



Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ADVANCING DATA COLLECTION, RESEARCH AND MONITORING

This section summarises country experiences as “lessons learned”. It aims to be a quick read about challenges and risks to consider when implementing policy initiatives.

Lesson 1: Communicate progress to the wider public and disseminate knowledge through networks and workshops

Australia’s national, state and territory governments have prioritised the publication of annual reports on progress with implementing the National Partnership for Early Childhood Education towards achieving Universal Access to early childhood education by 2013. Even in its early stages, reporting from 2009 shows that progress is being made throughout the country: an increase has been observed in hours of attendance by children in most jurisdictions, and there has been an increase in participation by indigenous children in some of the larger jurisdictions.

Mexico’s experience with evaluating child outcomes has shown that children attending services provided by the National Council for the Development of Education (CONAFE) have better outcomes compared to children who do not attend these services. However, the government has also learnt that language and communication aspects of the services must be improved. Mexico’s case is an example of how data collection on child development can highlight strengths of ECEC services but also reveal areas requiring improvement.

Through its Centres of Excellence on Social Welfare, **Finland** has created a mechanism for developing and transmitting expertise needed in the social welfare sector; ensuring diverse connections among basic, postgraduate and further education; and enabling research, experiment and development activities. Practice has proven that the centres have succeeded in networking regional and social actors.

Reports on findings from the longitudinal study Growing Up in **Ireland** are made available to policy makers and researchers through various mechanisms, one of which is the Annual Growing Up in Ireland Research Conference. Additionally, data from the study are made available for research purposes through databases; and the dissemination and use of data is encouraged through data workshops. Ireland finds that the dissemination of data enables children’s development to be examined for stability and continuity over time and will allow development sequences to be identified. Factors protecting children from risk and creating resilience can also be illuminated. Based on experience, however, Ireland has learnt that dissemination of research to influence policy can be challenging if the research is not commissioned by the government and if it is based on pilot interventions which cannot be scaled up because of cost factors.

Lesson 2: Link research findings and monitoring results to policies and practices

Korea established the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE) in 2005, which is one of the few national research institutes in the work devoted specifically to the field of ECEC. The

establishment of KICCE has had positive impacts on the development of ECEC policy research, planning and implementation. KICCE has conducted a total of 175 projects, including the integration of the care and education systems, a series of projects on the *Advancement of Early Childhood Education*, a national survey on child care, and the development of curriculum, workforce and quality assurance. The *Panel Study on Korean Children*, a longitudinal study, is expected to contribute to identifying the developmental mechanisms and outcomes of children as influenced and resulted by the inputs of ECEC policies and services. Korea has never more strongly advocated research-based policy and intends to evaluate policy research regarding the feasibility and efficiency of numerous measures proposed based on research findings in order to bridge the gaps between policy, practice and research.

In **Norway**, monitoring through standardised annual reports from all kindergartens has revealed a need for more qualified staff and points to those regions experiencing the greatest difficulties with workforce quality. As a result, the government launched a plan to recruit preschool teachers, and they have designed targeted actions for certain regions. Based on the case of Norway, it is clear that data collection on workforce can serve as an evidence base for taking concrete action to improve the quality of ECEC services.

When **Slovenia** evaluated the implementation of its preschool curriculum, the findings were shared with education officials and institutions responsible for ECEC, and they were forwarded to preschools so that suggested improvements could be introduced throughout the system. In addition to improving the implementation of the curriculum, Slovenia notes that the findings proved to be important for the preparation of professional development training contents.

Mexico has learnt via data collection that while a majority of preschool children have achieved basic skills in language and mathematics, those who have not are concentrated in rural communities. As a result of this finding, Mexico has decided to create new pedagogical materials specifically for rural communities in an effort to help underachieving students perform at the same level as their peers. This is an example of how data on child development can be used to design evidence-based interventions and help children in need of special support.

Through its *Language and Learning Study*, **Norway** has found that children who attended regular formal centre or family-based child care at ages one-and-a-half to three became less often late talkers than children who are looked after by parents or childminders. The cause is not certain, so the government welcomes further research into kindergarten conditions that enhance language development; however, preliminary findings strengthen the rationale for kindergarten attendance both for majority and minority language children.

Flanders (Belgium) seeks to pursue an evidence-based policy orientation in education and has thus introduced a student monitoring system, which tracks individual student development. This is believed to offer insight into, among other things, the quality of educational institutions. Flanders also notes that decreasing research budgets coupled with an academic disinterest for policy makes it difficult to respond to increasingly more diverse policy issues.

