



Short form version

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit

Enhancing ECCE services at all levels

A guide for Ministers of Education to increase access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education services, using a multi-sectoral approach



The Commonwealth

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit: Short Version

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Foreword

High-quality and accessible Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) lays the foundation for healthy and well-functioning societies. Effective ECCE systems equip young children with the means to develop to their fullest potential during their formative years, in a safe and inspiring environment, nurtured by well trained professional teachers and carers.

The Nadi Declaration of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) held in Fiji in 2018, emphasised the importance of providing all children in the Commonwealth with access to quality early childhood education, and the need for a multi-sectoral approach to support and promote early learning and development. The Commonwealth Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit was developed to support countries achieve this shared vision.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for government ministries and educational institutions and all relevant stakeholders to work collaboratively to develop and sustain effective ECCE systems.

The closure of ECCE premises due to COVID-19 resulted in a worrying decline in access to quality early childhood education for pre-primary children across the world. This has had a disproportionate economic and social impact on the lives of women and mothers who have often had no choice but to pause their own jobs and livelihoods to compensate for persistent ECCE service gaps. Even before the pandemic, UNICEF had estimated that if no substantive and country-wide plans are made to address early years learning and skills development, by 2030, 420 million school-aged children will not have acquired the most basic skills and an estimated 825 million children will not be on track to acquire basic secondary school level education.¹

These statistics provide a stark reminder of the need for urgent action by public, private, third sector organisations, and communities working together globally. The pandemic has, more than ever, reinforced the Commonwealth's strong commitment to assisting member countries in their provision of inclusive and equitable quality ECCE, within Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Specifically, SDG 4.2 which aims to 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'.²

1 Commonwealth Secretariat. (2018). *20CCEM Nadi Declaration*. <http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/20CCEMNadiDeclaration.pdf>

2 UNICEF. (2019). *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education Global Report*. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/>

The Commonwealth's ECCE Toolkit has been designed as a resource for Ministers of Education and officials to increase access to quality ECCE services, for ages 0 to 8 years, using a multi-sectoral approach. This toolkit outlines five features to support this approach, covering topics including conducting situational ECCE sector analyses, planning and implementing quality services, methods to expand access, and monitoring and evaluating ECCE systems. In addition, it aims to assist governments in ensuring these services are responsive to the rights, needs, and capabilities of children, their families and their communities.

The detrimental impact of COVID-19 on education systems worldwide in the past years reiterated the need to build forward better in the post-COVID era. The 'Big Change Starts Small' report by the Royal Foundation's Centre for Early Childhood³ highlights the importance of creating awareness of early years; building a more nurturing and mentally healthy society; creating communities of support towards long-term and intergenerational change; the need for strengthening early years work force; and the need for better data for better understanding of babies and infants. Through developing strong partnerships and collaborations to work alongside stakeholders, including international partners, to provide both stimulating ECCE for pre-primary learning and engagement are essential to ensure a safe haven that nurtures the welfare of children in early education alongside a caring and enabling home environment. We hope this ECCE Toolkit will be resourceful and provide effective knowledge sharing in your own country's efforts to enhance early childhood services.

Dr Arjoon Suddhoo
Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

3 Royal Foundation's Centre for Early Childhood. (2021). *Big Change Starts Small*. https://assets.ctfassets.net/qwnplnakca8g/2iLCWZESD2RLu24m443HUf/1c802df74c44ac6bc94d4338ff7ac53d/RFCEC_BCCS_Report_and_Appendices.pdf

List of acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BELDS	Better Early Learning and Development at Scale
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
ECC	Early Childhood Commission (Jamaica)
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECERS	Early Childhood Environmental Rate Scales
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EU	European Union
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
QA	Quality Assurance
RCP	Roving Caregivers Programme
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results (World Bank)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SitAn	Situation Analysis
TTF	International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Children
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BELDS	Better Early Learning and Development at Scale
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
ECC	Early Childhood Commission (Jamaica)
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ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECERS	Early Childhood Environmental Rate Scales
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EU	European Union
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
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UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

