paradigm in Korean centres, expressed as "giving recipe type lessons to passive children based on set topics".

A visit to the classroom found children absorbed in activities, with a high level of social and language interaction. Children were free to form small groups which would decide their centre of interest, seek teacher direction and support, or spend time alone in thought or deep concentration on a personal task. Although a Reggio Emilia style programme, the team noticed in the classrooms more Korean artefacts and culture than in many other centres. As well as the customary Reggio Emilia artistic and communication equipment, the environment was rich in natural materials that were available for selection by the children. In the classrooms, laughter and physical movement were evident, and regarded as natural activities of childhood.

Recognising that parents want the best for their children, staff emphasise parent participation and continually explain to parents what is being attempted and why. Monthly parent meetings are held in all classes to show specifically the educational value of the work in progress and to illustrate the children's ways of thinking. This has paid off handsomely in the past few years with parents becoming convinced of the benefits of a constructivist approach to learning. In a country focused on academic achievement, this has been no small achievement.

The teachers of this centre have become a real resource for the district. They organise mini-conferences for other teachers, showing how they develop programmes in this kindergarten. A collaborative of 65 teachers now take part and visit each other's centres. It is acknowledged that the children in this centre have transformed themselves from passive observers to active participants in their own learning. The director commented: "It takes two months to change children's attitudes from passive observer to active participant, and two years to change the teacher's." With funding from the state, it is clear that such a centre could become an important in-service training centre for the district.

The kindergarten has a home page and waiting lists exist for places both in the school and on staff. The majority of staff (16/22) have four-year university qualifications. The school engages teachers trained in science/computing as well as gymnastics specialist staff. Although ambivalent at the beginning, parents are now confident that the Reggio Emilia approach can help their children to fit into school later. They want their children to be active and creative, and yet get high scores in math and reading. The Director asserts the nearby elementary school is adapting to the kindergarten programme. Teachers are pleased that children have learned to take initiative, and have lots of questions and ideas. In the past, this was viewed as a problem but now is seen to be an asset.

*Issues in pre-service staff training*

110. A strong indicator of quality in early childhood services in all countries is the level of staff training. The review team met in Korea teacher educators and professional association leaders who outlined the pre-service and in-service education options for staff in ECEC services. Real progress has been made by regulations that require that teaching staff in contact with children should have four-year or

two-year early childhood qualifications. However, the initial training encountered by many ECEC professionals seems sector bound, and supports the gap between care and education. Different levels of entrance and exit qualification exist for kindergarten and child care diplomas, and different approaches to the conduct of programmes are very evident. Courses seem overly academic, with insufficient time given to the mastery of practical-aesthetic skills, training in methodologies and self-evaluation techniques, or reflection on individual and group practice. The OECD team was informed that efforts are already being made to redress these problems.

#### *Issues in in-service training*

111. Countries attempting to address the issue of integrating their care and education sectors seek to build common professional development programmes in order to enable the different groups and professionals to come together. For example, in Finland the concept of 'verticality' is in place whereby educators from different levels in the overall system come together for in-service development, thereby enabling cross-fertilisation of ideas across the different parts of a system.

112. The review team noted that in Korea, improved in-service assistance and integration of staff working with infants and toddlers in family day care settings was needed. Although they offer an important service for children in the birth-to-two age range, staff receive little pedagogical support and have become quite isolated from other ECEC service sector activities. Frequently, they are left to solve serious issues on their own, such as management of child sickness in the event of parents being unable to get leave from their workplaces. With regard to programming for children, only limited pedagogical advice is available to the family day carers and their staff. The review team considered that professional development or further training as well as regular, accessible pedagogical advice would be more beneficial in family day care services than the limited inspection system in place.

#### *Curriculum and pedagogy*

113. As noted in a previous section, many teachers and parents question the quality of the experience offered to children in Korean early childhood services. In particular, doubts were expressed concerning the emphasis on children's academic performance (literacy and numeracy especially) and with regard to over-restrictive group socialisation. Early childhood professionals referred to recent international research that showed the negative effects of pressuring very young children through narrowly focused academic programmes at a time in the child's developmental cycle when other pedagogical strategies are better suited to progress (Hyson, 2003; Janisch, 2003; Bertram & Pascal, 2002).

