Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN IMPROVING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Challenge 1: Improving staff qualifications

Qualifications for ECEC staff often overlap and are not transparent among child care workers and early education teachers. Different qualifications leading to different job titles/profiles do not always clearly communicate to staff or parents about what knowledge, skills and competencies staff have.

Different sectors – within ECEC – have different goals and visions for staff education and training. Revising or unifying ECEC staff qualifications poses a challenge especially in countries with a “split system” or fragmented services over child care and early education. Improving qualifications evenly across the country is also a challenge due to local control over the contents of the education programmes.

Revising initial education programmes and requirements

- **British Columbia (Canada)** revised the Child Care Licensing Regulation so that Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Assistants and other adults working in licensed facilities must fulfil specific course requirements. Prior to this change, ECE Assistants were only required to complete any ECE or related training. The requirements became more specific in an effort to increase the quality of the training. The change was made as a result of information received from the field consultations during the revision process. It responds to the implementation of two labour mobility agreements, which intend to facilitate the mobility of workers between provinces in Canada. Rather than creating an entirely new programme or course for ECE Assistants, the government used courses already designed and available through existing ECE programmes. The changes have not impacted content, duration, fees or modes of delivery.

- In **New Zealand**, in 1986, child care services were transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. A year after integrating the child care and education sectors, the government established the Diploma of Education (Early Childhood Education) as the benchmark teaching qualification for the newly centralised system. In 1988, the first three-year teacher training programme with cultural training components began to be phased in. In the early 1990s, the focus of the sector was on quality, training and funding.

- In 2009-10, **Korea** embarked on upgrading the initial education of the ECEC workforce. For kindergarten teachers, the government set the qualification level at a four-year bachelor’s degree and intends to gradually reduce the number of students at teacher training colleges in order to strike a better balance between demand and supply of the
kindergarten workforce. For child care teachers, the government set a higher level by increasing the required credits from 35 to 51 credits (i.e., 12 to 17 courses) at a college level and, furthermore, strengthened the training programme with a third level qualification (i.e., one year of training after high school graduation), requiring a total of 1,105 hours including four weeks of field practicum. From March 2013, child care practice will take place only at accredited facilities with a minimum of 15 children.

- In **Flanders (Belgium)**, the government agency, *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family), worked with key stakeholders in the child care sector, as well as experts, to come up with a definition of a vocational qualification for a vocational bachelor’s degree in child rearing and education of young children. It also consulted with the child care sector, educational organisations and the adult education sector to design the concept for a child-minding academy.

- In **Finland**, the education for practical nurses started in the 1990s. At that time, there was a call from the labour market for more flexible movement from one task to another. Formerly, there were several different examinations (childminder, day care nurse, rehabilitation nurse, nurse for the disabled, etc.), which are now merged into one broader examination with different sub lines to choose from.

- **Portugal** changed qualification requirements so that preschool teachers must obtain a four-year master’s degree, which is the same qualification that must be obtained by primary and secondary school teachers. Up until 1998, the qualification required for this job profile was a three-year bachelor’s degree. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education worked with universities and polytechnics to establish the preschool teacher degree programme.

- In **Germany**, more bachelor degree-level ECEC programmes are emerging at the university level. The development started with universities like the Alice-Salomon-Hochschule in Berlin and the Evangelische Hochschule Freiburg in 2004. In 2011, the Ministers of Youth from German Länder agreed on a resolution about a common title (approved pedagogue for early childhood) and common contents for these degree programmes.

- In **Slovak Republic**, ECEC teachers currently enter the profession with varying levels of training. Although ISCED level 3B is acceptable, the government is considering making it mandatory that teachers pursue higher initial education at ISCED levels 5A or 5B.

- In the **Czech Republic**, new requirements concerning the education and qualification of pedagogical staff went into effect in 2005. In addition to ISCED level 3 training, universities now offer ECEC study programmes at ISCED levels 4 and 5. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is promoting university-level qualifications in an effort to improve the quality of ECEC services.

- **Slovenia** has made the following revisions to initial education:
  - In 1994, a new three-year higher professional study programme in preschool education was established. Prior to this, preschool education studies consisted of a two-year programme established in 1987 that was offered by teacher training colleges.
- Students pursuing the new three-year programme have the possibility of continuing onto a master-level programme.
- As of 1996, preschool teachers’ assistants must hold an upper secondary technical qualification or an upper secondary general school with an additional qualification in preschool education.