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We also wish to recognise and thank those who participated in the piloting of the ECCE Toolkit, including officials and ECCE experts from the Ghana Education Service; Ministry of Education and other ECCE experts in Kenya; and representatives of Commonwealth and global education organisations. Additionally, we would like to extend our gratitude to a number of Early Childhood Education Working Group members mentioned above who gave generously of their time and insights into the ECCE landscape in 2021 for the revision and update of the Toolkit – specifically Professor Lynn Ang; Dr Yoshie Kaga; Dr Lynette Okengo; and Dr Jacqueline Vanhear; as well as Dr Eric Daniel Ananga, Early Childhood and Education Policy Expert, Ghana; Dr Hellen Kimathi, Early Childhood Education Expert, Kenya; and Ms Hannah Maina, Former Deputy Director, Directorate of Early Childhood Development and Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya.



Executive summary

Purpose of the Toolkit

The aim of this Toolkit is to provide a resource to ministers of education, and senior officials in the ministries and associated departments, interested in understanding how best to enable and support a multi-sectoral approach to increase access to quality early learning and development.

Toolkit development methodology

The development of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit feeds into the Commonwealth Secretariat's work programme on education, which is embedded in its 2021/22–2024/25 Strategic Plan Strategic Outcome 2,⁴ specifically Intermediate Outcome 2.4. The content sections of the Toolkit were identified by the Commonwealth Secretariat during a roundtable meeting of ECCE experts convened in April 2019. A smaller consultative technical team was formed from the roundtable to create the structure and a “road map” for developing the ECCE Toolkit. In preparation, a framework for examining available good practice was developed. A Country Landscape Study of six Commonwealth member countries was conducted for the purpose of reviewing the existing elements of good practice in ECCE within each country, to help illustrate the processes required to implement quality ECCE services.

Toolkit Revision and Update 2021

Following completion of the first edition of the Toolkit, it was piloted in two Commonwealth member countries – Ghana and Kenya. These exercises sought feedback on the usefulness, relevance and practicality of the Toolkit and its contents from key ECCE stakeholders in the two countries. The findings from the pilot assisted in identifying further refinements to be made to the Toolkit prior to its wider rollout across the Commonwealth.

This second edition has taken on board the feedback gathered from the trials as well as responding to recent developments in the ECCE sector and the new pandemic context brought about by COVID-19.

Available evidence of encouraging/good ECCE practice

The good practice examples highlighted in case study boxes throughout this ECCE Toolkit were gathered from the Country Landscape Study of six Commonwealth

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2021) “Strategic Plan 2021/22–2024/25”. London: Commonwealth Secretariat. https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-01/Strategic%20Plan%2021_25.pdf

member countries. Such practice is also referred to as “encouraging practice”. An encouraging practice is one that is relevant and effective and that has been devised to enable change and positive outcomes in the care and education of young children, as demonstrated by reliable research evidence.⁵

The case studies aim to assist ministries of education with examples of how other countries that share similar goals and targets – such as Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2: “By 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” – have moved forward in their policy.

Examples of encouraging/good practice are set out in each of the five sections and include the following country examples:

- Section 1** An example of the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach to ECCE policy for young children in Rwanda.
- Section 2** Two examples, with the first showing the process of conducting a situational analysis to inform ECCE planning in Kenya, and the second reflecting on the steps required to build multi-sectoral co-ordination in Belize.
- Section 3** Two examples, with the first exploring how to establish governance structures for ECCE in Jamaica, and the second illustrating how implementing pre-primary classes widen ECCE participation in Pakistan.
- Section 4** Two examples of how countries have expanded ECCE access with quality and equity. The first highlighting the creation of a child friendly pre-school system in Sri Lanka, and the second on strengthening quality ECCE delivery through a competence-based curriculum for the whole system in Rwanda.
- Section 5** An account of how monitoring and evaluation processes for ECCE service provision and learning are conducted in Jamaica.