114. Early childhood is a privileged moment to encourage imagination, creativity and problem-solving ability – skills that are indispensable for an innovative labour force that must work in complex ways, and find new directions both as individuals and as group members. On this basis, Singapore, for example, is investing in a major arts and creativity initiative for young children and aims to enhance the place of creativity in education (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000). In fact, there is a growing focus in many countries on how young children learn, and how their voyage of self-discovery and exploration of culture can be supported by practical-aesthetic skills in early childhood under the guidance of trained teachers, e.g. through music, rhythm, dance, mime, drama, arts, painting, poetry, puppetry, handcrafts, movement/gymnastics, sports, and gross motor development... Immersion in self-directed experiential activities has in turn been linked to later strong outcomes in literacy and numeracy (Wright, 2003; International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive, 2000).

115. The review team witnessed many fine examples of play-based programmes being enacted in Korea, many inspired by the well-designed *National Kindergarten Curriculum* (1999). The *Curriculum* clearly sets the scene for rich early learning experiences. However, in many centres claiming to follow the

*Curriculum*, the team encountered pre-set activities and colouring sheets, apparently downloaded from web-sites. Such an approach privileges teacher choice and affords undue attention to pre-determined cognitive activities, to the detriment of child agency and choice. Likewise in several childcare centres that the team visited, thematic choice, procedures and activities were generally based on teacher decision to the exclusion of children's experiences and interests.

### *Regulations, inspection and quality assurance*

116. Already in Chapter 3, we have noted the sound regulatory frameworks that exist for both the kindergarten and the childcare sectors. Detailed regulations are in place in both sectors to guide providers with regard to health issues, location, space, playgrounds, equipment, staffing, programming, etc. However, only in the public kindergarten systems were inspection and quality assurance mechanisms highly visible, to ensure that the spirit of the regulations should be respected. Even there, when kindergartens were under the auspice of a school principal and situated in an elementary school, we were informed that inspectors paid much less attention to the kindergarten classes. The team also heard criticism of the bureaucratic burthen placed on centres to comply with regulations, e.g. the production of daily lesson plans, pupil reports etc., but it is generally recognised that such regulations can also promote better planning and accountability. Assessment and action records also provide an agenda for discussion between the teachers and the pedagogical inspectors. However, if feedback mechanisms at the local service level are limited to accounts of daily schedules by headmistress or director, then vital information for the system and self-reflection by staff may be overlooked. Some means of aggregating such data needs to be found, based firmly on child outcomes, so as to provide benchmarks for centres and local authorities, and encourage them to engage in ongoing assessment and improvement.

117. According to all our interlocutors, the MOE gives insufficient means to private kindergartens to reach the standards of quality set by the regulations, and provides no support at all to *hakwons*. At present, in the private sector, parent choice must primarily be made on the basis of location, fee levels and physical premises, although anecdotal information about programme quality and outcomes may be obtained from other users.

118. In the childcare sector, it is generally acknowledged that the change from a licensing process to a notification only requirement for owners in 1997 has affected quality negatively. Inspection and quality assurance measures are much less apparent in child care facilities than in the public kindergarten inspection system. The districts employ officials to inspect centres, but the focus of inspection seems primarily on the environment, health and safety conditions. The Ministry of Health and Welfare has recently proposed a form of accreditation system for child care provision to be set in place, commencing 2003. This system is, as yet, little described or available for public discussion.

119. In terms of overall quality assurance and inspection processes, the review team noted that *outcomes* for children and families and outcomes from certain types of services were rarely made explicit. The monitoring and evaluation systems in both sectors focus on environments, curriculum inputs and teacher plans to a far greater extent than they attend to outcomes, whether these be child, curriculum or other service outcomes. Although there are limitations to an outcomes based approach to human service provision, some focus on achieving basic goals can assist services to gather evidence that describes or illustrates targeted achievements and outcomes.

## **7. Research and data collection**

120. In general, it may be said that research initiatives and directions that are initiated by the government departments in Korea are conceived separately within the relevant departments. Mechanisms for departmental officials in particular sectors to consider key issues that involve other departments seem

limited, although at the national level, the review team noted the good efforts made by the Conference of Education and Human Resources Development (see the *Korean Background Report*, 2003, p.47) to coordinate policy concerns and related research. Although the initiative was conceived from a framework focused on education, representation from both the Ministry of Gender Equality and the Ministry of Health and Welfare has been legally instituted, and a common *Steering Committee for the Development of Early Childhood Education and Childcare* established. Some collaborative policy research has been undertaken and is ongoing since March 2003.

