



Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM “RESEARCH BRIEF: ECEC QUALITY GOALS MATTER”

Why do quality goals matter?

- Quality goals give ECEC programmes their purpose and orientation; and they contribute to building a shared vision among different stakeholders, as well as greater clarity of objectives, establishing guidance for providers and direction for practitioners.
- Explicit goals lead to a more coherent level of quality provision across different regions and services, stimulate further development and improvement of early childhood programming, and prevent fragmentation of services, which can lead to knowledge gaps and uneven child development.
- Quality goals can also encourage governments to align resources with prioritised quality goals, anchor discussions between ministries and improve leadership in ECEC.

Which goals will most likely improve quality in ECEC services?

- Explicit and specific goals on **leadership, governance and funding** can help align resources with prioritised areas and promote more co-ordinated child-centred services. Sustained public funding is necessary to achieve quality goals; in absence of this there is a risk of uneven and poor quality provisions.
- **Minimum standards**, when applied and communicated widely, can help ensure even quality across different service settings, level the playing field for providers and help parents make informed choices.
- **Curriculum or learning standards** can ensure even quality for ECEC provision across different settings, help staff to enhance pedagogical strategies and help parents to better understand child development.
- **ECEC staff play** the key role in ensuring healthy child development and learning. Areas for reform include qualifications, initial education, professional development and working conditions.
- **Parents and communities** should be regarded as “partners” working towards the same goal. Home learning environment and neighbourhood matter for healthy child development and learning.
- **Data, research and monitoring** are powerful tools for improving children’s outcomes and driving continuous improvement in service delivery.

Policy implications

- Quality goals should be developed focusing on children's early development, well-being and learning, involving *all* early childhood services. Institutional performance should be strengthened for improvement purposes with core public funding.
- Roles and responsibilities at the central, regional and local levels of government should be clearly defined for system-level reform to successfully move towards the same goals. Central authorities can delegate responsibilities to local or centre-based authorities, while supporting their capacity to exercise the delegated responsibilities to the full extent. Municipalities and ECEC provisions can better co-ordinate with parents and communities to determine the appropriateness of quality goals and adapting these goals to local needs.
- A more integrated approach to ECEC quality goals allows government bodies to combine resources for ECEC services; regulations and other aspects of ECEC provision can be made more consistent; variations in access and quality can be lessened; and links at the service level are more easily created.
- Among various quality aspects, such as curriculum, workforce, family and community engagement, and monitoring, prioritisation and consideration of political, technical and financial feasibility are key in setting out quality goals.

Research gap

- There is a need for more research on targeted quality aspects: which practices best achieve a higher level of quality, and the effects of adaptation to local needs on child outcomes and quality provision. Research in these areas has great potential to inform policy and general public.