

Early childhood education and care workforce development: A foundation for process quality

About this Policy Brief

This Policy Brief draws on the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review undertaken by the OECD between 2018 and 2022 to foster an understanding of the different dimensions of quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC), focusing on process quality in particular. Process quality encompasses children's daily interactions through their ECEC settings – including with other children, staff, space and materials, their families and the wider community – which are directly linked to their development, learning and well-being. A primary goal of the policy review was to identify and discuss the main policy levers that can enhance process quality and provide countries with concrete examples of policies. The ECEC workforce is essential to providing good process quality: workforce development, including initial education, continuing professional development and working conditions are therefore among the main policy levers considered. This Policy Brief presents policy considerations to develop a strong ECEC workforce, building on the main findings of the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review and two country reviews prepared for Ireland and Luxembourg.

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Introduction

Purpose of this Policy Brief

Evidence points to the central role that process quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays in young children's development. Process quality involves young children's immediate daily interactions in their ECEC settings with their peers, staff, the physical environment and materials, their families and communities. Workforce development, including the initial education that members of the ECEC workforce are required to complete, their continuing professional development, and the working conditions of staff

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working directly with young children, provide foundations for process quality. As countries focus on identifying policy levers for strengthening process quality, the initial and ongoing preparation of the workforce (professionals who interact with children and families in ECEC settings) and working conditions for this workforce have emerged as priorities.

Ireland and Luxembourg have each shown strong commitments to strengthening their ECEC workforce policies in order to provide a strong foundation for process quality for their countries' young children. This commitment is reflected both in important policy developments in each country as well as their participation in OECD's *Quality beyond Regulations* data gathering and their country-specific in-depth reviews. While the *Quality beyond Regulations* data gathering across 26 countries resulted in *Starting Strong VI*, a report describing the range of early childhood policies that can contribute to process quality, the country-specific reviews provide an in-depth look and set of recommendations for where to focus policy efforts within specific countries.

Looking across the country-specific reviews for Ireland and Luxembourg suggests that there is an unusual opportunity for peer learning, not only for these two countries but for other countries as well. In a number of ways, Ireland and Luxembourg are starting from different policy foundations with contrasting and complementary initial strengths and areas for future focus with respect to the ECEC workforce. In a number of instances, the strong foundational areas or areas of current policy focus in one country are exactly the areas that the other country has determined will be a priority or has received recommendations to focus on. These areas may be priorities for further focus in other countries as well. Highlighting selected strengths in the policy approaches of Ireland and Luxembourg based on their in-depth reviews has the potential to inform work focusing on the ECEC workforce as a foundation for process quality in multiple countries.

As one example, while Ireland has a history of focusing on the educational requirements its early childhood staff must complete prior to starting in positions in ECEC, Luxembourg has focused more on the continuing professional development of its early childhood staff. While recommendations for Ireland in its country-specific review emphasise the need to complement the strong focus on initial education requirements with a greater focus on continuing professional development, recommendations for Luxembourg suggest that its strong focus on continuing professional development for staff could be complemented with greater emphasis on its initial education requirements. Peer learning for Ireland and other countries could involve learning from the experience in Luxembourg with continuing professional development, while for Luxembourg and other countries as well, such peer learning could involve benefitting from Ireland's experiences in the area of initial education for ECEC staff.

This Policy Brief is written with great respect for the steps Ireland and Luxembourg have already taken, and their commitment to further strengthening the process quality young children experience through a focus on the ECEC workforce. It is understood that the history and existing systems within each country present unique challenges and opportunities. While respecting these differences and each country's progress and accomplishments to date, the goal of this Policy Brief is to identify specific areas where there is the potential, for these two countries as well as other countries, to learn from Ireland and Luxembourg's current efforts and experiences aimed at strengthening their ECEC workforces in order to lay a stronger foundation for process quality. The two countries, and sections focusing on their policies and experiences, are consistently listed in alphabetical order in this document (with Ireland first and Luxembourg second) out of simplicity and without intent to prioritise one over the other.

Key contextual information

The country reviews for Ireland and Luxembourg provide extremely informative in-depth descriptions of the ECEC systems and policies in each country. However, it may be helpful for the present Policy Brief to provide a brief and selective overview of key points to keep in mind when considering opportunities for peer learning.

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ECEC in Ireland: Selected key points

In Ireland, nearly all children ages 3 to 5 who are not yet in primary education were enrolled in ECEC in 2019 (which is above the OECD average), and 25% of children under the age of three were enrolled in ECEC (which is close to the OECD average). Per child public expenditure in Ireland is well below the OECD average, and costs to families for ECEC are among the highest among OECD countries. In 2019, almost all children in ECEC in Ireland were in private institutions. Approximately 75% of centre-based settings in Ireland in 2019 were for-profit, while slightly more than 25% were non-profit community-based providers. Home-based providers also play an important role in ECEC in Ireland, with a 2016 estimate indicating that 13% of preschool-aged children were cared for by a "childminder", au pair or nanny. Home-based care is largely unregulated. Childminders are generally self-employed, with the cost of care negotiated individually. Subsidies for care are only available for care provided by registered providers and are thus not available to those using unregistered childminders.

With a largely private and market-driven ECEC sector and with a relatively low level of public funding, there is concern about low wages for staff, temporary contracts for staff, and staff working part-time. These working conditions are associated with high turnover in the ECEC sector. In 2021, a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) was established to propose requirements for pay and working conditions in ECEC. Given that ECEC in Ireland is largely privately run, with budgets determined internally, an important challenge for the government is assuring that increased public funding to providers is allocated to improve working conditions and improve quality.

A national quality framework, *Siolta*, was introduced in Ireland in 2006, and a national curriculum framework, *Aistear*, was introduced in 2009. Both are play-based and child-centred. Recent efforts have focused on promoting greater implementation of these frameworks. In 2010, Ireland initiated the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme (please note the difference between the acronym for this specific programme, ECCE, and the one used for early childhood education and care [ECEC] throughout the OECD), providing public funding for pre-primary education so that all children age 2 years 8 months to 5 years 6 months can attend preschool. This programme, expanded in 2016 and again in 2018, involves 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year for two years. The government provides a per child fee to participating ECEC settings, which enables them to provide preschool at no cost to families. The ECCE programme includes a specific initiative for inclusive experiences for young children: the Access and Inclusion (AIM) Model, which makes available specialists who assist with implementation and provides specialised equipment and additional resources to support participation of children with special needs.

The primary responsibility for ECEC in Ireland is within the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Tusla, a state agency that manages the national register for ECEC, is responsible for monitoring for continued compliance with regulatory standards; the Department of Education (DE) has responsibility for inspections that are education-focused, including in all ECCE programmes; and Pobal, a separate public agency, is responsible for review of compliance with funding requirements established by DCEDIY. Efforts are underway to move towards greater integration and co-ordination of inspections.