⁵ UNICEF (2016) *Report on Promising Practices on Social Protection for Children in Europe and Central Asia*. New York: UNICEF.

Introduction

This Toolkit is a resource for ministers of education and their officials in Commonwealth member countries. It aims to support multi-sectoral approaches to increasing access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) services that are responsive to the rights, needs and capabilities of children, their families and their communities in their local context.

The Toolkit is intended to be used alongside resources provided by other international organisations and agencies, for example the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Accelerator Toolkit published by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).⁶ It is meant to complement, not replace, other sources.

The Status Update Report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in the Commonwealth (2018)⁷ revealed three key aspects for urgent consideration: (i) a lack of appropriately trained ECCE teachers, especially in low- and middle-income Commonwealth member countries; (ii) less than 65 per cent participation of three to six year olds in at least one year of quality pre-primary education across many member countries, particularly in the Pacific and African regions; and (iii) limited reliable data as the basis for ECCE policy development and implementation for children aged from birth to eight years old.

UNICEF's 2019⁸ global report *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education* estimates that, in the absence of substantive and country-wide plans to promote learning and skills development in the early years, by 2030 420 million school-age children in low- and middle-income countries will not have acquired the most basic skills and 825 million children will be off-track to acquire basic secondary-level education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption to services for young children and their families in all affected countries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that 150 countries permanently closed their schools in 2020, putting children's education and future life chances at increased risk.⁹ Children, especially those from disadvantaged, impoverished communities, lost not only a stimulating

6 <https://www.ece-accelerator.org/about/about-the-toolkit>

7 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth Status Update Report 2018*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat. [http://www.20ccem.gov.fj/images/CCEM_TAB/17022018/CCEM\(20\)SDG4%20RPT.pdf](http://www.20ccem.gov.fj/images/CCEM_TAB/17022018/CCEM(20)SDG4%20RPT.pdf)

8 UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*. Global Report. New York: UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/>

9 UNESCO (2021) *Recovering Lost Learning: What Can Be Done Quickly and at Scale?* Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377841>

environment for learning and engagement but also a safe and nurturing space outside the family home, including access to nutritious meals, basic hygiene and other vital facilities. Families lost reliable childcare, making it difficult to work and adding to the financial distress of the pandemic. ECCE staff, some already in precarious employment, often lost their livelihoods as a result of the widespread closure of services.

Why invest in ECCE

ECCE addresses the phase of the life-cycle – from birth to eight years – when important growth, including brain development, takes place. Compelling evidence,¹⁰ stretching back to the 1960s,¹¹ highlights that investment focused on supporting young children yields benefits for children, families, communities and countries; it further warns of the negative effects of low quality ECCE provision.¹² **Figure 1** presents three vital benefits from increased investment in quality ECCE.¹³

The Heckman Curve (2006, 2012; 2020¹⁴ see **Figure 2**) provides a strong rationale for prioritising investment in ECCE, as it reveals that stronger rates of return on social investment are produced when countries prioritise and resource the health, education and well-being of their youngest children and their families. However, it is important not to overstate causal relationships between public “investment” in ECCE and individual and collective “return”. Conditions

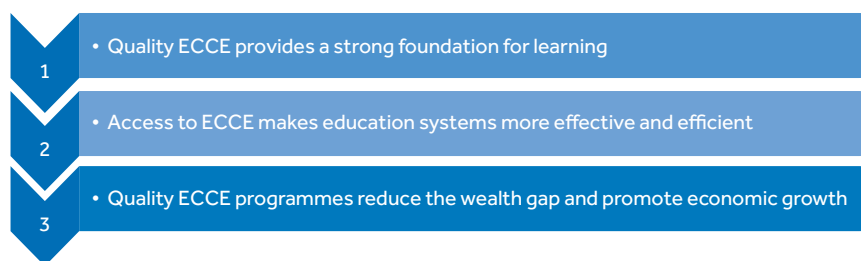


Figure 1 Why Commonwealth member countries need to invest more in quality ECCE

10 Bassok, D. and Engel, M. (2019) “Early Childhood Education at Scale: Lessons from Research for Policy and Practice”. *AERA Open*, January–March 5(1): 1–7.

