



## Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

### STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN SETTING QUALITY GOALS

#### Challenge 2: Aligning goals to stimulate quality provision

Setting out goals is a common first step that countries take to explicitly express political commitment. It is used as a framework to harmonise actions across different stakeholders. However, setting out quality goals is one thing, while implementing them is another.

Goal setting with a bottom-up approach has strengths and weaknesses. There will be a sense of ownership among the group involved in setting out a particular goal for their sector; however, it may compete with another goal set by a different group for their sector. There should be a coherent framework so that all planned actions can move in an agreed upon direction without cancelling out the effects of each action.

Aligning ECEC goals with compulsory education reforms, which receive considerable policy attention and budgets, can be a driving force for implementation. However, goals set out for ECEC are often not well aligned with the goals set for primary or other levels of education.

#### *Setting out comprehensive quality goals for the ECEC sector*

- All governments of states and territories in **Australia** agreed in July 2009 to an overarching [National Early Childhood Development Strategy](#) (Investing in the Early Years) to ensure that by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation. As part of this Strategy, all jurisdictions signed up to the [National Partnership Agreement](#) on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care in December 2009 in specific recognition of the importance of high quality, accessible and affordable ECEC for children and families in achieving better outcomes for Australian children. The National Partnership Agreement sits under the umbrella of the broader National Early Childhood Development Strategy. Additionally, Australia has the [Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians](#).
- The **China** Development Research Foundation ([CDRF](#)) initiated, in collaboration with local governments in Ledu County (Qinghai Province) and Xundian County (Yunnan Province) a pilot programme on Early Childhood Development in September 2009, which has the goal to enhance early child development and fight poverty in poor rural areas. The programme was implemented in Early Education Centres. ECEC is used as an anti-poverty measure, and their goals are to improve nutritional conditions of infants and raise the early education coverage rate with sufficient quality in these areas.

- In 2008, **Manitoba (Canada)** launched [Family Choices: Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care](#), which includes the goals of Manitoba to improve the accessibility and universality, affordability and quality of child care throughout the province. Within the Family Choices agenda, Manitoba has explicitly set out to improve quality in ECEC centres since evidence-based research demonstrates that quality early learning environments result in improved outcomes for children and their families.
- **Spain** has set out the following policy goals: to provide free provision of ECEC to the second cycle of pre-primary education (three-to-six-year-olds), to establish minimum requirements for institutions offering ECEC to zero-to-three-year-olds, and to decentralise the curriculum. Additionally, a plan called *Educa3* has been developed to increase the number of ECEC places for zero-to-three-year-olds and promote the quality of materials and workforce in ECEC.
- In May 2010, the Province of **Prince Edward Island (Canada)** launched the [Preschool Excellence Initiative: Securing the Future for Our Children](#). The overall aim is to build an early childhood system that is accessible, sustainable and quality-driven and also recognises the need for parental choice. The initiative addresses the needs of different actors in ECEC: children, parents, providers and staff. The specific goal is to help Island children by: providing a high-quality learning environment; stimulating and fostering creativity, discovery and a love of learning; ensuring indoor and outdoor play-based learning experiences; ensuring that all early childhood personnel are trained and certified; and expanding early learning opportunities for Island children with special needs. Besides this, the province stated it will try to help parents by moderating parent fees, providing new and expanded options for infant care in family home settings, and giving parents a voice through Parents' Advisory Committees. Needs of ECEC staff were met by aiming at increasing the wages for certified early childhood educators, developing and delivering new entry-level and one-year training programmes for all early childhood staff, and providing a new opportunity for early childhood educators to become self-employed through the establishment of Infant Homes. Lastly, regarding operators, the document includes goals, such as providing professional development and advisory support to supervisors and owner-operators and providing one-time funding to those who wish to retire their licences. These quality goals are expected to improve the level of quality of ECEC in Prince Edward Island and increase staff and parent satisfaction.
- **Korea** initiated two comprehensive mid-term plans in 2009 to reduce the parental burdens of child-rearing costs and provide quality education and care to young children: the *I-Sarang* (Child-Loving) Plan of child care and the Plan for the Advancement of Early Childhood Education. Under the vision of "building a future-oriented preschool where young children are happy", the latter plan by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology manifested the provision of high-quality early childhood education for children and parents in a tangible way as the top priority goal. The *I-Sarang Plan* by the Ministry of Health and Welfare also places great emphasis on the nation's responsibility for quality child care. Furthermore, initiation of a common curriculum (*Nuri Curriculum*) for children age five in kindergartens and child care centres was announced in May 2011 and will be implemented from March 2012 to ensure high-quality education and care.
- The **French Community of Belgium** drafted the "Code of quality of care" at the community level that sets out the quality principles of care for children ages zero to