Ireland has an ambitious policy agenda focusing on ECEC. An overarching initiative, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families ("First 5") for the period 2019 to 2028, aims at increasing access, affordability and quality of ECEC. This initiative committed to double the level of public investment in ECEC and school-age childcare by 2028 and thereby to make progress towards catching up with the average OECD per child expenditure. Key measures include the National Childcare Scheme introduced in 2019, and a new Core Funding stream announced in October 2021.

Efforts aimed at increasing the level of qualifications required for members of the workforce have been a major focus in recent years, resulting in the qualifications of staff in ECEC centres rising. The government has also worked to raise the quality of the initial education programmes that can fulfil education

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requirements for ECEC staff by setting standards for these programmes and requiring that they include a practice or placement component. A new Workforce Development Plan focusing on approaches to further professionalise the workforce has been published in 2021. There is also an increased focus on continuing professional development with the creation of Better Start, an agency aimed at co-ordinating and expanding efforts in this area, and with increased efforts focused on the implementation of *Siolta* and *Aistear*, the quality and curriculum frameworks. Plans are under consideration to reform monitoring and inspection procedures to work towards greater integration and co-ordination. Also of importance, the recent publication of the National Action Plan for Childminding proposes steps to bring home-based care into the regulated system and to support process quality in home-based settings.

ECEC in Luxembourg: Selected key points

In Luxembourg, a key distinction is made between ECEC that is within the formal educational system and ECEC that is not part of the formal educational system, termed the non-formal sector. Formal ECEC in Luxembourg, or ECEC within the school system, begins with 4- and 5-year-olds, and there is an optional programme for 3-year-olds in which all families can choose to participate. ECEC for those younger than 3 years and for 3-year-olds whose families opt not to participate in the formal sector programme takes place in the non-formal sector. The non-formal sector also serves school-aged children during out-of-school hours. Over 87% of 3-year-olds participated in the optional year of ECEC in the formal educational system in 2019, and approximately 61% of children under age 3 participated in non-formal ECEC, well above the OECD average for the youngest children. Luxembourg provides financial support for participation in ECEC in both the formal and non-formal sectors, with children from age 3 entitled to participate in ECEC through formal education settings, and children between the ages of 1 and 4 entitled to 20 hours of non-formal ECEC in centres that meet requirements for programming in both Luxembourgish and French. Beginning in 2022, out-of-school services will also be free to families from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on school days. The country-specific review for Luxembourg focuses especially on ECEC in the non-formal sector, but with attention to alignment across the formal and non-formal sectors, and the discussion that follows, accordingly, focuses primarily on the non-formal sector.

The Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse, MENJE*) plays a key role in ECEC in both the formal and non-formal sectors, with direct responsibility for the implementation of ECEC in the formal sector, and oversight of licensing and service agreements for ECEC in the non-formal sector. A well-articulated (and periodically reviewed and updated) curriculum framework for education in Luxembourg extends to the pre-primary years in the formal sector. There is also a carefully articulated curriculum framework for the non-formal sector that is co-ordinated with the curriculum for the formal sector. The National Youth Service *(Service National de la Jeunesse, SNJ*) within MENJE is responsible for developing and implementing the curriculum framework for the non-formal sector. A recent initiative has been undertaken to review the curriculum framework for the non-formal sector, including making it more accessible to staff.

The workforce in the non-formal ECEC sector is divided into two segments: those working in settings contracted by the government, which are generally run by non-profit organisations, and those working in non-contracted settings, which tend to be commercial and for-profit settings. While school-age children are more likely to participate during out-of-school time in contracted programmes run by non-profit organisations, very young children are more likely to be enrolled in non-contracted programmes. These contexts in the non-formal sector differ substantially in terms of workforce conditions, with negotiated three-year contracts involving higher salaries and benefits in the contracted sector but individually negotiated employment in the non-contracted sector involving generally lower salaries. In addition to these two primary segments of the non-formal sector, ECEC in Luxembourg is also provided by home-based providers. Home-based providers are regulated, and there are clear requirements for their initial education and ongoing professional development. In Luxembourg, there are discussions on changing the status of

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home-based providers, for instance, by creating networks of providers who could receive shared supports to improve their working conditions and the quality of their services.

An important feature of ECEC in Luxembourg is the recognition and support provided for multilingual education. Settings registered within the ECEC subsidy voucher system (*chèques-service accueil*, CSA) serving children 0 to 4 are requested to implement a multilingual education programme and comply with language qualification requirements to have at least one educator holding a C1 language qualification in Luxembourgish and at least one in French. They must appoint a pedagogical referent to co-ordinate the implementation of the multilingual education programme. A specific 30-hour training course to support multilingualism is required for pedagogical referents and is offered free by the National Youth Service.

Luxembourg has taken important steps in the past decade to professionalise the ECEC workforce in the non-formal sector. In particular, in 2013, it placed responsibility for oversight of the non-formal sector in the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, thereby integrating its oversight with that of ECEC in the formal sector. In addition, in the same year, regulations were introduced for the non-formal sector that included minimum qualifications. More specifically, the ASFT Act of 2013 (*Loi du 8 septembre 1998 réglant les relations entre l'Etat et les organismes oeuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique*) specified that non-formal settings must have a minimum of 60% of staff holding at least an ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) Level 3 qualification in a social or educational field; a maximum of 30% of staff with either lower qualifications or other qualifications not directly related to social or educational fields; and a maximum of 10% of staff with no qualifications. The same regulations apply to contracted and non-contracted settings. The ISCED Level 3 qualification, while broadly in a social or educational field, does not require content focused specifically on early childhood development or a practice placement specifically in an ECEC setting. Accordingly, in the non-formal sector, staff members may begin employment with very limited previous preparation focusing on early childhood development or specifically on early education and care. Given this, there has been a particular focus on continuing professional development in Luxembourg.

Fostering quality and continuing professional development in the non-formal sector are overseen by the National Youth Service. Recent policy efforts focusing on continuing professional development have included increasing the amount of funding for training and improving the training on the curriculum framework for non-formal education, making the framework more accessible to staff. Further reforms aim to increase access to and the quality of continuing professional development.

Policy considerations and policy pointers

Initial education and continuing professional development

Focus initial education requirements on content important to process quality and support implementation through work-based learning

- Develop standards for education programmes, including higher education institutions, for ECEC staff, including standards for the inclusion of content related to process quality in coursework.
- When appropriate, ensure that programme content also aligns with ECEC national curriculum frameworks.
- Ensure that ECEC staff education programmes include high-quality, practical training placements that provide opportunities for students to implement what they are learning about in coursework (and the national curriculum framework where appropriate).
- Clearly differentiate requirements for initial education according to the roles and responsibilities of ECEC staff to help clarify expectations for differing roles.

