

# More needs to be done to reap multiple benefits of monitoring quality

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Rising investments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) have made it increasingly important to determine whether ECEC systems are delivering high-quality services. Monitoring quality of ECEC systems matters not only for accountability purposes, but also to inform policymaking, to allow staff to learn and improve practices, and to inform parents about the level of quality being offered. Most importantly, monitoring is key for determining whether and how provision of ECEC is supporting children's development and well-being – and what can be done to improve it.

For these reasons, a growing number of OECD countries are establishing and expanding monitoring systems and practices. Although monitoring practices vary widely across countries, common trends are emerging (OECD, 2015):

- 1 Quality monitoring is increasingly practised across all 24 countries and jurisdictions surveyed.
- 2 Countries are making continuous efforts to improve monitoring methodologies and processes.
- 3 Areas of monitoring are often integrated: service quality, staff quality and child outcomes are usually not monitored independently of each other.
- 4 ECEC monitoring is often aligned with the primary school monitoring system, given the need for a more continuous early childhood development experience.
- 5 Results of monitoring quality, especially service quality, are becoming publicly available.

Monitoring service quality – structural aspects such as staff–child ratios, health and safety regulations, indoor/outdoor space regulations, staff qualifications – is the most common monitoring area reported across the countries that participated in *Starting Strong IV*. However, interest is growing in monitoring process quality to ensure high quality of interaction between ECEC staff and children. This aspect is frequently monitored as part of staff quality. It is increasingly important as it is widely acknowledged that staff's pedagogical activities, interactions and knowledge play a major role in shaping children's well-being and development. Child development and outcomes are also increasingly monitored to identify children's learning needs, enhance their development, raise service quality and staff performance, and inform policymaking.

Monitoring quality is complex, and presents various challenges. Defining what quality is, and how it can be coherently monitored, given the variety of different settings under consideration, is not an easy task. Neither is obtaining information on the level of quality being provided, and ensuring that monitoring contributes to policy reform and quality improvements. The different monitoring areas each pose specific concerns. In monitoring service quality, the key issues are defining what constitutes service quality; ensuring consistent practices and procedures; and ensuring that staff and settings are informed of the latest quality standards. In monitoring staff performance, the key challenges are monitoring the implementation of curriculum by staff and the alignment of monitoring

with effective quality improvements. Monitoring child development and children’s outcomes at the individual level requires age-appropriate tools to establish an accurate and complete picture of a child’s development, as well as tailoring monitoring to the individual child. A wide range of strategies have been employed to overcome such challenges, for instance by providing training to evaluators and carefully considering the distribution of responsibilities for monitoring of different actors.

The OECD is developing an international study on ECEC staff, the TALIS Starting Strong Survey, to address countries’ data needs regarding staff quality. This study will be the first of its kind, providing rich information for the delivery of high-quality services. The initiative will provide an overview of key quality aspects of children’s learning and well-being environments. It will provide evidence and comparisons to help policymakers develop ECEC services that enhance positive outcomes for all children.

#### Reference

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OECD. (2015). *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.



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