11 Barnett, W. S. and Nores, M. (2018) “Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care”. In L. Miller, C. Cameron, C. Dalli and N. Barbour (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Early Childhood Policy*. London: Sage. Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526402004.n30>

12 OECD (2012) *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/49325825.pdf>

13 UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.

14 Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E. and Prados, M.J. (2020) “Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program”. *Journal of Political Economy* 128(7): 2502–2541.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return

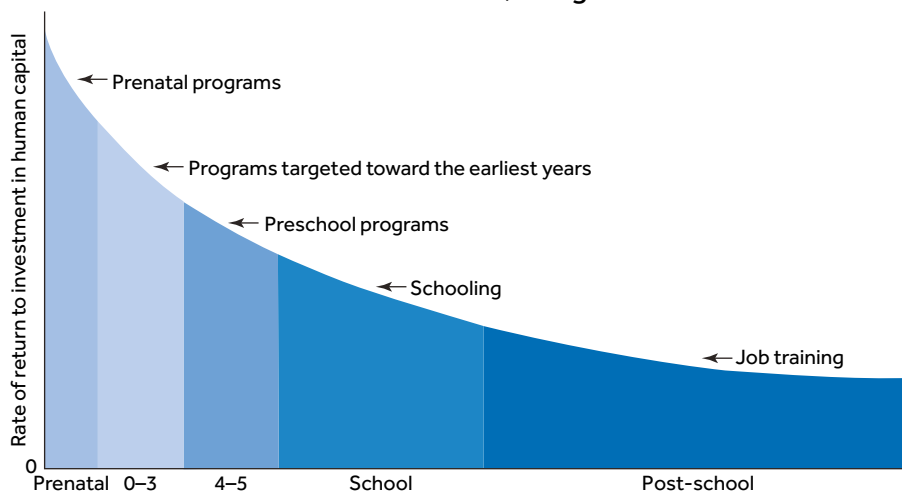


Figure 2 The Heckman Curve¹⁵

Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

affecting the lives of young children are complex and multidimensional, and ECCE alone cannot address contextual factors, including those related to poverty, access to infrastructure, marginalisation of groups for ethnic or cultural reasons, as well as racism, etc.

While ECCE services and systems are more effective when organised and governed by multi-sectoral policies, they also need to be understood as one of many interconnected elements of a country's policies to ensure equitable living conditions for all.

Other compelling reasons for investing in ECCE include:

- Children's right to quality ECCE arising out of Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- The prominent place of ECCE in the 2030 SDG framework. SDG 4 (education), Target 4.2, requires that all children have quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. In addition, ECCE is a potential enabler of almost all other goals in the SDG framework: poverty reduction, hunger, health (including child

¹⁵ <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>

mortality), gender equality, water and sanitation, reduced inequality and peace, and justice and strong institutions. These goals are not only complementary but also mutually dependent.¹⁶

That quality ECCE is a global priority for the positive development of a nation's population is not in question. Beyond its contribution to overall economic well-being, it is vital to female labour participation, reducing gender inequality and a well-functioning society – as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated. More practical questions, thus, relate to how Commonwealth member countries might invest more in quality ECCE, what quality involves in specific local contexts, how to enable and develop multi-sectoral programming and how multi-sectoral ECCE systems might be monitored and evaluated.

The structure of the Toolkit has been organised according to processes of planning, implementing, expanding and monitoring of quality ECCE service provision.