121. The work of the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHSA) and the Korea Women's Development Institute (KWDI) includes research on early childhood education and child care. Research conducted by these agencies is critical to advancement of ECEC policy and quality service provision in Korea. Discussions with ministry officials indicated, however, low levels of resources being directed toward early childhood education and child research. In particular, the team noted the low numbers of professionals in the research institutions actually involved in early childhood research. Moreover, the challenge of co-ordinating research efforts *across* ECEC is raised also at agency level. The current structures for generating research priorities and setting research programmes within agencies appear to inhibit the achievement of cross-sectoral research in an inter-disciplinary field such as ECEC.

122. In discussion with department officials, the review team learned that topics for research are normally devised by senior departmental officials based on issues being addressed at the time. Whether such topics link regularly with content necessary for informed policy making in the early childhood field, e.g. planning, coordination, quality monitoring is difficult for us to judge. We were informed of research on outputs – the numbers of children in the different services, the daily duration of a service – but rarely about outcomes for children, that is, the impact of services on school readiness or on children's long-term life chances. Nor were outcomes for parents mentioned. Research focusing on making clear the benefits or impact of certain programmes over others in any comparative sense was also considered highly controversial. Moreover, dissemination of the results of research is often limited to the agencies to which the work is contracted.

123. The role of academics in the research agenda is also critical. The review team learned from discussions, however, that academics primarily follow their own research interests and work individually to advance knowledge in their specific fields. What funding sources and grant schemes outside individual university budgets are available to guide research toward informing policy was not clear. This seems a weakness in the organisation of research, as a research programme on major policy issues, such as the training system or the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, is a key toward constructing a more coherent system to meet the needs of children and families.

124. The review team had insufficient time to obtain a full picture of the data and information routinely collected by the various government ministries and agencies connected with ECEC services. The overriding impression received was that Korea has attended primarily to tracking access, but has not focussed data collection to inform policy. Again, the issue of co-ordinating data sets across ministries arose. Making optimum use of routine information systems and linking data sets held by other ministries could provide a more coordinated picture across services and enhance research and analytic capacities. Clearly, matters of ethics and confidentiality come into play when co-ordinating ministry data sets with related data from other ministries, but the example of other countries, e.g. Flanders, shows that the task is not impossible. Strategic use of available data could generate real gains in knowledge about services, efficiency in systems and directions necessary for improvement.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

125. Early childhood education and care enjoys a high profile in Korea. In all the ministries interviewed and at the National Assembly, real concern was expressed to the review team about the need to strengthen the system and provide access to growing numbers of children. The government departments that have oversight of ECEC services regularly increase their budgets, reflecting the growth of ECEC service provision and capacity over recent years.<sup>6</sup> In parallel, staff working in centres generally demonstrated high personal commitment and concern for the overall development of children. The numerous associations, non-governmental organisations and researchers in institutes and universities show dedication and advocacy, and are clearly focused on the advancement and support of young children. The ability of some providers in the private sector to organise high quality services is also evident, although funding of ECEC programmes rests primarily with parents.

126. At the same time, the review team identified several issues which, from our perspective, require additional policy attention from the ministries to ensure better coherency and quality in Korean early childhood. These issues, outlined in Chapter 4, are:

- Views of young children;
- Views of women's roles and early childhood services;
- Linking ECEC funding with downstream economic, labour market and educational outcomes;
- Co-ordination of care, education and *hakwon* services;
- Improved access and equity;
- Quality issues;
- Co-ordinated research and data collection focussed on policy and quality issues

Based on the above discussions, readings and site visits, we propose the following eight policy suggestions for the consideration of the key ministry officials, policy makers and other stakeholders involved in ECEC in Korea:

### 1. Place the best interests of young children at the centre

127. In our survey of views of children in Korea, a number of points were raised. In summary, early childhood services have developed in Korea primarily as a response to labour market concerns. This is a legitimate – and usual - inspiration for new services, but there comes a moment when it is necessary for a country to ask: Can we attain high quality in the services we propose? The OECD team acknowledges the progress made over the years in Korea to improve quality, such as four-year tertiary training for teachers, or the work achieved on the National Curriculum.

128. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that the great majority of young Korean children have access only to private services. Many of these arrangements are small, over-crowded, regulated at a minimal level and their pedagogical quality is doubtful. In general, the private kindergarten sector is

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<sup>6</sup> Government support to date has been targeted mainly toward enrolling five-year olds and supporting families with low levels of income.

seriously under-funded, and despite growing budgets allocated to childcare, funding per child is far lower than the allocation per child (provided indirectly through the operational grant) in the public kindergarten sector. As a result the public kindergarten sector can maintain higher quality levels and better pedagogical standards, but at the moment, it is stagnant and seems unable to expand its services significantly. In parallel, the conception of early education as a domain apart encourages parents and providers to see it primarily as a preparation for school. Parents referred frequently to the pressure they felt to send young children to unsupervised *hakwons*, there to learn academic subject matter as early and intensively as possible.

