

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review was initiated to support countries and jurisdictions to understand and enhance quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. This policy review places a particular focus on policies that support the quality of children's daily interactions through their ECEC settings, including with other children, staff/teachers, space and materials, their families and the wider community, known as *process quality*. This note discusses several policy levers that are at the core of children's daily experiences in ECEC, making them important for understanding quality beyond the complex governance and regulatory systems that surround ECEC.

Australia

Key findings

In Australia, 100% of children aged 5 and 6 were enrolled in ECEC or primary school in 2018, which is above the OECD average. Enrolment of children aged 3 and 4 were slightly below the OECD average while 40% of children under age 3 were enrolled, which is above the OECD average. The average expenditure per child aged 3 to 5 is below the OECD average according to international data. The provision of ECEC involves mostly centre-based settings, with a small percentage of home-based settings. Governments at federal, state and territory level work collaboratively to regulate and ensure quality in ECEC. Over the past 15 years, a series of strategies have been implemented to improve access to ECEC through legal entitlements and subsidies to families, and to support quality through the introduction of a national curriculum framework, which is embedded with an overall national regulatory framework (the National Quality Framework). For the period 2022 to 2025, the national government will provide funding to states and territories to ensure children's entitlement to 15 hours of free ECEC per week.

The national curriculum framework for ECEC covers all children from birth to 5 years old/primary school entry age and is compulsory for all settings under the National Quality Framework. The curriculum recognises the importance of play and children's agency. It has broad goals and aims to support children's interactions with peers, adults and space and materials, for which it provides guidance. Process quality is, therefore, at the core of the curriculum. ECEC staff are encouraged to implement the curriculum in a flexible way to meet the needs of every child. A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the design of the curriculum.

Teachers are required to hold at least an International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 5 qualification, though the majority have an ISCED Level 6, and assistants to have at least an ISCED Level 4 qualification. Centre-based settings are required to meet several requirements regarding the qualifications of their staff and leaders. The breadth of the content of initial education programmes is broad and coincides with the OECD maximum for both teachers and assistants. Furthermore, practicum is required for both teachers and assistants. Professional development is encouraged and supported by authorities and is promoted through the quality assessment and rating system in place for all ECEC settings. ECEC teachers are typically given time reserved for activities

separate from their contact time with children, but not for many activities, compared to other participating countries and jurisdictions.

Monitoring of ECEC quality includes assessment and rating visits, which determine the rating level of each setting based on seven quality areas that address both structural and process quality. A risk-based approach is followed, in which lower quality rated settings are more frequently assessed. Regulatory authorities provide feedback to settings and advise on quality improvement. External monitoring of curriculum implementation is mandatory for all settings. Providers of approved initial education programmes are also monitored externally.

Governance, standards and funding

In Australia, governments at the federal, state and territory levels work collaboratively to regulate and ensure quality in ECEC, with national guidance, oversight and coordination provided by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. The federal government is primarily responsible for supporting children's access to ECEC, for example through subsidies for families and support for providers. State and territory governments are primarily responsible for regulating, monitoring and enforcing minimum quality standards of ECEC in their jurisdictions, as well as for delivering and/or subsidising ECEC in pre-primary settings.

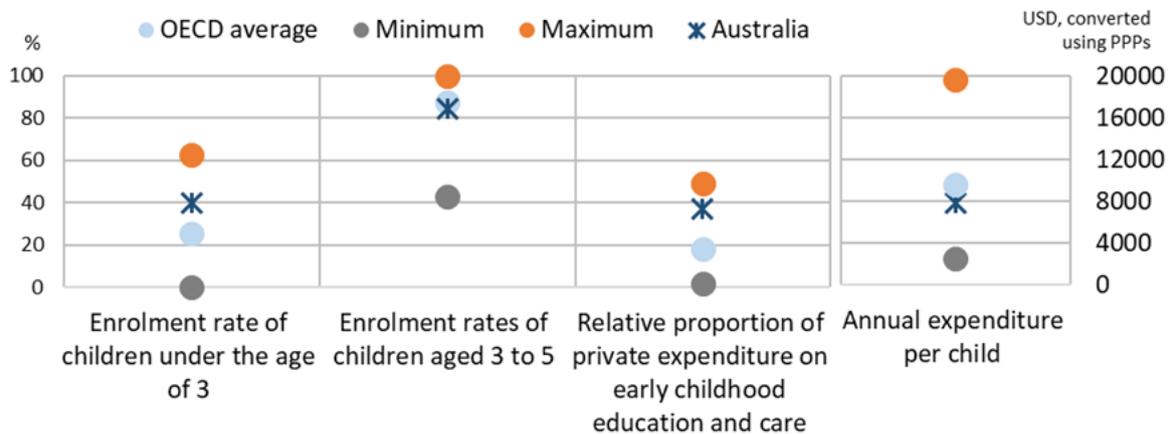
The provision of ECEC involves a range of settings, most of them centre-based, with 3% home-based settings, according to national authorities. Centre-based settings, including pre-primary settings, provide ECEC full or part-time, and children typically attend on a regular basis. ECEC is not compulsory in Australia, as the starting age for compulsory education is 6, although this may vary across jurisdictions, and many children typically start attending primary school at age 5.

