

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.

Japan

Key findings

In Japan, 92% of children aged 3 to 5 were enrolled in ECEC in 2018, which is above the OECD average, and 30% of children under age 3 were enrolled in some form of ECEC. The provision of ECEC in Japan involves different types of centre-based settings. The average expenditure per child aged 3 to 5 is below the OECD average. National, local and municipal governments share responsibilities for ECEC. In the past five years, efforts have been made to improve affordable access to quality ECEC through legal entitlements to free ECEC for children and public funding to support settings' staffing and operational expenses.

Three compulsory curriculum frameworks are in place, covering all children of ECEC age in three corresponding types of settings. The curricula have broad goals and aim to support children's interactions with peers, adults and space and materials, for which they provide guidance. Process quality is, therefore, at the core of the curricula. The curricula place a strong focus on the use of play for children's learning and development, and ECEC staff are encouraged to flexibly implement the curriculum to meet the needs of every child. A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the design of the curricula.

Teachers are required to have an International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 5 qualification to work in an ECEC-regulated setting. Initial training programmes require coverage of a broad range of areas, as well as practicum. The renewal of a working licence is mandatory every ten years for teachers in pre-primary settings (kindergartens), which requires their participation in professional development courses. Although professional development opportunities for staff are available, protected time for participation is not secured, and time and financial incentives may be limited. Career progression is possible depending on increased responsibilities, work performance and years of experience.

Different entities ensure monitoring and quality support, depending on the type of setting. Regular evaluations, including external on-site inspections and self-assessments, are conducted in all settings based on evaluation standards aligned with the national government's guidelines. Monitoring of curriculum frameworks implementation is compulsory in settings covering children aged 0 to 5. A wide breadth of interactions is monitored in all settings. Although a common practice, monitoring is not regulated regarding professional development.

Governance, standards and funding

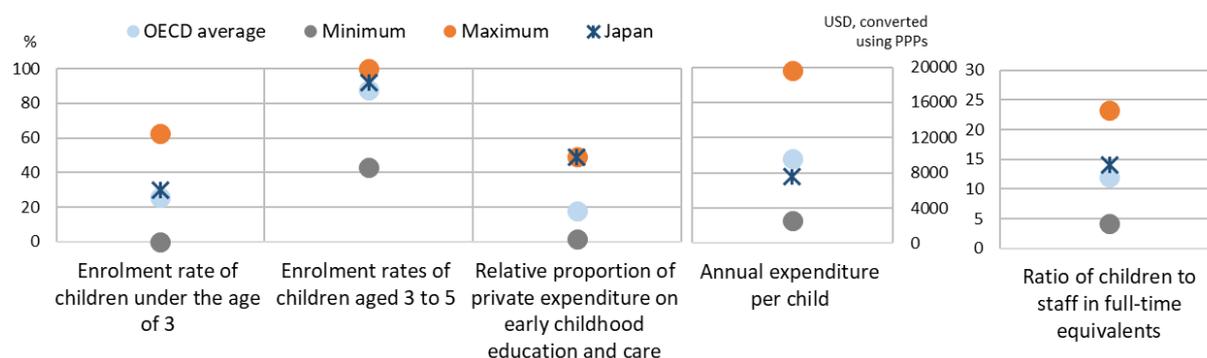
In Japan, the national government is responsible for the governance of ECEC, including the establishment of quality standards and curriculum frameworks. The provision of ECEC involves a range of centre-based settings. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is in charge of settings for children aged 3 to 5 (kindergartens), while the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is responsible for settings for children aged 0 to 5 (day-care centres). The Cabinet Office administers recently introduced integrated settings for children aged 0 to 5 (integrated centres for ECEC). In terms of national standards, local and municipal governments have the authority to approve the establishment of settings, monitor quality and support quality improvement in their corresponding jurisdictions. Municipal governments also operate public kindergartens, day-care centres and integrated centres.

ECEC is not compulsory in Japan, as the starting age for compulsory education is 6 years of age. In 2018, 92% of children aged 3 to 5 were enrolled in ECEC, which is above the OECD average, and 30% of children under age 3 were enrolled in some form of ECEC. Some 76% of children were enrolled in private institutions. Average expenditure per child aged 3 to 5 was below the OECD average in 2017, and the relative proportion of private expenditure on ECEC was the highest among OECD countries in 2018.