129. In this context, much greater emphasis needs to be placed – as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child proposes – on the participation rights and needs of young children. It would be helpful if more research were undertaken and communicated within the ministries and to parents concerning *an acceptable developmental profile* for young children in keeping with Korean cultural values. If it is acknowledged that positive self-image and the development of creativity and imagination are important pedagogical goals when children are young, then programmes in early childhood centres need to adopt a more open framework approach to child learning than at present. This will require a thorough re-training of early years teachers to move away from the dominant paradigm of *teaching*,<sup>7</sup> and instead, to conduct classrooms where children can take initiatives and use language about matters that are of interest to them. The work accomplished in the Reggio Emilia centre in Il-San is instructive in this regard.

## **2. Focus on a family-friendly society sustained by law and public policy**

130. By family-friendly, we mean that national policies and workplace practices should respect the important role of families in the economy and society, and value the work of raising children. In practice, this requires that families should have time to foster children's growth and development. In the past, women ensured these tasks, and even today – despite the fact that many mothers are working – the essential burthen falls on them. However, the modern labour context limits their ability to maintain the strong childrearing traditions characteristic of Korean culture and history. Yet, there can be no going back to historical divisions of labour. The pressure to form dual-income families comes not only from the personal choice of women but also because our modern service and knowledge economies need the labour of women, who are increasingly better educated than men. The conclusion reached by a growing number of OECD countries is that family-friendly strategies, *sustained by law and public policy*, are necessary in contemporary economies to balance equal opportunity for women and parental time with children.

131. We have already underlined the tremendous progress made in gender equality issues in Korea in the last decade. However, legal and practical supports for women with young children are still relatively weak.<sup>8</sup> Many signs point to ambiguities about women's access to the labour force, e.g. high drop-out rates of young women from the labour market once they have their first or second child; the large number of women in part-time or irregular work; the low participation of older female cohorts... The team was also informed that *irregular* female work is increasing because of the preference of businesses to hire labour without the responsibility of paying social charges. In addition, the responsibility of providing back-up services to women to continue in work – in particular, the assurance of affordable early childhood services – is left to private, for-profit providers.

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<sup>7</sup> Some teaching and instruction is, of course, necessary and useful, but the dominant paradigm of whole-class teaching or ongoing circle time is unsuitable for very young children.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however that Korea has had a powerful Commission on the Status of Women for many years, and a fully-fledged Ministry of Gender Equality since 2001. In addition, ministries such as Labour, Administration and Home Affairs have important departments dealing with equality and the status of women.

132. The OECD suggests that government may wish to re-examine this complex field. The whole question of irregular versus official work status needs to be resolved, as Korean women may be suffering discrimination with respect to the recognition of their work, on which depends access to parental leave and other social benefits. Workplace culture and practice also needs to be reviewed against the needs of families with young children. The OECD team was informed that there is little flexibility in work practices at those moments critical for family life, e.g. around the birth of a baby, when mothers are nursing, when a child is ill. If this is the case, then perhaps the government as a major employer of women may wish to give a lead, both through improved policy-making for the whole business sector and through the introduction of innovative work practices in the public sector, and especially in the ministries. Most of the major industrial countries have been able to introduce successfully parental leave schemes that guarantee a sufficient bonding time for mother and baby; a decent parental leave remuneration based on previous salary; the retention of employment status for nursing mothers, and extensive family-friendly practices at work. Canada has been the most recent country to introduce a year-long parental leave, based on research on the developmental needs of infants, and on analyses comparing the costs of providing parental leave as against the costs of building crèche services for infants.<sup>9</sup>

133. Access to affordable early childhood services for their children is also a challenge for many women, whether unemployed or occupying low- and modestly paid jobs. Employment statistics show that the participation of Korean women in the labour market is still relatively low, and that their participation curve further sags during the child-bearing years from 25-34 years. Yet, women (and their families) gain greatly, both at a personal and a professional level, from being in employment. Official work status enables women to take their rightful place in society, to contribute to the national economy, to augment family budgets for the good of children, and to build up independent pension benefits for their later years. The state too benefits from women's work through having a more flexible labour market, a broader tax base, and a marked improvement in the employment-dependency ratio. The time may therefore be ripe in Korea to consider greater investment in facilities for young children and in the status of women.