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- Assign responsibility for the monitoring of quality in ECEC staff education programmes, including the quality of practical training placements.

Continue to build the knowledge and skills of those already in the ECEC workforce through continuing professional development that matches staff needs

- Ensure that ongoing training for all ECEC staff provides knowledge about practices that are important to process quality and is accompanied by mentoring and coaching.
- Develop mechanisms to assess staff needs for continuing professional development so that there is a match with the focus of the training provided. Ensure that there is an emphasis not only on fulfilling required hours or credits but on addressing a range of content, including the content that is assessed as most needed by staff.
- Where there are multiple providers of continuing professional development, implement mechanisms to co-ordinate their work to ensure sufficient access for staff and consistency in how the professional development is provided.
- Provide for appropriate training and supervision of those delivering continuing professional development.
- Develop processes to approve or certify training and to monitor continuing professional development for quality.
- Consider the importance of providing funding for staff to participate in continuing professional development.

Clarify how members of the ECEC workforce can progress professionally

- Consider how initial education requirements and continuing professional development together provide a career progression that members of the ECEC workforce can climb to make professional progress.
- Ensure that there are sufficient steps in the career progression and that these are spaced and sequenced in a way so that professional progress is attainable with fulfilment of specific requirements.
- When needed, develop new programmes of initial education or continuing professional development to address gaps. Consider the potential to accumulate smaller “microcredits” for specific trainings so that they build towards the next qualification.
- Address unintended discrepancies in professional recognition and rewards for the same staff role in different segments or sectors of ECEC.

Include all ECEC roles in initial education and continuing professional development

- Leaders in ECEC programmes, in addition to teachers/room leaders and assistants, need tailored initial education as well as continuing professional development.
- Initial education and continuing professional development for ECEC centre leaders should include a focus both on pedagogy and management/administration.
- , On-site support process through mentoring or coaching is needed for ECEC centre leaders, as well as for teachers and assistants.
- Take steps to ensure the content and structure of initial education and continuing professional development are appropriate for home-based providers/childminders, as well as for centre-based staff.
- Develop professional development programmes that take into account the specific strengths and challenges of those providing ECEC in home-based settings, including possible challenges

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involved in finding time to participate in professional development if programme hours are long and the need to implement curricula in mixed-age groups of children.

Working conditions

Provide salaries, benefits and job security differentiated by staff roles but with a sufficient base given the cost of living

- Review the salaries of ECEC staff to ensure that they are differentiated by the requirements for different roles and reasonable even at entry-level positions, given cost of living.
- As far as possible and recognising that part of ECEC provision is privately managed, ensure that staff have benefits including sick leave, vacation time and time for professional development.
- Work towards full-time and stable contracts for employment, including the possibility of combining part-time hours across specific positions.
- Monitor for unintended discrepancies in salaries, benefits and job stability of those working in different segments of ECEC.

Provide ECEC staff with time to prepare and plan for activities related to process quality

- As far as possible and recognising that part of ECEC provision is privately managed, allocate ECEC staff with time that does not involve direct contact with children to engage in activities that make it possible to prepare and plan for process quality. This includes: time for professional development; time to plan for activities with children; time for communication with other staff members and parents; and time for cleaning and preparation of the physical environment (the importance of which is highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Clarify the amount of such protected time and also the activities for which protected time will be provided.
- Consider both extremes in terms of work hours: excessive hours that can compromise attention to process quality, and limited and inconsistent hours that can compromise ECEC staff members' sense of job security or ability to attend to all relevant activities.

Attend to discrepancies in working conditions

- Attend to discrepancies in working conditions between primary education and ECEC, as well as across different types of ECEC settings. Diminish discrepancies in working conditions that can contribute to staff turnover, which can diminish process quality.
- Foster communication and collaboration between ECEC staff and primary education staff to foster both mutual respect and continuity for children.

Initial education and continuing professional development

Initial educational requirements and continuing professional development (continuing PD) for ECEC staff provide important foundations for process quality. Each can include content providing an orientation to process quality and the importance of interactions and structuring of the physical environment. Each can also involve practice experiences that provide learning opportunities for applying principles. Clearly differentiated requirements for initial education and continuing PD according to the roles and responsibilities of ECEC staff help clarify expectations for differing roles. Initial education and continuing PD are also important to the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce, conveying expectations for the profession.

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Looking across the country-specific reports for Ireland and Luxembourg, it becomes clear how much requirements for initial and continuing PD can vary across countries as well as within countries by segment of the workforce. The relative emphasis placed on initial education requirements versus continuing PD also varies: a relatively stronger emphasis on continuing PD may complement and compensate for a more limited focus on initial education requirements and vice versa. Further, the extent to which a practice component specific to ECEC settings is required and the extent to which there is monitoring of the quality of initial education and continuing PD can also vary substantially.

Because of the potential importance of looking across initial education and continuing PD and the ways these can work together and complement each other, this Policy Brief considers them within the same section. This section also focuses on providing clear steps for professional progress that continue across initial education through continuing PD to provide a career pathway. Lastly, this section discusses the need to address gaps in articulating professional qualification requirements specifically for ECEC leaders and those working in home-based settings.

Policy consideration 1: Focus initial education requirements on content important to process quality and help support implementation through work-based learning

Overarching issues

A key task for policy makers is the need to specify not only the level of education that will be required of ECEC staff in order to be qualified to fulfil different roles but also the content required in initial education coursework. An important priority is including content that supports process quality.

The survey gathered from OECD countries for *Quality beyond Regulations* asked about coverage of 20 specific content areas distributed across these general topical areas: child development, child health, curriculum and pedagogy, playful learning, classroom management, diversity, transitions and family and community engagement. In *Starting Strong VI*, breadth of content covered in initial education was summarised as the percentage of the 20 content areas that were required in initial education coursework for teachers and assistants (OECD, 2021, pp. 106, Figure 3.3[1]) . Wide variation was found in the breadth of content included in the initial education requirements for both teachers and assistants, though breadth was greater in the requirements for teachers than assistants. Content required in the initial education of teachers in most settings included child development, playful learning and general issues related to curriculum and pedagogy (though content related to curriculum implementation was less often included in requirements). One of the topics least frequently included in initial education requirements was connecting ECEC with learning activities in the home.

While Ireland required coverage of 100% of the content areas for both teachers (called room leaders in Ireland) and assistants in its programmes spanning birth to age 5, Luxembourg was among the countries that required no content areas to be covered in its initial education. As noted, Luxembourg places a complementary focus on continuing PD to provide early childhood-specific content to staff. However, the country-specific review for Luxembourg urged consideration of the content of initial education, asking whether it might be possible to develop initial education programmes with a specific focus on ECEC.