Lesson 3: Track financing and costs to justify education spending

For **Australia**, tracking financial spending on ECEC has shown that funding has led to an increase in the number of children enrolled in child care services from 2007-10 and a decrease in the cost to parents for long day care services from 2004-10. This is one example of how financial tracking and monitoring of outcomes can showcase proven results and accountability, which justify the educational funding.

Portugal has learnt that not having a systemic research agenda for ECEC leads to difficulties in the assessment of quality and makes it complicated to show the benefits of investing in ECEC.

Lesson 4: Place key actors at the centre of monitoring, data collection and research

As **Australia** has introduced a National Quality Standard Framework, which includes a new monitoring process, governments at all levels are recognising the importance of creating opportunities for professionals to regularly assess their practice. Australia finds that the most effective improvements to service delivery are initiated from within the service, rather than imposed from the outside. Upon assessing the quality of practices and services, the next step is to determine where quality improvements can be made and plan effectively to implement them.

In **Flanders (Belgium)**, a report is produced upon completion of an external inspection, and school principals are obligated to share the findings during a formal meeting with the school's personnel; however, teachers unions claim that this is not common practice. A lesson learnt from Flanders is that when a feedback cycle is put into place, all parties involved must participate as planned if the cycle is to function properly.

British Columbia (Canada), **Japan** and **Slovenia** highlight the importance of having a programme or curriculum evaluated/assessed by persons related to the ECEC centre such as parents and local residents. It increases the objectivity and transparency of the assessment, stimulates parent and community engagement, increases parental satisfaction and deepens the understanding of the stakeholders regarding ECEC centres.

Ireland highlights the importance of ensuring the following when conducting research: relevance of the policy study; minimal attrition; maximised data; minimal respondent burden; and child-centeredness, capturing the breadth of children's lives. A variety of measures have been taken to meet these challenges in Ireland; and one of the main lessons the government has learnt is that it is essential to involve all stakeholders from the outset, in particular policy makers and children.

Lesson 5: Collect data on ECEC services consistently across providers, including those not subsidised by government

In the child care sector of **Flanders (Belgium)**, independent facilities receive limited public funding, so it is not possible to obtain the same amount of data from them as from subsidised facilities. As subsidised facilities receive public funding, they can be required to provide data. A key lesson learned from Flanders is that the overall picture of child care services is incomplete when monitoring is not carried out consistently across all providers. With the current monitoring system, the government realises that they are lacking information such as the profiles of users in all facilities, who pays how much of the total child care costs, who is not being reached by child care services, qualifications of personnel in all facilities, staff turnover rates, the age of staff, etc. Flanders is assessing how to obtain missing data without placing too great of a burden on facilities and without invading the privacy of parents and children.

Norway collects data (administrative records) across public and non-public kindergartens on an annual basis, including information about the quality of ECEC provision (staff-child ratio, staff provisions and qualifications and gender); the organisation of kindergarten (ownership [public/private], opening hours); parents' fees (reduction for siblings, reductions for low-income families); the number of ECEC places and children in ECEC (ages, weekly attendance, etc., including minority language children and children with disabilities); and kindergarten co-operation with other institutions. By collecting this data from all kindergartens, Norway is able to create

official statistics about ECEC services, which provide an in-depth, comprehensive picture of services provided throughout the country.

Lesson 6: Consider both the advantages and disadvantages when giving local authorities the responsibility of monitoring quality

With regards to giving more autonomy to local authorities in monitoring the quality of ECEC services, **Japan, Mexico** and **Portugal** agree that it can be advantageous in that it promotes local-level initiatives; and local authorities tend to have a better understanding of the educational needs of the population, which could give shape to more rigorous monitoring and evaluation. However, these countries also concur that one of the disadvantages is that different authorities may establish different monitoring criteria. Another challenge is harmonising the collection and processing of data among local authorities. These issues make it difficult to consolidate data at the national level and maintain national standards for the quality of services. Additionally, Mexico finds that local authorities sometimes do not have the necessary training to manage resources for monitoring and data collection.

Lesson 7: Use monitoring as an opportunity to effectuate compliance and process quality

For **British Columbia (Canada)**, monitoring class size across the province on an annual basis has resulted in universal compliance for kindergarten class size.

Korea learnt that a monitoring and quality assurance system can contribute to the enhancement of quality in ECEC, not only in terms of structural quality (e.g., staff-child ratio, class size and space per child) but also in terms of less tangible processes such as staff-child interactions. Internal monitoring and self-supervision practiced among staff are acknowledged as more sustainable resources for the enhancement of quality.