



Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPROVING QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

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: Consider cost implications and be cautious in setting numeric targets for the percentage of qualified workforce

In **New Zealand**, the shift towards a qualified workforce occurred at the same time as a strong increase in demand for ECEC and a rapid expansion of the workforce. When the government established the Diploma of Education (Early Childhood Education) as the benchmark teaching qualification for the newly centralised system, targets were set for the percentage of the workforce that was qualified. The government found that the targets were difficult to achieve due to the increase in the total number of teachers employed. Furthermore, the increased demand for qualified teachers had a strong impact on their salaries. Pay parity for kindergarten teachers with primary and secondary teachers was introduced; and the government policy was to provide funding to meet the cost of quality improvements so that the cost to parents would not increase. New Zealand found that this policy led to a significant increase in the cost of ECEC funding for the government. As a result, the government reduced its target of 100% registered teachers in the sector to 80%, deciding that achieving a minimum level of 80% registered teachers by 2012 will maintain sufficiently high standards across the sector.

Lesson 2: Plan sufficient time for the implementation of the revised qualifications

When **British Columbia (Canada)** revised licensing regulations, the province found that immediate implementation of the revised requirements led to many people not being in compliance. Staff needed considerable time and exemptions to come into compliance with the new standards. British Columbia notes the importance of ensuring that those most impacted by the revisions have time to make the necessary changes to meet new requirements.

Lesson 3: When changing qualification requirements, ensure that the changes are introduced in pre-service education as well as in-service training

Upon changing qualification requirements so that preschool teachers must obtain a four-year masters’ degree, **Portugal** has found that it is important to foster the career of preschool professionals from the start of their first degree programmes through to in-service training. While the qualification requirements have been raised, teachers will still require continuous support after obtaining their degree, as changes occur in educational practices.

An evaluation on the quality of pre-primary teacher education in **Norway** has led the government to acknowledge the need for improving initial training. Norway finds that the importance,

complexity and size of the kindergarten sector combined with the demands for ECEC require the government to discuss the findings of the evaluation. Strengthening the education of educators, pedagogical leaders and administrative leaders in ECEC needs to be a priority if children are to have high-quality ECEC. This requires allocation of resources to preschool teacher education, and there must be a continuous effort to provide training combining theory and practice.

Lesson 4: When changing curriculum, prepare staff for the change, and ensure that staff training is embedded in the implementation plan

As **Mexico** trains teachers to implement new curriculum and revised pedagogical orientations, the government has learnt that before establishing new policies, it is necessary to make educators sensitive to the need for change. It is equally important to follow up on the training by monitoring teachers' practice and observing whether they are implementing the changes.

A key lesson learned from **Sweden** is that staff competence is decisive for quality in preschool. The education and skills of preschool teachers are one of the most important factors ensuring a successful preschool system. To work in accordance with the curriculum, staff must have good knowledge of young children's development and learning.

Through long-endevoured processes towards the integration of ECEC, **Korea** developed the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5* in 2011 and set up nationwide in-service training for 20 000 kindergarten and child care teachers working with five-year-olds to prepare them for the new curriculum content and pedagogy. About 150 teacher trainers from education and care sectors will be trained together for the first time in December 2011, and local education and care authorities will collaborate in organising and arranging teacher training.

Lesson 5: Consider whether training with a holistic approach or an individual needs-based approach would better suit your country's context

Belgium's French Community emphasises that ECEC services must be carried by a strong and pertinent care project, or the effects of continuous training will be reduced. Additionally, the training programme should be holistic and not determined on an individual basis, or it will lack direction, which could negatively impact the quality of ECEC provision.

Portugal stresses the importance of making sure that continuous training is provided in context so as to meet the needs of teachers, children and families. **Mexico** also stresses the need to ensure the effectiveness of professional development courses and the quality of course content. The government values asking teachers which training courses they would find useful.