- In **Sweden**, in 2010, the government proposed that current degrees in education be replaced by four new professional degrees: preschool education, primary school education, subject education and vocational education. The new degrees will lead to greater clarity regarding the components of teacher education; and the preschool education programme will have a more specific direction to secure the supply of well-educated teachers. The government introduced in 2011 a new initial training programme to increase the supply of well-educated preschool teachers. The following decisions have been made:
  - regulate preschool teachers as other teachers are regulated;
  - clarify teacher qualifications;
  - create a teacher certification process; and
  - design a state authorisation system (senior subject teachers) to strengthen incentives for preschool teachers to advance the quality of activities and to pursue continuous education.

- **Prince Edward Island**’s (Canada) Preschool Excellence Initiative (2010) requires all staff working in Early Years Centres to be provincially certified at either an Entry Level, Program Staff or Supervisor Level certification. The Entry Level certification requires uncertified staff in the system to participate in a training consisting of three courses: growth and development, developmentally appropriate practice, and guidance. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development worked with staff at local colleges to design an appropriate entry level course. The Program Staff and Supervisor Level certifications require educators to have a two-year diploma in ECEC.

- **Scotland** (United Kingdom) is currently undertaking a review and discussion on what skills, knowledge and understanding ECEC staff should encompass. A Common Skills Working group has been established to identify what should be included in initial ECEC staff education programmes. Stakeholders are invited to comment on the identified skills and knowledge areas for ECEC staff. After receiving the comments, the plan will be revised. An implementation plan for the revision of initial ECEC education programmes will be drafted at the end of 2011. The goal of this initiative is to strengthen the workforce knowledge and improve quality ECEC delivery.

- **England** (United Kingdom) has launched an independent review of existing early education and child care qualifications and training. The review will look at the ways in which qualifications can be strengthened and pathways to support career progression in the sector improved to the benefit of young children, their families and those who work in the early childhood sector.

- **Spain** set out a new bachelor’s degree in Pre-Primary Education, which requires four academic years, that is, one year longer than the previous programme. The total workload is 240 credits, 50 of which are devoted to practicum; whereas the previous
diploma only required 320 hours. Furthermore, foreign languages have gained relevance, and students must demonstrate a certain level of competence in a foreign language at the end of the degree programme. Students also now have the possibility to enrol in specialised courses to meet the specific needs of early education, for example, organisation and optimisation of school libraries, innovation through ICT, school organisation and management, promoting joint action between school and its environment, etc. The syllabi of the general training module include new course proposals such as “Society, family and school”, “Childhood, health and nutrition” and “Systematic observation and context analysis”.

- In **Germany**, the federal government started the Action Programme Family Day Care (Aktionsprogramm Kindertagespflege) to foster a minimum qualification of 160 hours for all day care mothers and fathers. Training institutions have to apply for a seal of quality. Additionally, subsidies are given to day care workers who take part in a part-time qualification to become a pedagogue or a child care worker.

**Aligning qualifications between pre-primary and primary teachers**

- **Flanders** (Belgium) aims to merge kindergarten teachers and primary teachers into a single career profile with the same set of required competences.

- The **French Community of Belgium** has revised the initial education level of preschool teachers so that it is equivalent to the level of primary school teachers.

- **Finland** raised the level of education for kindergarten teachers and connected it more closely to the level for primary school teachers. In 1995, kindergarten teacher education was moved to the university level, as classroom teacher training and other teacher training had already been established in universities. This change created greater synergy and interaction between training for ECEC professionals and training for primary school teachers to better support children’s development and learning and foster co-operation between teachers during children’s transition from kindergarten to primary school.

- In **Portugal**, preschool and primary teachers follow the same programme in the first three years then specialise in either preschool or primary for the fourth year. Teachers can study for a fifth year if they wish to obtain certification for both levels.

**Promoting mobility/collaboration among preschool teachers, child care workers and other workers**

- **Slovenia** allows teachers and other graduates in the fields of education, arts, humanities, social sciences and social work to work as preschool teachers once they have acquired an additional qualification in preschool education.

- In **Australia**, the government is creating additional early childhood education university places; and tertiary education providers offer preschool teaching degrees tailored to the needs of diploma-qualified child care workers as a response to the need to increase integration of early education and child care. Articulation pathways have been created between the Vocation and Education Training sector and the Higher Education sector to support students through new training opportunities.
• In **Flanders (Belgium)**, the education sector is considering extending certificates of competence to facilitate the mobility between primary teacher and nursery teacher. They are also considering whether other qualifications can be taken into account for the job of pre-primary teacher. This is still in a preparatory phase.

• In **Belgium’s French Community**, children’s nurses have had rights and obligations in the academic domain as well as the care domain since 2004. In 2006, the government established a law by which children’s nurses may be appointed to work in *maternelle* in collaboration with preschool teachers; and from 2007-09, slightly more than 25% of children’s nurses were appointed to do so.