Other important overarching issues related to content include how well the initial education requirements in a country align with the country's curriculum (and quality framework where this exists), and the transfer of degrees from other countries (especially the need to consider how well degrees from other countries prepare ECEC staff for the country-specific curriculum and quality goals). Important differences are apparent across countries in terms of whether initial education requirements include a practice-focused component and what requirements are in place for the quality of such placements. In addition to the monitoring of quality in placements, there is an overall issue of the monitoring of the quality of initial education programmes and whether there are sufficiently qualified providers of higher education for the

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ECEC workforce in institutions of higher education or other institutions that provide initial education for ECEC staff.

Opportunities for peer learning

The country review for Luxembourg encourages a greater emphasis on ECEC content in initial education for members of the workforce. One key recommendation is to consider whether it would be possible to develop further initial education programmes with a specific focus on early childhood involving qualifications at the ISCED Levels 3 to 6. A further key recommendation is to work to identify qualified providers for higher education programmes working in collaboration with universities in other countries, with an eye toward developing collaborations that will take into account the national curricula for early childhood programmes in Luxembourg for both formal and non-formal settings.

There is an opportunity here for peer learning in that Ireland has taken steps in the past and is currently taking further steps to raise the qualifications of its ECEC workforce through formal education. While the targets set for educational requirements and content goals are likely to differ across countries, and there may be country-specific issues related to the autonomy of universities to determine the content of their programmes, the considerations taken into account in Ireland and the processes for raising educational qualifications might be informative elsewhere. More specifically:

- Ireland's “First 5” strategy has set as a target that at least 50% of ECEC staff in registered centres will hold an ISCED 6 degree by 2028, which would involve an increase in degree holders of 17 percentage points from 2021 to 2028. Efforts also include broadening content and increasing the emphasis on practical experiences.
- Regarding content, while the breadth of content in initial education programmes in Ireland is comparable to that of many other OECD countries and has a strength in its emphasis on inclusion and diversity, efforts currently focus on ensuring more focus on the national curriculum and quality frameworks.
- An important development is the introduction of standards for the development of ECEC training programmes through release in 2019 by Ireland’s DE and DCEDIY of Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for education programmes at the ISCED Levels 6 and 7. Standards were also updated for ISCED 4 and 5. There is a Qualifications Advisory Board that reviews programmes on their adherence to the criteria and guidelines. Following validation, programmes can be included on a list of recognised programmes.
- Another important development in Ireland is the incorporation of practice placements in higher education programmes.
- The country review notes that Ireland seeks to balance the creation of new programmes and programme components with a strong emphasis on monitoring of quality.

Should Luxembourg and other countries decide to strengthen initial education requirements specific to early childhood education and care, they might learn from the mechanisms and procedures put in place in Ireland to set standards for ECEC training programmes and to develop programmes at specific levels through its Professional Awards Criteria and Guidelines, as well as those to review programmes for adherence to the standards through its Qualifications Advisory Board.

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Policy consideration 2: Continue to build the knowledge and skills of those already in the ECEC workforce through continuing professional development that matches staff needs

Overarching issues

Research is clear that evidence-based training for staff already working in ECEC settings has the potential to improve process quality, particularly when the training combines a focus on knowledge about practices that are important to process quality with support from a mentor or coach for implementing these practices. Evaluations of specific training programmes point to their potential to improve both the warmth and responsiveness of teacher-child interactions and the cognitive stimulation provided to children. As just one example, a recent study evaluated a continuing PD programme for ECEC centre teachers working with preschool-aged children that involved training to strengthen both their language and literacy instructional practices as well as their responsiveness to young children (Crawford, 2021[2]) The continuing PD involved online coursework combined with coaching. Teachers were randomly assigned to participate in the coursework combined with in-person coaching, coursework combined with virtual coaching, or continue business as usual (without the coursework or coaching). Coursework that was combined with either virtual or in-person coaching improved observed teacher sensitivity with the children as well as their language and literacy instructional practices.

Ongoing professional development can be very important in increasing the knowledge and skills of members of the workforce for whom initial education was limited or who are ready to proceed on to the next professional level. With research on young children's development progressing rapidly, continuing PD can provide important updates to those who have been working in ECEC for multiple years. When multiple staff members undertake professional development in an ECEC setting, this can help to establish an ethos of ongoing goal setting for quality improvement within the setting and can foster communication and collaboration among staff members in a way that fosters each individual's progress.

Continuing PD can also be targeted to address content that has been determined to be of high priority or in need of improvement. Such professional development can help to assure that ECEC staff are knowledgeable about a national curriculum and are taking appropriate steps to implement it. When inspections have revealed a need for quality improvement in a specific facet of process quality, continuing PD for staff can help to bring about improvements in the specific areas of concern.

The importance of continuing PD underscores the need for systems for implementation. Such systems need to have sufficient capacity to meet staff needs, not only in terms of amount of available training but also content that matches areas in need of further development. Systems need to be in place to provide continuing PD in a way that is consistent when multiple organisations are providing the professional development. There is also a need to assure that those providing the continuing PD themselves have sufficient preparation, with a focus both on the provision of information in group settings in a way that is attuned to adult learning styles and through individual supports in the form of effective mentoring or coaching. Those providing continuing PD may need to have sufficient knowledge of languages in the particular country, especially where fostering multilingualism in a country is an articulated goal. Just as for initial education, there is a need for systems for continuing PD to include monitoring to assure high-quality implementation.

Opportunities for peer learning

Recommendations for Ireland in the country-specific review include the suggestion to increase the focus on continuing PD to complement the already strong emphasis on initial education. While it seems that a high percentage of centre staff in Ireland participate in continuing PD, it is not clear that the staff who need it most participate and whether there is a match between the content of the professional development and staff needs. A further key issue is the number of different organisations providing ongoing guidance on

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quality improvement to help programmes respond to issues identified during inspections. Access to support for quality improvement following inspections is described in the country review for Ireland as limited and inconsistent.