While pre-service training in **Korea** tends to focus on universal contents required for prospective teachers, in-service training takes into account the needs and competence levels of individual teachers and is designed according to the developmental phases of their teaching profession (e.g., beginning, experienced and managerial status). Korea increasingly emphasises the provision of diversified in-service training contents and methods, which are tailored to individual teachers and their working circumstances (e.g., rural areas and class sizes).

Lesson 6: Consider whether a universal or targeted approach would better suit your country's context

New Zealand's experience has been that allowing ECEC services to self-select for participation in professional development activities can mean that some services over participate in professional development while other services do not participate at all. Learning from this lesson,

the government pursued a new approach to funding professional development, which requires providers to go into targeted communities and determine training programmes that best meet the needs of those communities.

Lesson 7: Mainstream the ECEC workforce into the recognised teaching profession, while recognising cost implications

Finland raised the level of education for kindergarten teachers, connecting it more closely to education for primary school teachers. One of the main lessons learned is that when kindergarten and primary teachers are trained in connection to one another, they can better support children's development and learning by knowing how to co-operate during children's transition from pre-primary to primary school.

In **Slovak Republic**, importance is placed on improving the status of kindergarten programmes and teachers so as to secure a high quality workforce supply. The government supports the following improvements: kindergarten teachers should pursue the same level of education as primary and secondary teachers; remuneration should be equal across all levels of teaching; and kindergarten teachers should have the same obligation and right to pursue continuous training as other teachers.

Lesson 8: Ensure stakeholder engagement through a regular consultation/review process

Australia has found that consultation with the ECEC sector is critical to the success of workforce reform. For instance, sector engagement has been critical in developing a national training package for ECEC vocational education which meets the needs of the industry, the community and delivers high quality outcomes. Australia has learnt that a regular consultation/review process involving the sector is critical to maintaining the relevance of the training to ensure that the training remains current to the industry. The government notes the importance of seeking broad agreement on the principles and aims of initiatives and then tailoring specific implementation requirements to accommodate existing systems and processes. To support the development of its National Quality Agenda, Australia undertook extensive consultation in the development phase and is currently undertaking consultations to support the introduction of reforms to the sector.

British Columbia (Canada) finds that it may be helpful to engage stakeholders to assist in planning opportunities that will meet the variety of needs in the sector, especially given the potential for great diversity in geographic, cultural and interest areas.

Lesson 9: Mainstream diversity in the workforce

For **Norway**, training for minority-language assistants and recruitment of minority students to preschool teacher education has led to an increase in the proportion of staff with minority background, including the number of preschool teachers coming from an immigrant background.

In the context of diversifying the workforce, **Flanders (Belgium)** finds that diversity may be more about accepting that differences are difficult to understand than about trying to understand something based on an individual's frame of reference. This requires openness and flexibility and recognition of multiple perspectives and paradigms. Dealing with diversity presents practitioners with complex issues that cannot be solved with a technical body of knowledge. Practitioners in Flanders expressed a need for interpreting professionalism based on continuous reflection upon practice as well as a need to move beyond reflection and develop the ability to be reflexive.

Lesson 10: Create centres of excellence to communicate the sector's needs and facilitate networks

In **Finland**, where social welfare training is mandatory for all staff, centres of excellence on social welfare were created to inform municipalities about the needs of the social welfare sector and ensure the relevance of training content. Finland has found that the creation of the centres has succeeded in networking regional social actors; and as the ECEC sector is closely linked to the social sector, the ECEC sector benefits from the centres as well.

Lesson 11: Support the salaries of workers in private institutions

Korea has recognised that the enhancement of ECEC service quality should be accompanied by a balanced provision of work as well as an increase in salary. As the private sector of Korean ECEC outweighs the public sector, it has become important on Korea's policy agenda to make the rewards parallel/equivalent between teachers of the public and private sectors. Local authorities currently provide various types of teacher allowances and subsidies in addition to a basic salary as a way of encouraging monitoring and ensuring the quality of private ECEC services.