Section 1: The Ministry of Education as lead agency in framing multi-sectoral ECCE policy

This section presents the rationale for multi-sectoral ECCE provision with the Ministry of Education (MoE) as the lead agency. It outlines the key advocacy functions that MoEs carry as lead agencies for ECCE policy and discusses strategies for a successful multi-sectoral approach to ECCE.

Section 2: Planning for quality ECCE service provision in the education sector

Focusing on how to engage in strategic planning for quality ECCE service provision, this section outlines the value of conducting a situation analysis to gather information on gaps and strengths within a national ECCE context. It discusses resourcing and costing for ECCE policy initiatives together with planning for a professional ECCE workforce.

Section 3: Implementing ECCE in the national education system

This section discusses governance mechanisms that are key to successful policy implementation, including the establishment of a co-ordinating body or forum for multi-sectoral ECCE policy. It discusses cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial partnerships, building sustainability and going to scale, as well as funding strategies. It also introduces the need for systematic data.

Section 4: Expanding access with quality and equity

Recognising the wide range of ECCE services operating in different jurisdictions, and the value-laden notion of “quality”, this section outlines key

¹⁶ Urban, M. and Guevara, J. (2019) “Early Childhood in the Global Village: Competent Systems for Sustainable Development”. In B. Mooney (ed.) *Ireland's Yearbook of Education 2019-2020*. Dublin: Education Matters.

structural and process variables that are amenable to policy intervention with the aim of expanding access while enhancing quality and equity of provision.

Section 5: Data, monitoring and evaluation for a quality ECCE system

Starting from the principled position that each child has the right to quality ECCE, this section identifies the need to ensure data, monitoring and evaluation systems combine diverse sources of information and are compatible across sectors and government departments in order to advance the goal of a systemic multi-sectoral approach to ECCE.

Section 1: The Ministry of Education as lead agency in framing multi-sectoral ECCE policy

Investing more in quality ECCE is urgent, exacerbated by the wide-ranging consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's early childhood is short but the impact of their experiences in that timeframe lasts a lifetime. This makes it essential for MoEs as the lead agency in multi-sectoral ECCE policy to advocate to keep the child at the centre of all policy. A global examination of current trends on access to early learning indicates that, by 2030, only 43 per cent of children in low-income countries will have access to early education.¹⁷ A Commonwealth Secretariat report on the Status of SDG 4 in the Commonwealth (2018)¹⁸ notes that, while many small states (for which data was available) were reporting participation rates in organised learning over 90 per cent, this was not necessarily the case for small states in the Pacific region. Also of concern is that many Commonwealth member countries in the African region, with the exception of some countries (such as Ghana, Mauritius and Seychelles), recorded levels of participation in one year of pre-primary ECCE below 50 per cent.

17 "Towards Competent Early Childhood Education Systems: A Conceptual Framework for a Pre-Primary Education Sub-Sector", 2018 Asia-Pacific Regional Early Childhood Development Conference, Kathmandu, 5–6 June.

18 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth Status Update Report*.

Key messages – Section 1

ECCE refers to all those services that engage with children aged birth to eight years and their families.

"Keeping the child at the centre" is the core rationale for multi-sectoral ECCE policy and provision.

To be most effective, ECCE provisions must be inter-sectoral, going beyond education to encompass health, nutrition and protection.

As lead agencies in multi-sectoral ECCE policy and provision, MoEs must:

- Advocate for young children to be at the centre of social policy;
- Take a leadership role in the identification of opportunities for collaboration;
- Prepare to overcome barriers to multi-sector collaboration;
- Deepen the knowledge base on all aspects of ECCE provision;
- Prepare a plan of actions with defined roles and accountabilities of sectors involved;
- Engage in high-level meetings
- Ensure a co-ordination structure is in place.

Selected example of encouraging/good practice from a Commonwealth member country

The case study below illustrates encouraging/good practice from Rwanda. The country has moved from a single-sector approach to policy for young children to an innovative multi-sectoral policy and a corresponding action plan.