Steps are underway to improve continuing PD in Ireland through the recent creation of an agency, Better Start, aimed at improving the focus and co-ordination of such efforts. As new efforts are undertaken, there are opportunities for Ireland and other countries to learn from efforts already underway in Luxembourg to strengthen continuing PD. More specifically:

- Upskilling of the ECEC workforce through continuing PD has been a major focus in Luxembourg.
- Efforts have included establishing minimum requirements for participation in training that apply across types of ECEC and age groups of children. For those working in non-formal ECEC, the requirement is for 32 hours of professional development over two years for all staff working directly with children. While the requirement pertains to all those working in the non-formal sector, it is linked with the eligibility for subsidy funding through the CSA programme.
- As noted earlier, a specific 30-hour course is provided without cost by the National Youth Service focusing on multilingualism. Participation is required for the pedagogical referents of multilingual programmes.
- Home-based providers are required to register in order to participate in the CSA subsidy system. They are required to participate in 40 hours of continuing PD every two years, half of which must include a focus on the national curriculum framework for non-formal ECEC.
- Multiple agencies provide continuing PD through training, mentoring and coaching. Leaders of ECEC settings can also apply to provide training. In the context of multiple providers, it is especially important to note that the content of training provided as part of continuing PD must be reviewed in light of quality standards, with accreditation of training provided by the Further Training Commission.
- Specific plans are underway to extend and strengthen continuing PD in Luxembourg in 2022. A primary goal is to increase the number of hours of participation to approximately 24 hours per year for full-time members of the workforce (from the current minimum requirement of 32 hours across two years).
- In addition, the government has begun to pay for continuing PD for all staff members in all settings, whether contracted or non-contracted (though time for participation will still need to be covered by providers). Before 2022, non-contracted settings did not receive specific funding from the government to cover professional development beyond the general funds provided through the subsidy system (CSA).
- There are also plans to take further steps to ensure the quality of continuing PD, with discussions by multiple stakeholders underway regarding the governance structure, including which organisation will provide accreditation for training courses, and what steps could be taken to tailor continuing PD for home-based providers so that it meets their particular strengths and needs for further development.

The needs for continuing PD in Ireland and other countries will differ from those in Luxembourg, and approaches fitting to the context will be needed (just as when strengthening initial education approaches is considered). However, here too, general principles or mechanisms undertaken in Luxembourg may be informative. These include having a designated body within the government to provide accreditation to courses of training and providing additional financial support for participation in continuing PD.

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Policy consideration 3: Clarify how members of the ECEC workforce can progress professionally

Overarching issues

A sense of professionalisation of the ECEC workforce rests in part on members of the workforce having clarity about the expectations that exist for their specific roles within ECEC and about what further they need to do in order to transition to more senior professional roles. This requires the articulation of a path for professional progress. A "career pathway" involves opportunities for advancement across a progression of clearly articulated steps involving education, further training, and credentials, with financial rewards involved in making professional progress.

Lack of an articulated career pathway can result in turnover. Turnover can also be unintentionally fostered when there are discrepancies in the requirements or rewards given for filling similar roles in different sectors of ECEC. Turnover can limit the benefits of investments in staff professional development to process quality. It can also be financially costly as time and funding invested in professional development are lost when staff depart, and further staff members must participate to meet requirements. Turnover can compromise young children's sense of security in their relationships with staff members.

Articulating a career pathway requires identifying attainable steps between the major ECEC job categories (such as teacher/room leader and assistant) and looking across initial education and continuing PD to create a continuous progression, clarifying preparation requirements as well as rewards for specific steps. A key challenge is articulating how on-the-job experience is to be evaluated and given credit, a challenge faced in other professions, but that takes care and thought on the part of key stakeholders.

Opportunities for peer learning

The country-specific reviews for Ireland and Luxembourg include recommendations for the further articulation of paths for professional progression for ECEC staff in both countries. The country review for Luxembourg identifies as a key challenge the lack of a sequence in which specific certifications build towards qualifications for the next professional level. The amount and focus of the content that would be required for specific certifications and the way in which breadth of content would be entailed in building towards higher levels of qualifications are noted as issues.

The country review for Ireland recommends a future focus on induction practices, on assuring that further professional steps can be taken by those already working in ECEC, and giving careful consideration to ways to give recognition for prior learning experience. However, the country review also stresses that a great deal of work has already gone into developing occupational role profiles, qualifications and career pathways, most recently articulated in the Workforce Plan for 2022-2028, published in December 2021.

Both reviews identify steps that have been taken recently or are being taken now to fill in gaps in a professional progression to make progress more attainable and to address unintended discrepancies in professional recognition and rewards for the same role played in different segments or sectors of ECEC. These recent steps taken by both Ireland and Luxembourg to add specific, attainable steps in a professional progression provide opportunities for mutual peer learning. For example:

- An important development in Ireland is the development of a new Certificate in Early Learning and Care for ISCED Level 4 and an Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care at ISCED Level 5. In addition, as noted earlier, in 2019, Ireland introduced standards for training programmes at the ISCED Levels 6 and 7 through the release by DE and DCEDIY of Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for education programmes at the ISCED Levels 6 and 7. These new certificates and further development of standards help to provide smaller attainable steps on a professional pathway.

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- Movement in this direction in Luxembourg can be seen in the preparation of "pedagogical referents" who co-ordinate the implementation of multilingual education for settings and are offered a specific 30-hour training course.

Ireland and Luxembourg could build further on these important steps by considering whether specific content and sequences of content in continuing PD could aim toward additional certifications and help staff in the ECEC workforce continue to make professional progress once already in positions.

Policy consideration 4: Ensure that all key ECEC roles are included

Overarching issues

A complete career pathway for professional progress needs to include and be accessible to all key professional roles in ECEC. The country-specific reviews identify two gaps that would benefit from further attention: full articulation of expectations and requirements for leaders of ECEC programmes; and full inclusion of home-based providers in a way that takes into account their unique strengths and needs.

A review of the research conducted for the OECD on *Leadership for Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* notes that ECEC leadership is important to process quality in multiple ways. Effective leadership involves supporting the professional development of staff so that they continue to grow in their capacity to facilitate young children's learning, development and well-being. Such leadership also supports process quality by facilitating the implementation of a curriculum and specific instructional practices and creating an organisational climate that encourages collaboration, peer learning and goal setting for continued improvement and innovation. An international survey of the ECEC workforce, the OECD *Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS Starting Strong), found that centre staff report a stronger sense of efficacy when centre leaders provide a clear vision. Recent research has looked explicitly at the initial education of leadership in ECEC as a predictor of young children's development across the course of a year in centre-based ECEC. In an analysis of multiple large datasets focusing on ECEC in the United States, the initial education level of centre leaders was found to contribute to the gains young children made, even taking into account the education levels of teachers, classroom staff-child ratio, and use of a curriculum. Thus, the inclusion of centre leadership in a fully articulated pathway for professional progress is important.

Similarly, including the providers of home-based care in a complete pathway for professional progress is particularly important given the evidence that there are unique aspects of such settings that can contribute to children's experiences of process quality, as emphasised in a recent review of the research focusing on quality in home-based care (Bromer et al., 2021). Such settings can be important when fostering multilingualism is a priority, as providers in home-based settings may be particularly able to contribute to the continuing development of a home language. Unique features of home-based care also include the potential to sustain individual relationships of children with particular providers over the course of years, the potential to have siblings participate in the same group, and the potential in mixed-age groups for younger children to learn from older children. Home-based care may provide an opportunity for a young child to continue to learn a home culture if the provider shares cultural practices with the family. Families may prefer home-based care for a very young child with special needs because the small group size and home setting may facilitate specific accommodations. Home-based providers may also help address parental stress and family economic security by providing care during hours needed by those working nonstandard hours. Yet, at the same time, home-based providers may face specific challenges that can affect process quality, such as isolation in their daily work and challenges finding the time and financial resources needed to participate in continuing PD.