At age 5 and 6, 100% of children were enrolled in ECEC or primary school in 2018, which is above the OECD average. Enrolment of children aged 3 and 4 were slightly below the OECD average. Most children in this age group were enrolled in private institutions. The average expenditure per child in this age group is below the OECD average according to international data and the relative proportion of private expenditure on ECEC is above the OECD average. According to national authorities, an estimated 86.4% of Indigenous children aged 4 were in ECEC in 2018, as compared to 91.3% of non-Indigenous children. The enrolment rate in ECEC for children under age 3 was 40% in 2018, higher than the average in OECD countries.

Over the past 15 years, a series of strategies have been implemented to improve access to quality ECEC. These include the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and the Child Care package, the introduction of a national curriculum framework, and the agreement on a national system for the regulation of ECEC services, the National Quality Framework. Children aged 4 to 5 are granted access to 15 hours of free ECEC per week. A national funding agreement will provide financial support for states and territories to ensure children's entitlement to free ECEC for the period from 2022 to 2025. The national government will also allocate funding over this period to support families' access to ECEC.

Figure 1. Enrolment rates, funding and standards: Australia

2018



Note: Minimum and maximum values are across OECD countries and for total ISCED Level 0 unless specified.

The reference year is 2017 for relative proportion of private expenditure on early childhood education and care and annual expenditure per child.

Source: OECD (2020^[1]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

Curriculum and pedagogy

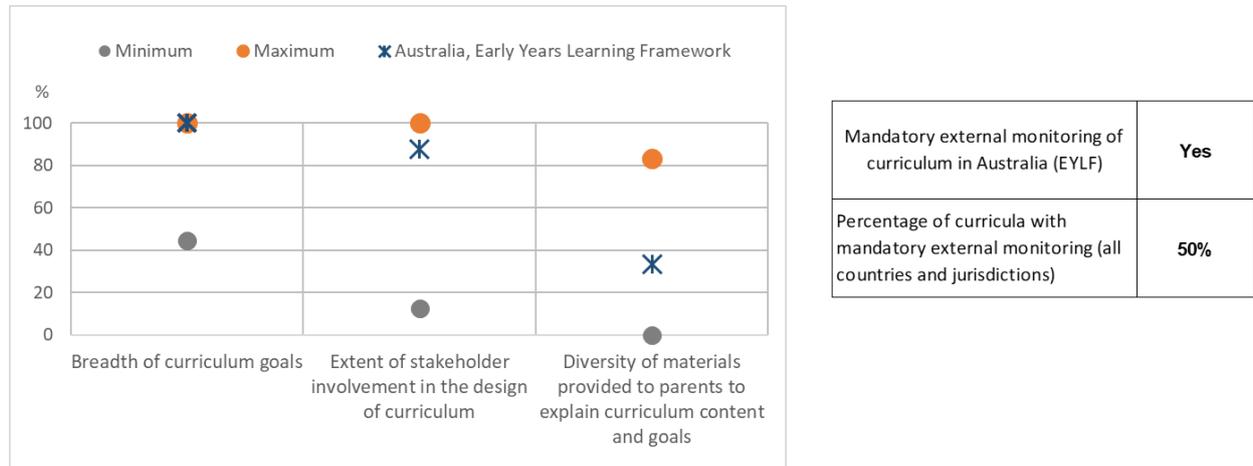
In Australia, a national curriculum framework for ECEC covers all children from birth to 5 years old/primary school entry age. The curriculum is compulsory for all types of settings under the National Quality Framework. There is also in place a national curriculum covering before and after-school activities for school-aged children. In addition, states and territories can design individual curriculum frameworks, which are also approved under the National Quality Framework. This is the case, for example, in Victoria.