Case study: a multi-sectoral approach in Rwanda

In the African region, Rwanda adopted a multi-sectoral approach to policy for early childhood development (ECD), with specific outcomes under the heading of Improving the Quality of Life; this included quality health and quality education. The innovative National ECD Policy and its corresponding strategic plan (2011) recognised that children developed holistically, and that it was not just the actions of one sector that would support children to achieve their full potential, but rather a co-ordinated effort between national and district levels. Initially, it was the MoE that was solely responsible for children. In recognition that, to thrive in education, children require supportive family environments that provide safety, protection and health promotion, responsibility for children was transferred to the Ministry of Gender and Families Promotion. The ECD Policy now recognises the key role that each sector plays in improving children's lives in Rwanda and includes programmes in the health sector and in the public school system (i.e. milk is provided daily to young children in ECD centres to prevent malnutrition and stunting). The government has positioned education as critical to the country's economic growth, and the provision of quality education has been credited for the steady growth in universal adult literacy by 2020.¹⁹

This example shows the alignment of national policy with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Investment in young children is recognised as key to the country's development, and the multi-sectoral model ensures the holistic provision of essential services for all children.



¹⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview>

Section 2: Planning for quality ECCE service provision in the education sector

Planning for quality ECCE service provision is a key priority for MoEs and comprises a set of organised collaborative activities to improve ECCE outcomes: enabling environment, co-ordination, and shared planning and monitoring. These activities will allow MoEs to guide and strengthen the place of ECCE within the development of the overall education system, to recognise and set main areas of concern in consultation with stakeholders, to identify precedents for priority programmes and interventions and to offer funding support towards SDG Target 4.2. It is important to consider the extent to which ECCE is “visible” within education sector planning, and to which it is aligned with overall education system plans. Furthermore, reliable and up-to-date information is needed for planning to be most effective. Conducting an in-depth analysis of the country situation and contextual issues affecting ECCE is therefore an important part of the planning process. For example, a SitAn can be conducted to inform the planning, development and costing of ECCE service provision.

Key messages – Section 2

A key priority for MoEs is to make young children and ECCE "visible" within general education sector planning strategies and across collaborating ministries and agencies.

Planning for quality ECCE service provision should be based on accurate and reliable country data; this requires a SitAn.

Using accurate and up-to-date country data will result in a realistic strategic action plan with clearly delineated activities and roles for the different sectors involved under the leadership of the MoE.

Working in a multi-sectoral approach enables the identification of synergies that may enhance programme and service quality and facilitate the achievement of priorities for specific target groups.

Resourcing ECCE requires an estimation of figures in line with the country's individual administration procedures. In devolved administrative systems, the aim is to make the processes of planning and implementation less bureaucratic and more efficient.

A qualified ECCE workforce is of key importance to a quality ECCE sector and must be a key consideration in policy planning. This includes recruitment, training, professional development and staff deployment. Measures for staff retention should be taken into account when planning ECCE.

Selected example of encouraging/good practice from two Commonwealth member countries

The case study below illustrates encouraging/good practice from a situation analysis conducted in Kenya focused on the status of women and children as the basis for planning.

Case study: conducting a situational analysis in Kenya

The Kenyan 2017 Situation Analysis of Children and Women provides a comprehensive overview of the key factors contributing to and hindering the realisation of children and adolescents' rights in the country. The report was launched at a critical time in terms of national planning for children: after the launch of the SDGs and while the government was in the process of finalising the Third Medium Term Plan (2018–2022) of the Vision 2030; the second generation of County Integrated Development Plans; and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2018–2022. The 2017 SitAn aimed to inform these planning processes by providing policy-makers with a current and comprehensive overview of the needs of children and women in Kenya. The findings were crucial for the government and UNICEF Kenya in the planning of the 2018–2022 Country Programme Document, which identified key priorities for four years of collaboration and UNICEF support.