In the last five years, the government has enhanced support to facilitate the operation of all types and sizes of ECEC settings. The system provides public funding to both public and private settings to cover their staffing and operating expenses in accordance with national standards. Furthermore, since 2019, a legal entitlement grants children aged 3 to 5 access to free ECEC up to an established financial limit. According to national authorities, children aged 0 to 2 from low-income households are also granted access to free ECEC.

Figure 1. Enrolment rates, funding and standards: Japan

2018



Notes: 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 ECEC 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 Japan, three ECEC curriculum frameworks are in place: the National Curriculum Standards for Kindergarten, which covers children aged 3 to 5; the National Curriculum Standards for Day-Care Centre, covering children aged 0 to 5; and the National Curriculum Standards for Integrated Centre for Early

Childhood Education and Care, for children aged 0 to 5. These curricula are compulsory in their corresponding settings.

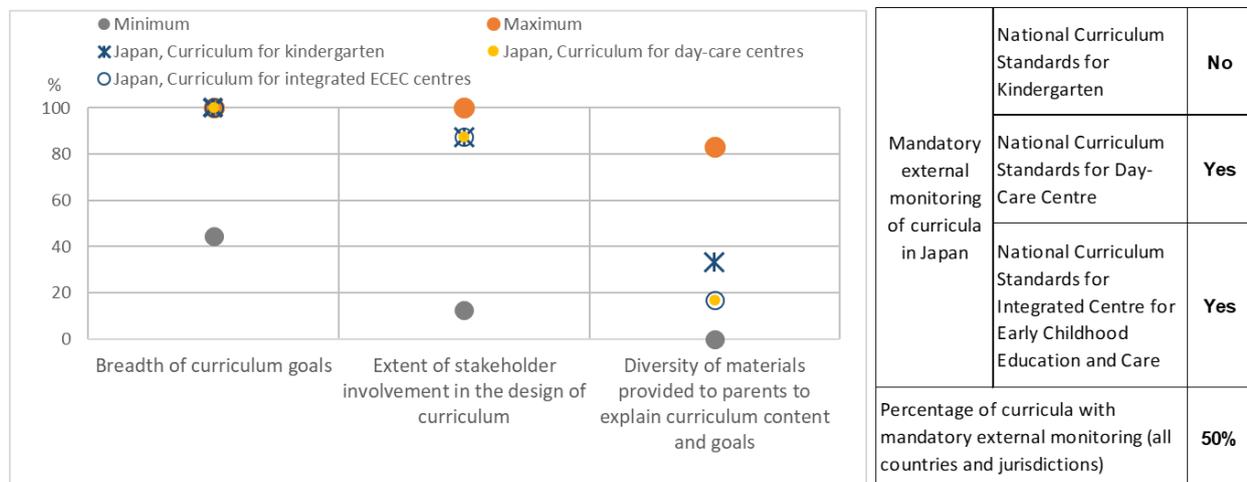
In all curricula, the goals for children’s development are expressed in terms of broad strands of concepts/competencies and principles and values such as developing a sound mind and body, developing sensitivity and the ability to express oneself, and fostering children’s abilities to relate to the environment with curiosity. The three curricula have broad goals, including the holistic development of children as well as facilitating education continuity and transitions, providing guidance on the material to be used with children and co-operation with families.

All curriculum frameworks in Japan aim to support the quality of children’s interactions with ECEC staff and other children, and to support high-quality interactions between staff and parents, providing guidance for information exchange and joint activities in the ECEC setting. They also foster children’s interactions with the local community. Process quality is, therefore, at the core of the curricula. A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the design of these curricula. Like most countries and jurisdictions that participated in the survey, Japan did not involve children in the design of the curricula.

The curriculum frameworks are accompanied by guidelines that aim to support local/regional governments and ECEC settings in their implementation. The curriculum frameworks place a strong focus on the use of play for children’s learning and development, and ECEC staff are encouraged to flexibly implement the curricula in order to respond to every child’s needs.

Figure 2. Features of curriculum frameworks and pedagogy: Japan

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

ECEC teachers working in all ECEC settings are required to have an ISCED Level 5 qualification. Initial training programmes are required to follow national standards that define contents, length and corresponding credits. Programmes cover a broad range of areas, including the implementation of the curriculum, pedagogy, playful learning, transitions, classroom management and family engagement. Practicum is mandatory, and teachers working in public settings are required to receive further training as they enter the profession, including courses on several themes, such as curriculum areas, children's mental and physical development or methods of instruction.