In the national ECEC curriculum framework, goals for children's development are expressed in broad strands of concepts/competencies and principles and values, such as respect for diversity, high expectations and equity, secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships. The curriculum is based on the notions of children's agency and play-based learning, and recognises the importance of children's well-being. It has broad goals, including the holistic development of children as well as facilitating education continuity and transitions, providing guidance on material to be used by staff with children, and co-operation with families. The curriculum aims to support the quality of children's interactions with ECEC staff and other children and to support high-quality interactions between staff and parents through guidelines for supporting learning at home. It also promotes interactions between children and space and materials. Process quality is therefore at the core of the curriculum.

The national curriculum framework for ECEC is accompanied by guidelines that aim to support settings, parents and community groups and agencies in its implementation. ECEC staff can flexibly implement the curriculum and are encouraged to explore new ideas to meet the needs of every child and their diverse cultural backgrounds. The curriculum framework also provides examples of pedagogical practices for ECEC staff, such as responsiveness to children and cultural competence. It also places a strong focus on the use of play for children's learning and development. A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the design of the national curriculum for ECEC. Like most countries and jurisdictions participating in the survey, Australia did not involve children in the design of its curriculum.

Figure 2. Features of curriculum frameworks and pedagogy: Australia

2019



Notes: *Breadth of curriculum goals* corresponds to the percentage of goals included in the policy questionnaire (nine goals) stated in the curriculum. Goals include, for instance, “to provide guidance on the holistic development, learning and well-being goals for children”, “to provide guidance that facilitates educational continuity and transitions”, and “to highlight the importance of co-operation with families to support the goals for children”.

Extent of stakeholder involvement in the design of curriculum corresponds to the percentage of actors (e.g. ECEC staff, parents, children, researchers – eight categories in total) involved in developing the most recent version of the curriculum framework.

Diversity of materials provided to parents to explain curriculum content and goals corresponds to the percentage of types of material provided to parents to explain the content and goals of the curriculum (e.g. website, social media, meetings at the ECEC setting – six categories in total). Maximum, minimum and percentage values are taken over the 56 curriculum frameworks included in the survey.

Source: *Quality beyond Regulations* database.

Workforce development

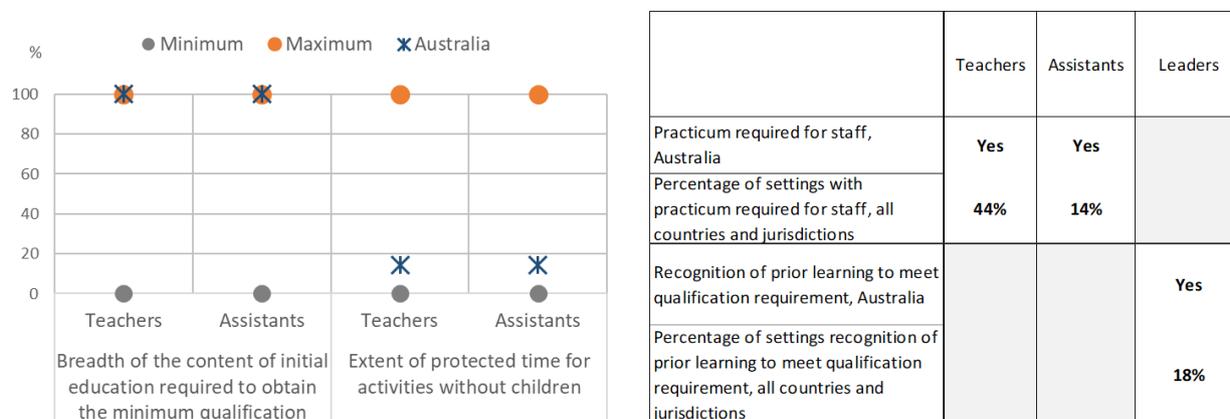
Since 2012, the regulatory framework requires staff working in regulated settings to have at least an ISCED Level 4 level qualification. Centre-based settings are obliged to meet three minimum thresholds for staffing: at least one degree-qualified teacher (at least ISCED Level 5); half of the staff holding or working towards at least a short-cycle tertiary qualification (at least ISCED Level 5), and half of the staff holding or working towards at least the minimum requirement, a post-secondary qualification (ISCED Level 4). These requirements may differ across jurisdictions. The approved initial education programmes for staff are required to meet national requirements and to include a broad range of content areas, such as curriculum implementation, playful learning, transitions, diversity, and family engagement. Initial education programmes are also required to provide practicum for all staff working in centre-based settings. Also, providers must designate a pedagogical leader with suitable qualifications and work experience in each setting. Leader qualifications are not specified, but authorities provide a list of approved qualifications, and providers are responsible for assessing the adequacy of leaders’ qualifications and experience. Pedagogical leaders are responsible for supporting and mentoring staff, as well as for building their capacity in implementing the curriculum framework, while supporting the cycle of planning and reflecting. Several resources developed by authorities are available to support leaders in their functions.