### **3. Increase public funding and steering, and incorporate the quality private providers**

134. Statistical data collected by the OECD (see Table 3 above *Expenditure on educational institutions per student, 2000*) show that Korean public investment levels for young children are low: less than half that of the OECD mean, and only about one-third of the investment made in tertiary level students. Yet, as we have shown in Chapter 4, the rationale for investing in early childhood services is particularly strong, as when they are properly organised, these services can deliver a fair start for all children, appropriate preparation for school, support for working women and families, a broader tax-base for the state... The consequences of not investing sufficiently in services can also be considered. If early years services are regarded as a private family responsibility and supply left to the market, the result will be – in modern economies – a fragmentation of service types and quality, an insufficient supply of services in those areas where parents have difficulties in paying market prices; a continual movement of teachers from one service to another; and poor quality of provision. Where uncertainty exists, many women (often highly educated) will prefer to leave the labour market to look after their own children.

135. In the face of this evidence, the low-cost solution adopted by Korea may not be wise in the long-term. It is true that expenditure is increasing steadily, that for example, many public kindergartens are now offering a full-day service. At the same time, it is also true that the great expansion of facilities during the 90s has now slowed down, and few new *public* services are being built, especially in the education sector.

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<sup>9</sup> There is also an economic calculation involved. Parental leave schemes based on government, employer and employee contributions seem to cost less than the high operational costs of infant services in which child-staff ratios of three or four infants per nurse must be respected. In addition, the parental leave scheme is preferred by most families.

All five-year olds still do not have free pre-school places, a feature that makes Korea stand out from OECD partner countries where free education from the age of three years is increasingly the norm.<sup>10</sup> Stakeholders who met the team indicated that steps towards the establishment of new public sector facilities are encountered with opposition by private sector operators who may have invested significantly in a particular locality.

136. Experience shows that opposition to public services in the early childhood field are common in many countries – especially among the small private providers - but experience also shows that without public financing and steering, the coverage and quality of services will inevitably suffer. Political leadership and steering through legal and financial instruments is essential to surmount difficulties. Advocacy for the best interests of children needs to be reinforced, and analyses undertaken as to what kind of market and funding share might be targeted by government for the various groups.

137. In the present context, it seemed urgent also to the OECD team that certain private forms of early childhood provision should be brought within the public network and funding stream. The auspices of a service matters little to the children or families who use it, as long as they receive a quality service at an affordable price. We encourage the Korean authorities to find means of subsidising the capital and operational expenses of the quality private providers, especially NGOs and non-profits which work in localities that lack services. Again, support to high quality providers who are able to offer exemplary in-service training for other providers in a district would seem not only fair but also a question of good sense. We would recommend also subsidisation of teacher's salaries, but within the perspective of generating a coherent professional profile for the field, straddling both education and care. In general, conditions for government subsidies should be stringent, with the purpose of reaching certain quality benchmarks in return, e.g. quality guaranteed in centres that join the state network, affordability for families in centres where teaching staff is paid by the state; the requirement for centres receiving subsidies to engage in training, limitation on the number of services any one provider can own... Licensing regulations relevant to the Korean situation can be found in several other OECD countries.

138. The review team welcomes current expenditure by government to support young children from poorer families and to provide them with targeted fee relief. We feel also that this effort could be further reinforced by multi- and cross-agency initiatives on behalf of disadvantaged families. Free access to early childhood services cannot by itself address structural poverty, income inequality, or the limited access of poor families to what is primarily a private system of services. In this respect, we were encouraged to hear that integration work may link in the future practitioner training to more generalised child development, family support and community health aims.

139. We encourage also more active partnerships with employers and the private sector so as to spread the burthen of expenditure on young children across society, and not to have it rest alone on parent fees and government funding. Among initiatives seen in other countries to share expenditure across the public and private sectors are: requiring the corporate and business sectors to provide crèches or to purchase childcare places in accredited centres for the young children of their employees; granting powers to local authorities to raise taxes, which are devoted to supplementing the State allocation for health, social welfare and early education services. In Belgium and Italy, a significant part (about 1%) of social security and/or corporate tax is channelled toward childcare. In Finland, the alcohol tax has been used for many years to subvention early childhood services, in particular, out-of-school care. In the USA, grants from the large corporations toward early childhood services are common, as tax concessions can be granted by the public authorities for large donations. State lottery proceeds are also used to fund early childhood services and to provide subventions to needy third-level students wishing to enter college.