twelve for all child care providers. The Code is laid down in the Decree of Government of the French Community of December 2003. It provides consistency of good qualitative child care. Every child care provider is required to implement quality aspects in accordance with the Code.

- In 2008, **British Columbia (Canada)** created a framework for early learning for children from birth to kindergarten entry that goes beyond overall policy for ECEC. This policy document, British Columbia Early Learning Framework, articulates a vision for young children's learning for all service providers working in the ECEC sector and creates greater understanding of the vital importance of early learning for all children.
- The Action Programme for Promotion of Early Childhood Education in **Japan** was formulated in October 2006 as a comprehensive action plan focusing on the educational requirements in recognised *kodomo-en* (child centres). In Japan, traditionally, policies have always been developed from the perspective of fulfilling the basic role of "equity in educational opportunities" and "maintenance and improvement of educational standards". With regard to nursery centres, an Action Programme to Improve the Quality of Nursery Centres was formulated in March 2008.
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity of **Portugal** launched the System for Quality Improvement of Social Services, which includes child care services. This system was created and implemented by the Institute for Social Security to promote high quality in the provision of social services. The programme's purpose is to ensure that citizens have access to quality social services that satisfy their needs and expectations. The system is based upon a number of criteria and specific requirements for the evaluation of quality and the client's degree of satisfaction. Another objective of this programme is to establish a series of minimum requirements for new buildings and for the adaptation of existing buildings, ensuring their safety and quality. Once all the requirements are fulfilled, the organisation may ask for certification and receive a "Quality Mark". There are three levels of certification (C, B and A) depending on the stage of development of the quality requirements. Level A corresponds to the highest quality.

#### *Introducing the quality goals at different education levels*

- In 2007, **Finland** developed a new Strategy for Special Needs Education for both pre-primary education and basic education. The Ministry of Education appointed a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of pre-primary and basic special education. The quality goals for special education at both education levels have been streamlined in the new strategy.
- In April 2008, the government of **Prince Edward Island (Canada)** decided to integrate kindergarten into the public school system by September 2010 and to align the goals of pre-primary education and primary school to smooth the transition between the two education levels. With the integration of the two systems and aligning the goals, early education and primary schooling ensured a more continuous learning structure.
- Policies to promote high-quality ECEC services in **Norway** have, over the last five years, included policy development and legislation, monitoring and supervision, and strategic plans. Norway allotted means to raise the competence and support the recruitment of preschool teachers and qualified staff in the sector. By supporting research programmes, there has been an increase in the grants for research in the field of ECEC. The

legislation on kindergartens from 2005 clarified the roles of owners, municipalities and county governors, regulated maximum parental fees and equal public financing of public and private institutions, and supported children's agency through a right to participation (*i.e.*, to have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten) for each child. This was followed by a revised Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens. The plan describes the societal role of kindergartens and emphasises the importance of adults' attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children, so that they can bring up children to participate actively in a democratic society. Legislation was followed by support material. The policy for quality also included grants to the National Center for Multicultural Education to initiate education in the field of multilingualism and multiculturalism.