With respect to the leadership role, the country review for Ireland notes that attention to this role has been limited thus far, though current initiatives are placing a greater emphasis on the role. Clarification of expectations for the role is seen as a key first step. Different challenges are noted for leaders in large and

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small centres. In large centres, the country review notes the concern that professional development for current leaders may emphasise administration rather than balance administrative and pedagogical leadership. In small centres, the need for leaders sometimes to serve also as room leaders/teachers may limit the time they have available to devote to management or a focus on pedagogy for the centre as a whole.

In Luxembourg, while the minimum qualification to become a centre leader in ECEC for children under the age of three is a bachelor's degree (ISCED Level 6), in settings with fewer than 40 children, regulations permit leaders to have an ISCED 3 qualification. There is no requirement for initial education to have a specific focus either on management and supervision or on the development, education and care of young children. Before the introduction of the 2022 reform of continuous PD, the provision for mentoring or coaching specifically aimed at leadership was limited. As for Ireland, a key overarching issue is the preparation of leaders for balancing administrative and pedagogical tasks, and especially the implementation of the curriculum.

With respect to home-based providers, in Ireland, as noted above, more than one in ten young children are cared for in home-based settings by a childminder, au pair or nanny. While the same qualifications pertain to registered childminders as in centres, only a small percentage of childminders are currently registered in Ireland, and the qualifications and training of the other childminders are not known. A National Action Plan for Childminding in Ireland is working towards the development of a registration and qualification system. Great attention is being paid to incorporating the input of key stakeholders, with the understanding that retaining as staff those already working in this sector will require awareness and thoughtfulness about their priorities and needs.

In Luxembourg, it is estimated that 4% of slots available in the non-formal sector are in home-based settings. Home-based providers are required to register in order to participate in the CSA or subsidy system, and a very high percentage do so. Home-based providers are included in the quality assurance and improvement system in Luxembourg. The country review for Luxembourg notes the need for careful consideration of how to include these providers in continuing PD in a way that respects the workload and hours of these members of the workforce while taking into account their unique strengths and challenges. As in Ireland, an emphasis is being placed in Luxembourg on taking stakeholder perspectives into account.

Opportunity for peer learning: Leadership

Despite their very different starting points, it is clear that in both Ireland and Luxembourg, there is an underlying need to consult with programme leaders in order to arrive at an understanding of their needs for professional development and the opportunities that would be welcome and utilised for professional progression.

Luxembourg has recently engaged in both data gathering and piloting a new continuing PD programme for its ECEC leadership. More specifically:

- A recent survey of programme leaders conducted in Luxembourg by the SNJ underscored a perception by leaders that they need more individual support, for example, through coaching.
- A pilot programme for leaders implemented by the SNJ to provide such support to leaders has had strong participation.

An opportunity exists for Ireland and other countries to learn more about Luxembourg's attempts to specify leaders' needs for continuing PD and the structure and content of the pilot programme. It might be helpful to learn about any feedback received by the SNJ on the pilot programme.

Interestingly, both country reviews highlight that the specialists provided in particular programmes within each country are potential starting points for extending support to leaders. In Ireland, it is noted that the specialists for the AIM programme, who currently provide supports to centres for the implementation of

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inclusive programming for children with special needs, could be extended to include further pedagogical support. In Luxembourg, it is noted that the role of the specialists who provide support for implementation of the programme for multilingualism could similarly be extended to encompass a broader agenda of support for centre pedagogical efforts. The development of a specific training programme for the specialist role, and strong interest in participating in this training, can be illustrated by the experience in Ireland with the Leadership for Inclusion in Early Years (LINC) programme. More specifically:

- The LINC programme involves a Special Purpose Award at the ISCED 5 level aimed at preparing ECEC staff to take on a leadership role in providing support and supervision for the implementation of inclusive practices.
- Participants must be nominated by their employers and continue to work while participating in the programme. They have a range of backgrounds and qualifications. A variety of learning approaches are incorporated into the programme to ensure that it will be accessible to adult learners with a range of experiences.
- There are six in-person full-day sessions and six online units. Students also receive one-on-one mentoring.
- As of autumn 2020, approximately 3 450 participants had completed the programme, and 60% of ECCE settings had an inclusion co-ordinator. Participant satisfaction with the programme has been strong.

A peer-learning opportunity exists here, focusing on the specific approaches used in the specialist training programmes in both countries. Important questions include whether preparation for specialist roles might be extended to include broader preparation for pedagogical leadership, either for individual centres or groups of centres, and whether a curriculum framework could potentially serve as the focus for such further training. While pedagogical leadership has been articulated as an area needing further support and focus in each country, the two country reviews also stress the close ties between pedagogical leadership and such aspects of management as staff supervision and mentoring, and the needs for preparation of leaders for management as well as the pedagogical aspects of their work. The OECD literature review on ECEC (Douglass, 2019[3]) leadership emphasises that ECEC leaders often face challenges in balancing tasks across the core functions of programme administration and pedagogy. It would be helpful for future efforts to include a focus on preparing leaders to balance and harmonise tasks across these areas.

Opportunity for peer learning: Home-based providers

As noted, Ireland is in a very active period of consultation with key stakeholders about ways in which it would be possible to bring childminding into the regulated system. This will involve developing initial qualifications as well as continuing PD. While clearly acknowledging the need to consider whether and how to align qualifications with those of staff members working in centre-based settings, Ireland is placing an emphasis on proceeding with the development of training in a way that incorporates the voices of childminders.

While Luxembourg is further along in terms of registration of home-based providers and with their inclusion in ongoing quality improvement efforts, it is important to recognise that efforts are currently underway to further tailor continuing PD to the unique needs and challenges of home-based providers in the country. An opportunity exists for peer learning to further understand the specific needs for support and professional development and the unique strengths and challenges faced by home-based providers. More specifically:

- Luxembourg and other countries stand to learn from the extensive consultation with key stakeholders that Ireland has conducted for the development of the National Action Plan for Childminding. What have childminders expressed in terms of their priorities and needs for initial education and continuing PD? How does Ireland foresee connecting the requirements and

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qualifications of childminders with those of other ECEC professionals in Ireland while at the same time acknowledging their previous experience and setting-specific contribution to process quality?

- Ireland and other countries stand to learn from ongoing efforts in Luxembourg to reform the governance of their continuing PD in a way that includes a specific focus on improving the quality of continuing PD for home-based providers. Plans include introducing new formats, including but going beyond courses to encompass practical exercises and coaching. Important questions include what specific content and formats are introduced, and what are the responses of home-based providers?