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<sup>10</sup> *Free* is not the essential concept but the principles of universality and equal access, that is, that all children and families have access – on an equitable basis - to affordable, high-quality services.

#### **4. Rationalise the government management of early childhood services**

140. A number of impasses exist that inhibit the development of a coherent early childhood system for Korean children and families, viz. the parallel but unequal paths of childcare and early education, the duplication of policy and management services in both areas; the existence of parallel training and research streams; the possibility for private providers and *hakwons* – the majority providers – to remain outside public control, except for basic health, safety and input features... Currently, however, a co-ordinated response to these issues from the line ministries has been noticeably absent.

141. The OECD team would encourage the Office of Government Policy Co-ordination to continue its efforts to bring the line ministries together to resolve these issues, or else to nominate one agency to take charge of all early childhood services. Integration of services under one lead agency could be a source of real savings, and would impose a unity of policy-making and service provision that the system now lacks. As discussed in Chapter 4, proposals for a division of responsibilities along age or function lines should be treated with some care, e.g. the proposal to allow one ministry to take charge of children up to three years, and the Ministry of Education to take charge of children aged 3-6 years. This division of responsibilities according to age has led in many countries to the care sector becoming the poorer partner, with low recruitment standards, low salaries, under-resourced premises and weak pedagogical programmes. In parallel, early education may become dominated by a ‘readiness for school’ approach, using methodologies that are more suitable for primary school children than for children who are still at a more experiential stage in their reasoning and learning. Too narrow a vision, dominated by any one group – whether “educational”, “health-oriented” or “play group” – can lead to inappropriate services for the youngest children. On the contrary, an active and independent policy and programming group situated in one ministry can effectively organise services, bring unity of vision to care and education, establish a strong partnership with the primary education system and other ministries, and include parent and local community perspectives on early childhood services. Sweden and Finland are good examples in this regard.

#### **5. End the conceptual and training rift between education and care**

142. The situation of young children in Korea – and their families – is greatly complicated by the standoff between early education and care sectors. Government officials, researchers and practitioners are deeply divided, and public arguments about the merits of kindergarten versus childcare, reform versus the status quo; public versus private are commonplace. This is all part of the democratic process, but it also leads inevitably to confusion and lack of objectivity. The successive OECD reviews have shown that it makes little theoretical or practical sense to divide early care from early education. In fact, when this dichotomy is reflected back into the practical organisation of services, it generally carries negative consequences for the under-3s, who despite the importance of their developmental stage receive inferior services.

143. The conceptual divide also impacts strongly on the status and training of staff, especially of the childcare professionals. In full employment economies - as for example Australia, USA or UK in the past decade – low qualifications lead inevitably to high turnover among childcare personnel, a phenomenon that renders system management difficult and is unhelpful for the development of young children. The cycle is intensified because of long working hours in childcare, and the low pay and qualifications of many of the staff. For early childhood education and care to be attractive to potential candidates, it must be viewed as a viable profession, with opportunities for salary and career advancement.

144. That such problems are not unknown in Korea is evident. Low staff training and limited career advancement is becoming a challenge especially in the care sector where teacher retention levels and turnover are becoming critical problems. As in other countries, it is possible to address the situation

through creating articulation agreements across training courses, which, for example, could help the two-year diploma graduates to eventually graduate to four-year teacher status through their work-experience and ongoing credit work at a certified institute. A reform in this direction would help provide opportunities to improve the overall qualifications of those who work directly with children. Similarly, some mechanism is needed to enable family day care providers and staff to receive in-service training that could be applied to degree completion.

145. However, underlying the present vulnerable situation of the majority of staff in Korean centres is the abandonment of much of the sector to market conditions. Profits are made essentially by raising parental fees and imposing long hours and low salaries on young childcare teachers. The context inevitably places pressure on families with modest incomes, and lowers the quality of services provided to young children. A move from the state to subsidise teacher salaries could do much to ease the situation. It would also be an opportunity for the state to negotiate certain conditions with providers, e.g. an obligation on centres to undertake annual project formulation, and engage in team evaluation and in-service training.

146. How the Korean authorities can put an end to what is becoming a sterile debate is outside the competence of the OECD review team. Many practical issues are involved, including low public investment in young children, the presence of a large private sector which has been allowed to operate outside government financing and control, the legitimate rights of small business owners, convenience and affordability for parents, the prevailing culture of education competition... These dilemmas are not unknown in other countries, especially where public responsibility for the early childhood field is a relatively new phenomenon. Government responses have generally taken the road of gradual reform, through the rationalisation of management at central level and thereafter, the steering of the system toward national goals through judicious funding and standard setting. However, the exact parameters of reform change from country to country, and can only be judged correctly at this level.