Since 2009, a system was introduced by the national government requiring teachers working in both public and private kindergartens and integrated centres to participate, every ten years, in a 30-hour professional development course in order to have their license renewed. These courses are accredited and cover both compulsory topics aligned with national educational policies, as well as topics chosen by the teachers based on their needs and interests. Local governments are responsible for providing such training. Other professional development opportunities are available for ECEC staff, including centre-embedded professional development and consultation. However, protected time for participation is not secured, and time and financial incentives may be limited. As such, ensuring professional development opportunities for all ECEC staff has been a long-lasting challenge. In some cases, local governments can provide support for professional development. For instance, ECEC settings that have achieved certain levels of quality may receive financial support from the local government.

As for career progression, teachers can become mid-career teachers after approximately ten years of experience. Additionally, teachers can progress by having new roles and greater responsibilities, such as middle leaders or managers, with corresponding salary increases. Progression is based on level of responsibilities, work performance and years of experience. In 2017, a series of subsidies were introduced to cover costs related to salary increases and support career progression for ECEC staff. The career progression system is regulated under the Comprehensive Support System, which provides funding to ECEC settings based on the job types, staff functions and their employment status (full-time and part-time). Although each setting has the autonomy to distribute salaries and working conditions, it is common that staff with greater responsibilities and who work full-time receive higher salaries and experience better working conditions.

Figure 3. Features of ECEC workforce development: Japan

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 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 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 groups 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.

"a" = not applicable.

Source: OECD *Quality beyond Regulations* database.

Monitoring and data

Responsibilities for monitoring ECEC falls under different entities, depending on the type and placement of settings. For day-care centres and integrated centres for ECEC, local and municipal governments are responsible for monitoring structural features related to facilities, staff and labour regulations, safety and sanitary management, as well as curriculum implementation. Governments provide settings with recommendations and guidance for quality improvement based on the monitoring process.

In day-care settings for children aged 0 to 5, external, on-site evaluations are conducted at least once a year by specialised accredited institutions based on evaluation standards aligned with the national government's guidelines. Inspectors submit a report to the local government. Settings are also required to conduct self-assessments and to collect data through a range of methods, including surveys, checklists and portfolios, while addressing several topics, including the quality of interactions among children, between children and staff, and among staff. Self-assessment results are expected to be made public.

In pre-primary settings (kindergartens), external and internal monitoring are conducted in line with national guidelines issued by the national government. Results and improvement plans are reported to the national, local or municipal government, and, in the case of private settings, to the school corporation, who provide

settings with support for quality improvement, either financially and/or through guidance or professional development opportunities.

Settings that benefit from public funding under the comprehensive support system are regularly provided with on-site guidance by the municipal government, including support on matters relating to quality enhancement and curriculum implementation. For all settings, financial support provided by governments can increase based on the quality improvement efforts of the setting. Examples of quality improvement initiatives include strengthening collaboration within an ECEC setting or with primary schools, as well as engaging in external evaluations or implementing feedback from stakeholder evaluations.

External monitoring of curriculum implementation is conducted in all settings and is mandatory for settings for children aged 0 to 5. In all settings, interactions monitored include children’s interactions with their peers, with ECEC staff, with materials in the ECEC setting and with parents and communities, as well as ECEC staff interactions with parents. Internal monitoring of curriculum implementation is also common, for which different tools are used, including surveys, staff self-assessment/evaluation and portfolios.

Initial education programmes and license renewal training are assessed and approved by the national government for pre-primary settings (kindergartens) and by local governments for day-care settings and integrated ECEC centres. For professional development, monitoring is not regulated, although it is a common practice. It is common that training institutions assess professional development needs through surveys to participants. In pre-primary settings, assessment needs are based on self-evaluation reports and considered in the design of professional development initiatives.

Figure 4. Features of the monitoring system: Japan

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 Japan?

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 Japan 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, Japan reported information on three curriculum frameworks covering three types of settings. The National Curriculum Standards for Kindergarten covers children aged 3 to 5 in kindergarten settings. The National Curriculum Standards for Day-Care Centre covers children aged 0 to 5 in day-care settings. The National Curriculum Standards for Integrated Centre for ECEC covers children aged 0 to 5 in integrated centres for ECEC.

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.

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