Professional development is a responsibility of providers and is provided through different organisations, including sector bodies and agencies and ECEC providers. Staff are granted protected time for participation in such training. Several resources and materials are provided by authorities to support participation in professional development. State and territory governments also provide staff with professional development opportunities, financial support and mentoring, in order to increase opportunities for career progression.

A commission (the Fair Work Commission) sets minimum standards for working conditions, and career progression is possible through salary increases based on work performance and years of experience. Teachers and assistants are typically given time reserved for activities separate from their direct contact with children, namely for individual planning or preparing play and/or learning activities. Nevertheless, the ECEC sector is diverse, with different types of services and providers offering different working conditions. The country faces challenges related to the attraction and retention of qualified workforce, especially in more rural and remote areas, where staff have more difficulties in participating in initial education and professional development courses. To address these challenges, since 2019, a national workforce strategy is being co-ordinated by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, in partnership with all governments, the ECEC sector and other stakeholders. This strategy aims to support the recruitment and retention of a quality workforce for the ECEC sector and focuses on improving staff well-being, professional recognition, qualifications and career pathways as well as their leadership skills.

Figure 3. Features of ECEC workforce development: Australia

2019



Notes: *Breadth of the content of initial education required to obtain the minimum qualification* corresponds to the percentage of content areas required to obtain the minimum qualification among the 20 considered areas that can be grouped into the following categories: child development, child health, curriculum and pedagogy, playful learning, classroom management, diversity, transitions, and family and community engagement.

Extent of protected time corresponds to the percentage of tasks for which there is protected time among the seven following tasks, namely: individual planning or preparing play and/or learning activities; collaborating and speaking with colleagues and parents or guardians within this 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 other clerical duties); attending professional development activities; reflecting on work; laundry, tidying-up, cleaning, shopping or cooking.

For jurisdictions with multiple settings within an age group, indicators represent the average across settings in that age group. For jurisdictions with settings for different age groups, when values are the same in all age groups, no age group specification is made.

Maximum, minimum and percentage values are taken over 108 settings included in the survey.

Grey cell: information not asked for this category of staff.

Source: OECD *Quality beyond Regulations* database.

Data and monitoring

Since 2012, a national regulatory framework has been in place, which sets standards for process and structural quality in ECEC settings and developmental outcomes for children. State and territory regulatory authorities are responsible for monitoring and enforcing regulations within their jurisdictions. The national Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority supports the monitoring and quality improvement activities of state and territories regulators.