## **6. Further democratise the system through decentralisation and parent participation**

147. In the OECD countries, in circumstances where co-ordination is weak at central level, a great deal of co-operation and integration can often exist at local government level. In fact, the integration of early childhood services has come frequently from the local level, that is, from communities that cannot afford the luxury of parallel services and double administrations. We encourage the Korean authorities to explore good practice in this field – both in Korea and abroad – and to introduce measures to strengthen local initiative and control, e.g. local educational contracts, to support co-ordination and information exchange across childcare, kindergarten and *hakwon* networks in each community; a common training agency in each district; shared local inspection and monitoring...

148. The *Korean Background Report* underlines the importance – both legally and in practice – of parents in rearing their children, and notes that in order to maximise the effects of early childhood education and care, “kindergartens need to share knowledge and skills on children’s development with parents”. This implies a two-way process of knowledge and information between parents and teachers. The organisation of this process will seek:

- To engage parents in the life and organisation of the centre;
- To promote positive attitudes toward active and creative learning;
- To foster continuity between children’s learning in the centre and learning at home, that is, to guide parents about what early learning is and to show the importance of time spent informally with children, and of parental talking and reading to children;
- To provide parents with information and referrals to other services, especially of mothers to the adult education and training services;

- To support parent and community involvement.

149. The *Background Report* points to a number of practical difficulties in outreach to parents in the Korean context. The rewards, however, are worth the effort. Not only are centres and the children they serve much helped by parent engagement, but research also suggests that if good attitudes to education and parental responsibility for young children are supported in the critical period when children are young, then these attitudes tend to remain during the child's further schooling.

## **7. Raise the quality of all programmes, including in the *hakwons***

150. As outlined in Chapter 4, certain structural elements of quality – training and qualifications of staff and their access to on-going professional development; staff status and salary scales; child-staff ratios, programme hours; curriculum; space, resources and equipment - are all elements in the provision of quality services. It seems clear that in Korea, these elements serve the sectors (*hakwon*, child care and kindergarten) and the providers (private and public) in different ways, enabling some to provide quality programmes more readily than others. The OECD team encourages the authorities to ensure that greater standardisation of structural features is achieved across the different sectors and providers. From our experience of other countries, quality assurance mechanisms are more effective – particularly in market-oriented services – when linked with financial support to services, either through subsidies attached to children, or preferably, through operational grants to the services when they engage in pre-defined quality improvement measures. Without such incentives, it is difficult to see how the *hakwons* reaching acceptable quality standards can be incorporated, and their programmes oriented more in line with the *National Curriculum* and its approaches.

151. In addition, it seems important that staff in all centres should be trained to work in teams, and that a quality improvement process - built on critical reflection and self-study by all staff – is inbuilt into all programmes. For the moment, accountability seems limited in many centres to the production and implementation of pre-determined planning sheets rather than on team reflection on how to support the learning interests of children. Teams should be supported to address continually such questions as: What is the level of wellbeing and involvement of children in the activities proposed? What pedagogical practices can best support the children's ongoing learning and inquiry? How does the centre engage parents in dialogue about what is important for young children as they grow and develop? How does the relational climate in the centre support children in feeling good about themselves and in taking initiatives?

152. Strategic efforts are being made in other countries to address similar issues and facilitate professional development. In Australia, the state of Queensland has moved to support training places for child care staff who receive lower remuneration than their peers in kindergarten. This programme enables child care staff to upgrade qualifications within their workplace by enrolling in development programmes provided by accredited training providers and by engaging in development through computer mediated learning and other activities. Similarly in Korea, it seems important to create articulations and ladders between the various training pathways, which could help, for example, the two-year graduates to advance in career, and over time, accede to posts of greater responsibility. Likewise at school level, it is important that early childhood staff and directors should be invited to become – on equal terms with primary school personnel – pedagogical supervisors and inspectors. We consider such forms of career progression to be critical, in order to retain strong early childhood expertise in the management, guidance and monitoring of the field.

## **8. Establish a regular policy review and research cycle**

153. During its visit, the OECD review team asked many questions about the state of early childhood research in Korea: How much internal and external evaluation of programmes, both large-scale and centre

based, is actually taking place in the present system? How many first-class early childhood research institutes and researchers actually exist in the country? It seemed to the team that though there are rich sources of data already resident in different parts of the system, the task of undertaking large-scale evaluations of current practice does not seem to have begun. Building a coordinated research agenda for the country and a research community that can be funded to respond adequately and objectively has become urgent in a situation in which progress is slow and hindered by a certain camping on old positions.

