

Starting strong III: A quality toolbox for early childhood education and care ^[1]

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Excerpts from executive summary:

A growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large.

But all these benefits are conditional on "quality". Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the longterm productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.

There is a general agreement that quality matters to gain significant pay-offs. In recent years, a growing number of OECD countries have made considerable efforts to encourage quality in ECEC; countries are at different stages of policy development and implementation. Regardless of which stage countries are at, research has suggested five key levers to be effective in encouraging quality in ECEC:

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Setting out explicit quality goals and minimum standards will help enhance quality in ECEC. Research has shown that setting out clear quality goals can help consolidate political will and strategically align resources with prioritised areas; anchor discussions between ministries for better government leadership in ECEC; promote more consistent, co-ordinated and child-centred services with shared social and pedagogical objectives; and provide guidance for providers, direction for practitioners and clarity for parents. In fact, many OECD countries set out specific quality-focused goals (such as improving qualifications of the workforce and setting out a childcentred curriculum).

Research has also shown that minimum standards can ensure conditions for better child development, support transparent regulation of the private sector, level the playing field for providers and help parents make informed choices. Many countries set minimum standards on structural indicators, such as staff-child ratios, indoor/outdoor space, staff qualification levels, and the frequency of contacts between staff and children or parents. In countries where the remit for early education and child care is "split" between different ministries, different standards are often set for different ECEC settings or for different age groups of children. In countries aiming to deliver "integrated" services, the same standards are applied in any ECEC settings.

Related Links:

[OECD Early Childhood Education and Care webpage](#) ^[7]

[OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care](#) ^[8]

Starting Strong II (2006) ^[9]

Starting Strong (2001) ^[10]

Quality matters in ECEC: Country policy profiles ^[6]

Region: International ^[11]

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