Each country has opportunities to learn from the other's efforts to understand the strengths and challenges of the ECEC workforce working in home-based settings and the approaches to professional development that stand to contribute to process quality in these settings. Broader collaborative learning on governance/oversight and professionalisation of the home-based workforce could help multiple countries shape their policies in this area as well.

Working conditions

In addition to initial education and continuing PD, working conditions for the ECEC workforce are important contributors to process quality. Evidence indicates that staff salaries, and the perception of the fairness of salaries given responsibilities, are related to staff engagement or detachment in their work and thereby the interactions young children have with staff members. Relationships with children are embedded within and reflect the quality of relationships among staff members: a warm and mutually respectful work environment helps create such patterns of communication and interaction of ECEC staff with children and families. For example, in a study of the working conditions of teachers working in toddler classrooms in centres, participants' reports of the fairness of their wages and of their degree of involvement in decisions in the workplace regarding hiring were both predictors of observed emotional supportiveness of the classrooms. In addition, teachers' wages were associated with toddlers' positive emotionality and behaviour (Cassidy et al., 2017).

Excessive job demands and work hours for ECEC staff can affect staff emotional well-being, which in turn can have important implications for staff-child interactions. When staff have not been allocated non-contact time (for example, time to plan activities, document children's progress, communicate with parents, and collaborate with other staff members in professional development), this can impede the implementation of process quality goals.

Research indicates that poor working conditions, as well as poor staff emotional well-being, have the potential to contribute to staff turnover. For example, a study of ECEC staff working with preschool-age children in the United States found that those with better perceptions of their working conditions were less likely to report that they intended to move to another job within the early childhood field or leave the field entirely. In addition, those reporting greater stress and emotional exhaustion were more likely to report that they intended to leave the early childhood field (Grant, Jeon & Buettner, 2019). Turnover not only disrupts secure relationships between children and staff members but also affects process quality through a loss of the knowledge and skills attained through the professional development in which departing staff have participated. Discrepancies in the working conditions across ECEC roles in different sectors of ECEC and between ECEC and primary education can hasten departures as members of the workforce leave for settings with related work but more advantageous working conditions.

The country review for Ireland notes that with relatively low public funding and the market-driven nature of the ECEC sector, working conditions are generally poor in the ECEC sector in that country. However, important efforts to address working conditions are underway both through the efforts of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) and provisions in the 2022 budget that are linked to the outcomes of the JLC. The country review for Luxembourg notes specific areas of concern with respect to differences in the working conditions

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of those working in specific segments of ECEC in the non-formal sector. Just as in Ireland, the country report points to specific efforts that are already underway to address challenges, in this instance, the differences in working conditions in the contracted and non-contracted sectors.

Consideration of working conditions for the ECEC workforce requires focus on: 1) salaries, benefits and job security; 2) workload and work hours; and 3) discrepancies for segments of the workforce working in different ECEC programmes and looking across ECEC and primary education. Key issues in each area that emerge from the in-depth reviews in Ireland and Luxembourg are highlighted below, with attention to how the challenges and efforts in these two countries can inform efforts in other countries as well.

Policy consideration 5: Provide salaries, benefits and job security differentiated by staff roles but with a sufficient base for all staff to support the well-being and development of children through process quality

Overarching issues

Key overarching issues regarding salaries include whether these are aligned with the qualifications required for specific positions, whether salaries are reasonable given the cost of living, and whether there are regulations beyond the minimum wage for specific positions. Issues regarding benefits include whether positions involve sick leave, vacation time and time for continuing PD. A central issue for job security is whether staff have contracts for full-time employment and for stable employment. Differences in salary, benefits and job security for different segments of the workforce that can sometimes occur with the creation of different programmes can have implications for the level of qualifications of those working with particular groups of children (such as the youngest) and for issues of turnover. A further issue of importance is the extent to which the government has a formal role in setting salaries, benefits and job security: a direct role in setting working conditions can be limited when the sector is primarily privately run.

Opportunities for peer learning

The country review for Ireland notes that in the context of a privately run sector and with relatively low public funding to date, salaries have been low for members of the ECEC workforce. In addition, there are issues of part-time work (for example, for those working only in the ECCE programme, which operates for a specific number of hours per day and per year). The proportion of staff with permanent contracts differs across types of staff in ECEC centres but is generally lower than for many other workers in the country. Assistants are less likely than room leaders to have a permanent contract, as are staff working in the ECCE programme. These issues are seen as contributing to high turnover rates, estimated at 18% in Ireland during 2019-20. A survey of about 2 000 ECEC staff by a trade union found that 77% of respondents had no sick pay, 91% had no pension beyond the State Pension, and only 10% had paid maternity leave. The country review points to different levels of public financing and differing parental fees for different segments of ECEC, with the unintended consequence of focusing more resources on preschool-age children (including in the ECCE programme) and less on classrooms with younger children, where costs are actually higher.

The country review for Luxembourg notes large gaps in the salaries and in job security for those working in contracted versus non-contracted centres in non-formal ECEC. Salaries within the non-contracted sector can also vary substantially as employment is negotiated by individuals with their employers. Those working in the non-formal sector with children who are spending part of the day in the formal sector, for example in the optional pre-primary programme for 3 year-olds, may have intermittent and few hours of employment. There is a challenge in retaining staff in the non-contracted sector, with a special challenge of retaining staff who speak Luxembourgish. The increasing goal setting for implementation of the national curriculum framework may appear discrepant with the limited working conditions, especially in the non-contracted sector.

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From both country reviews, it appears that attending to differences in salaries for specific segments of the ECEC workforce and focusing on opportunities to combine part-time employment contracts for fixed periods into more full-time and more enduring employment agreements are areas that could strengthen the sector.

The initiation of a Joint Labour Committee in Ireland with a goal of agreeing on minimum wages for staff in differing roles in ECEC, including leaders, with the possibility of focusing also on other aspects of working conditions, provides an important opportunity for peer learning. By way of background, Ireland's Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth began a consultative process in 2020 to establish a need for a JLC for the sector, with the JLC given effect by the Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail in mid-2021. The JLC is an independent process with an independent chair and includes representatives of trade unions and employer organisations. There are multiple goals. More specifically:

- A primary goal will be to propose an Employment Regulation Order (ERO). If accepted by the Labour Court, this will set minimum wages for ECEC staff. It may also cover such further aspects of working conditions as working hours and training.
- Contingent on an agreed-upon ERO and contingent upon providers agreeing to certain terms and conditions including on parental fees, the Irish government will initiate a new core funding stream for ECEC as part of the 2022 budget. This new funding stream is intended to support the costs of the adoption of the ERO with respect to higher wages and improved working conditions.
- To help address the discrepancy by child age and to incentivise higher qualifications, more funding would be allocated to centres with the youngest children and to staff with higher qualifications.