154. To meet the challenge, we would encourage, if it is not already the case, the establishment by government of a regular policy review cycle. Annual or biennial policy reviews are a means of confronting national practice with up-to-date research and evaluation. They also give increased stability to the national research community, which in general, is charged to undertake the review and to propose new research on current practice. The cycles provide an opportunity for research institutes and universities to tender for important pieces of research and to organise their research more rationally. The mechanism also allows the government to take the lead, and mobilise the research community around issues of national concern. The current structures for generating research and setting research priorities seem, at least from an outside perspective, too unplanned to achieve sufficient cross-sectoral research on the early childhood field from a whole-government perspective.

155. With the exception of the common research sponsored by the *Steering Committee for the Development of Early Childhood Education and Childcare*, it may be said that in Korea research initiatives and directions are generally uncoordinated, and are conceived separately within the relevant departments. Given the paucity of researchers in the specialist area of ECEC, we would encourage also greater cooperation between the various national research institutes and the university early childhood departments. Some prior coordination of research strengths and focus could give a more coherent picture to the ministries of the possibilities of research and advance the power of systems to reflect on practices and work from an evidence base.

#### **In closing.....**

156. This *Country Note for Korea* represents the views of the OECD team after an intense two-week visit, aided by a comprehensive *Background Report*. Our reflective report on this review is offered in a spirit of professional dialogue, basing our judgements on our discussions and observations. During the visit, the OECD team was impressed by the approachability of the people we met at all levels in Korea and the willingness of most groups to engage in a critical debate.

157. We especially commend the manner in which the visit was organised by the *Background Report* authors, Dr Jung Na of KEDI and Dr. Mugyeong Moon of Seoul National University. Despite the shortness of our visit, we engaged in a rich and varied programme of visits, and spoke to a wide range of providers and sectors at national and local levels.

158. It should be noted, however, that the facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received every help from KEDI, from the various ministries, and from many researchers and practitioners in Korea, they have no part in any shortcomings, which this document may present.

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### 6.3 Prospects

## References

## APPENDIX III: PROGRAMME OF THE REVIEW VISIT

18-28 May 2003

### *Sunday 18 May*

Seoul

17h00 – 19h00 Team meeting and preliminary planning

### *Monday 19 May*

08h30 - 10h30 Meeting and discussion with Background Report team writers

11h00 - 12h00 Visit to Buk-Seong (Public) Kindergarten

14h00 - 15h30 Visit to Chung-Ang Kindergarten (University/Affiliated Private)

16h00 - 17h30 Chung-Ang University (teacher training)

### *Tuesday 20 May*

10h00 - 11h00 Visit Song-Joon (Private) Child Care Centre, Seoul

11h20 - 12h30 Visit to Gum-Do-Li Academy (*Hakwon*)

14h00 - 15h30 Visit to Go-Eun (Public) Child Care Centre, Seoul

16h00 - 17h30 Visit to Han-Na (Private) Family Day Care Home, Seoul

### *Wednesday 21 May*

09h00 - 10h30 Visit to Kung-Jin (National Public) School for Special Children in In-San (Integrated Class)

11h00 - 12h30 Visit to Han-Mi (Private) Kindergarten in Il-San (Reggio-Emilia style programme)

14h00 - 15h30 Visit to Seo-am Kindergarten (Elementary affiliated public kindergarten)

16h00 - 17h00 Visit to Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education

17h00 - 19h30 Dinner meeting with Vice-Superintendent of Gyeonggi Province

***Thursday 22 May***

10h00 - 11h30 Visit to Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Seoul

15h00 - 16h00 Visit to Ministry of Planning and Budget

***Friday 23 May***

10h00 - 11h30 Visit to Ministry of Gender Equality

13h00 – 17h30 Seminar hosted by Korean Educational Development Institute

***Monday 26 May***

10h00 - 12h00 Meeting with ECEC Academic Associations

14h00 - 16h00 Meeting with ECEC Organisations and NGOs

***Tuesday 27 May***

10h00 - 11h30 Visit to National Assembly

12h30 - 15h00 Visit to Ministry of Health and Welfare

16h00 - 19h00 Team de-brief and analysis of data

***Wednesday 28 May***

09h00 - 12h00 Formal de-briefing and synopsis - Ministry officials and Korean Educational Development Institute members