• **Japan** encourages ECEC staff to obtain both kindergarten and day care qualifications to promote co-operation between these facilities. Most college credits for both qualifications are already aligned, and around 80% of staff in ECEC facilities hold both qualifications.

• In **Korea**, kindergarten teachers studying early childhood education can be also qualified as child care teachers if they complete the required credits for child care. Child care practitioners can now also work at full-day kindergarten programmes, although there are still some limitations and barriers in this due to the dual training system and salary differences. Three municipal territories in Korea have therefore implemented an ECEC collaboration project called the *Yeong Cha* Project. These projects are partially funded by the local authorities and stimulate interaction and co-operation among different ECEC practitioners (child care and kindergarten). Within these projects, kindergarten and child care professionals plan activities together, care for infants co-operatively, etc.

Setting or revising training outcome standards or curriculum for initial education

• **Australia** has introduced ECEC vocational educational standards (training packages), which are nationally consistent and coherent; responsive to individual, industry and community needs; and provide quality outcomes. Developed by Industry Skills Councils or enterprises, each package is a set of nationally-endorsed standards, qualifications and guidelines used to recognise and assess the skills and knowledge people need to perform effectively in the workplace. The packages prescribe outcomes required by the workplace, not training or education. They are generally reviewed and resubmitted for endorsement every three years; however, within the three years, changes may occur under a continuous improvement process. Additionally, in the ECEC sector, national training packages have been developed for Certificate III, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Children’s Services through the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. The packages are regularly reviewed through consultation with the industry sector ensuring that the courses remain both relevant and effective.

• In **Korea**, initial training for kindergarten teachers requires specific academic credits and courses for the major (at least seven mandatory courses) as well as for the teaching profession (Article 19 of Teachers’ Qualification Decree, 2008). In 2009, the National Standardization Projects for Child Care Teacher Qualification and Training were implemented, resulting in the provision of Standard Teacher Training Subject List and Field Practicum Guidelines, and the Standard In-service Training Curriculum. The implementation of these, which will be enforced by law, is expected to occur in 2013.
Japan revised its *National Curriculum of Day Care Center Works* in March 2008, clarifying the enhancement of staff quality and the expertise of all staff. Due to the changes in the living environments of children and in the ways of child rearing by parents, the expectations for the role and quality of nursery centres increased. The Action Program to Improve the Quality of Nursery Centres was designed to address the following needs: 1) improvement and enhancement of child care practices; 2) assurance of the health and safety of children; 3) enhancement of the quality and expertise of nursery teachers; and 4) reinforcement of the foundation to support child care.

In Finland, the national curriculum for practical nurse training has been reformed. In this reform, the view points of ECEC have been taken into consideration more profoundly than in the former curriculum. Also, the national curriculum for family childminders has been reformed.

New Zealand has Graduating Teaching Standards in place, which were set by the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) in 2007 under the Education Act 139AE. Minimum standards of teacher education are ensured by the accreditation and approval of all teacher education programmes by the NZTC. All teacher education providers with programmes approved by the NZTC must demonstrate how they enable students to reach the Graduating Teacher Standards. Providers guarantee that students have met these standards and are “fit to be a teacher” when they graduate from the programme.

**Mapping and assessing initial education programmes**

Australia is undertaking a mapping exercise of all early childhood education courses to analyse the content of the subjects to ensure the quality of initial staff education at the tertiary level. This research will likely inform future policy development aimed at improving the quality and consistency of initial staff education across all institutions, including identifying gaps in the curriculum that may need to be addressed and steps that need to be taken. It is also expected that two national bodies – the new Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership – will have roles in assessing and accrediting initial early childhood education courses, providing an opportunity to ensure quality and relevance.

Norway established the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (*NOKUT*) in 2002. In 2008, *NOKUT* was tasked to evaluate the education of preschool teachers. The purpose was to develop knowledge and information on the current status of the quality of pre-primary teacher education in relation to the framework and regulations on higher education. The report was delivered in 2010 and concluded that: the preschool education programme has low status within the universities and the society; the sector does not recruit the best students, and its students do not put enough time/effort into the study; the focus is too much on children over three years of age and does not meet the needs of those under three years; and the programme needs to strengthen the staff competences of multiculturalism. Additionally, the evaluation pointed to the fact that today’s preschool teacher training does not offer sufficient possibilities of in-depth studies of pedagogy for children with special needs. A new regulation for preschool teacher education is now being prepared. The government has appointed a commission to deliver a framework plan that will modernise preschool teacher education, which is relevant and of high quality.