While in many ways, the process and goals of the JLC are specific to Ireland, there are aspects of this approach that have the potential to inform efforts in Luxembourg as well as other countries. For example, it may be valuable to learn from the JLC's recommendations regarding salaries for ECEC leadership. The approach taken to addressing discrepancies across programmes through incentives may also be of particular relevance.

Policy consideration 6: Provide ECEC staff with time to prepare and plan for activities related to process quality

Overarching issues

Specific issues that emerge from the country reports regarding workload and working hours for ECEC staff include whether staff receive time for tasks that do not involve direct contact with children, such as planning time and time for continuing PD; equity in workload across larger and smaller centres, and more specifically whether those working in smaller centres may be asked to take on administrative as well as pedagogical tasks; and whether home-based providers have longer working hours than those working in centres and how time for continuing PD for those in home-based settings can be arranged given work hours. It is important to note that inconsistent and part-time work hours and the implications of these for employment contracts, as well as excessively long and demanding hours, are issues for different segments of the ECEC workforce.

Opportunities for peer learning

Seven specific activities that can contribute to process quality but do not involve direct contact with children are identified in *Starting Strong VI*. These activities include: individual planning or preparing play and/or learning activities; collaborating and speaking with colleagues and parents or guardians within the ECEC setting; documenting children's development, well-being and learning; participating in the ECEC setting management, staff meetings and general administrative work (including communication, paperwork and

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other clerical duties); attending professional development activities; reflecting on work; and laundry, tidying up, cleaning, shopping or cooking.

A key aspect of working conditions for ECEC staff involves whether there is protected time for these activities, which contribute to process quality but take place without direct contact with children. In Ireland, at present, there are no regulations regarding such protected time. In addition, in Ireland, many staff members work part-time and are only paid for hours directly involving work with children. This may result in non-contact activities that can contribute to process quality being conducted beyond paid work hours, or being conducted without sufficient frequency and depth.

It will be important to learn whether the JLC in Ireland includes consideration of protected time for non-contact activities that contribute to process quality and whether further steps concerning protecting non-contact time are considered in Luxembourg. Key issues include which specific activities are viewed as important for the provision of protected time and whether it is possible to provide protected time to part-time as well as full-time ECEC staff.

Policy consideration 7: Attend to discrepancies in working conditions

Overarching issues

Discrepancies in working conditions between primary education and ECEC, and within different segments of ECEC, can create differences in self-respect and respect from others for different ECEC positions. Such discrepancies can also result in "syphoning off" of staff members, with the most qualified leaving for positions accorded greater professional respect and better working conditions. Discrepancies have been noted between those working in ECEC and primary education, across ECEC positions when they are within or outside of formal education, and for ECEC staff members working outside of formal education but in different programmes or sectors. These discrepancies can be particularly concerning when there is an expansion in the expectations for supporting young children's development, learning and well-being for ECEC staff members working outside of formal education, but no parallel improvement in working conditions.

Opportunities for peer learning

The gap in working conditions and perceived status between those working in primary education and in ECEC is large in Ireland. Salaries for primary school teachers in Ireland are considered relatively high from an international perspective, the perceived status of primary school teachers is positive within the country, and these teachers have pensions and receive time off for holidays. However, as noted above, efforts are moving forward to address the generally poor working conditions of ECEC staff in Ireland.

In Luxembourg, there is no difference in the working conditions of those working in formal ECEC within the school system, starting at age 4 or in the optional programme for 3 year-olds, and those working in primary education. In contrast, working conditions for those working in ECEC in the non-formal sector are less favourable, particularly for those working in non-contracted settings, with differences in salary, perceived status and job security.

In Luxembourg, ECEC staff in the non-formal and formal sectors are encouraged to identify strategies to engage with each other. Such collaboration is viewed as important to children's transitions and is included in the monitoring of the non-formal sector. Interestingly, there is a feeling in the non-formal sector that this is not fully reciprocal. The country review for Luxembourg raises the possibility of increasing the symmetry in monitoring as a possible mechanism for fostering greater mutual respect and communication.

Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in Luxembourg provide a possible opportunity for peer learning. More specifically:

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- During the pandemic, collaboration across the formal and non-formal sector sectors in Luxembourg increased in many cases.
- This happened because it was seen as increasingly important for teachers to communicate about the learning, development and well-being of individual children.

It might be useful to gather further information about this cross-sector communication during the pandemic in Luxembourg, asking what specific opportunities for cross-sector communication were utilised, how they took place, and what information about the children' progress was conveyed.

Children in other countries also make cross-sector transitions daily or with age. For example, with the ECCE programme in Ireland, because it is structured to be part-day and part-year, parents who are employed full-time may enrol their children also in other types of ECEC (for example, by childminders or in other ECEC centre classrooms). In addition, the youngest children in Ireland may begin participation in the ECCE programme after participating in centre classrooms for infants and toddlers or in home-based settings with childminders. Perhaps structured formats for communication by teachers across settings could be developed to foster continuity for children, with a further aim of increasing collaboration and mutual respect by ECEC staff working in different settings.

Conclusion

Ireland and Luxembourg have already made important efforts to strengthen process quality in their ECEC settings through a focus on the ECEC workforce. They have each shown a commitment to taking important further steps. In addition to ongoing policy efforts, their participation in country reviews, complementing and extending their participation in the data collection for *Quality beyond Regulations*, are indicative of this strong commitment.

Each country review highlights the unique context for ECEC in Ireland and Luxembourg, including distinctive areas where progress has been made, as well as challenges. The country reviews make specific recommendations on where to target future efforts focusing on the ECEC workforce.

While respecting the significant differences across the countries, a careful reading of the country reviews also suggests that there are important opportunities for peer learning across the two countries as well as opportunities for learning for other countries. This Policy Brief is written with the intent of pointing to specific opportunities for peer learning. It is intended as a starting point, highlighting opportunities rather than providing in-depth discussions of each of the areas where peer learning is identified as a potentially fruitful step.

It is hoped that this report will provide encouragement for further in-depth reading of each country's review by ECEC leadership in other countries and provide guidance as to where further communication across countries and with OECD staff on specific issues might be fruitful.

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The bottom line:

The early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce is foundational for providing high-quality learning, development and well-being experiences for young children. Policies can support the development of this workforce by addressing requirements for initial education and continuing professional development, as well as the working conditions of ECEC staff. Examining different policy approaches with a focus on Ireland and Luxembourg, this Policy Brief highlights key opportunities for peer learning across countries interested in enhancing process quality in ECEC through workforce development.

Starting Strong thematic reviews

OECD Starting Strong thematic reviews identify key elements of successful early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies in OECD countries and partner economies. The reviews offer an international perspective on ECEC systems, discuss the strengths and opportunities of different approaches and provide policy orientations that help promote equitable access to high-quality ECEC.



For more information

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See: OECD Early Childhood Education and Care

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