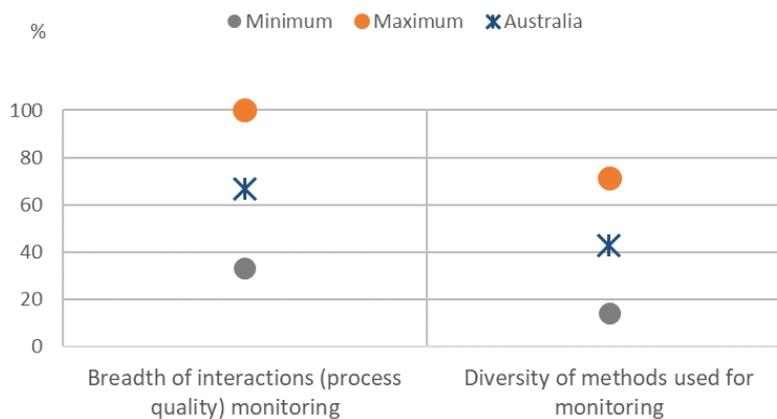
The monitoring process includes quality assessment and rating visits, which determine the rating level of each setting based on seven quality areas that address both structural and process quality. The resulting quality ratings are publicly accessible. A range of assessment methods is used, including observation, discussions with staff and leaders, and analysis of documents. A risk-based approach is followed, in which lower quality rated settings are more frequently assessed to check whether the minimum standards are met and whether initiatives for quality improvement are in place. To ensure nationally consistent assessments, regulators are required to participate in training and to undertake reliability testing on an annual basis.

The interactions assessed through the quality rating process include children’s interactions with their peers, with ECEC staff and with materials in the ECEC setting, as well as interactions between ECEC staff and children. Regulatory authorities provide feedback to settings and advise on quality improvement. In addition, ECEC settings are required to conduct self-assessment and to set plans for quality improvement based on the curriculum framework principles of critical reflection and reflective practice.

Initial education programmes are assessed and approved by national authorities. Additionally, approved courses are required to renew their approval every five years to be recognised under the National Quality Framework. Several regulators monitor and evaluate professional development trainings and the agencies that provide them. The assessment of professional development needs is under the responsibility of each provider and takes place regularly.

Figure 4. Features of the monitoring system: Australia

2019



Notes: *Breadth of interactions (process quality) monitoring* corresponds to the percentage of types of interactions monitored among the seven considered types of interactions: between ECEC staff and children, among children, between children and the materials in ECEC settings, between ECEC staff and parents, between children and their communities, and between parents and children.

Diversity of methods used for monitoring corresponds to the percentage of methods used for monitoring among the six following methods: inspection, staff self-assessment/evaluation, portfolios, surveys, peer reviews, and child assessments.

Maximum, minimum and percentage values are taken over 108 settings included in the survey.

Source: OECD *Quality beyond Regulations* database.

What is the *Quality beyond Regulations* project and how does it apply in Australia?

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review was initiated to support countries and jurisdictions to better understand the different dimensions of quality in early childhood education and care, focusing on process

quality in particular. The first phase of the project culminated in a literature review and meta-analysis of the links between different dimensions of quality and children's learning, development and well-being, published under the title *Engaging Young Children* (OECD, 2018^[2]).

The second phase of the project builds on this research base to address the overarching question: How can policies enhance process quality and child development and what are good examples of these policies? To address this question, countries in the OECD's Early Childhood Education and Care Network were invited to share information on relevant policies by completing a questionnaire. Twenty-six countries responded to this invitation, resulting in a rich database of information on ECEC systems around the world and their efforts to promote high-quality ECEC as of the year 2019.

In addition, six countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg and Switzerland) participated in the *Quality beyond Regulations* project by completing in-depth country background reports. These reports were undertaken by national governments, as well as provincial governments in Canada. The reports were based on a common framework developed by the OECD to facilitate comparative analysis and maximise the opportunities for countries and jurisdictions to learn from each other. The country background reports are complementary to the information collected in the policy questionnaire, and together, these two sources provide the data for the main analyses presented in this publication.

This note builds on information provided by Australia through the policy questionnaire and its country background report as well as other international databases (i.e. the OECD Education at a Glance database). In the policy questionnaire, Australia reported information on one curriculum framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia) and three types of ECEC settings: family day care (home-based), long day care and preschool/kindergarten (centre-based).

In the *Quality beyond Regulations* project, the term "teachers" refers to the individuals with the most responsibility for a group of children at the class- or playroom-level. They may also be called pedagogues, educators, childcare practitioners or pedagogical staff. The term "assistants" refers to ECEC staff whose role is to provide support to the teachers or lead staff member with a group of children. The term "leader" refers to the person who has the most responsibility for administrative, managerial and/or pedagogical leadership at the ECEC centres. In Australia, the "teacher" category corresponds to "room leaders", and other staff are included in the "assistant" category.

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References

- OECD (2020), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>. [1]
- OECD (2018), *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, Starting Strong*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264085145-en>. [2]