Given the availability of rich data on children in Kenya collected between 2014 and 2017, the SitAn report used secondary analysis of recent data on children and women complemented by key informant interviews with government technical departments, and technical input from the Kenya Bureau of National Statistics. The report highlighted the various policies, legislation, legal frameworks and interventions adopted by the government to strengthen the realisation of the rights of children, including adolescents. It also reviewed the most recent data and analysis on the status of women and children in terms of poverty, health and nutrition, HIV and AIDS, water and sanitation, education, protection, and inclusion in society and in emergencies, at both national and county levels.

The report indicated the government's commitment to providing an enabling legislative and policy environment for addressing women and children's issues. The finalised policies in key areas of children's rights included (i) the education curriculum reform; (ii) the ECD policy; (iii) the free secondary school scheme; and (iv) the female genital mutilation policy. The Children's Act is also being revised. The SitAn further noted that groups of children – particularly those living in the arid and semi-arid northern counties, those living in informal settlements within growing cities and many girls living within communities that practise harmful traditions – were being left behind in the realisation of their fundamental rights and the opportunity to thrive.

Conducting the SitAn allowed planners to target specific areas for interventions and to secure effectiveness and efficiency, including in relation to issues of gender and equity.

The next selected practice provides an example from Belize of how to make a multi- sectoral approach work. It describes how multi-sector co-ordination was arranged to build an effective model of working together with shared and defined areas for collaboration.

Case study: co-ordination on ECCE in Belize

Belize produced a comprehensive ECD National Strategic Plan 2017–2021 to drive the enhancement of the ECD sector. This defined three output areas for the ECD sector: (i) children remain safe and healthy; (ii) children can learn in a safe environment; and (iii) young children have skills and opportunities, with clearly outlined sets of outcomes. To achieve the set outcomes, the work of the MoE was aligned primarily with that of two other ministries: the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alienation.

The three ministries jointly produced the ECD National Strategic Plan 2017–2021, with support from an ECD technical working group established in 2015 and UNICEF. The Plan was underpinned by a 2010 ECD SitAn and a 2014–2015 ECD Programme Mapping. The draft Plan was shared widely with stakeholders, who provided feedback and comments. In 2016, the cabinet endorsed ECD Core Commitments prioritising strengthening existing programmes and service delivery within the three ministries with a focus on future expansion.

This example also highlights the advantages of having conducted a SitAn so that each sector was familiar with the issues to take into consideration when planning the operationalisation of programmes for young children in Belize, of which ECCE is an integral part.

These examples show that it is feasible to articulate national plans in ways that take account of the wider targets of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.



Section 3: Implementing ECCE in the national education system

Clear strategies for ECCE governance are key to successful policy implementation. Governance refers to all efforts by different levels of government and other agencies to administer and operate ECCE policies and services. It comprises practices, processes and policies for developing, planning, implementing, administering, monitoring and evaluating ECCE initiatives as well as the establishment of lines of accountability.

ECCE governance also comprises working across multiple sectors involved in the transparent delivery of quality ECCE, and in connection with external organisations and the general public. A multi-sectoral approach to ECCE policy and governance requires a comprehensive understanding of all factors involved in system governance, to ensure the effective use of shared plans and resources in the implementation and co-ordination of quality and equitable ECCE services, in line with SDG Target 4.2. In this way, good governance may be conceptualised as the “glue’ that holds the pieces of the ECCE system together”²⁰

20 Neuman, M. (2005) “Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care: Recent Developments in OECD Countries”. *Early Years* 25(2): 129–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140500130992>

Key messages – Section 3

It is key to position pre-primary education centrally in education sector plans, policies and budgets.

A co-ordinating body needs to be set up to bring sectors together and leverage strategic partnerships for ECCE and pre-primary education.

Clear norms for co-ordinating governance processes across sectors need to be established and maintained to sustain system functioning.

Having robust communication and governance structures will facilitate decision-making during periods of unexpected national crisis, thus enabling recovery.

Governance facilitates the distribution of resources – including funding from private actors – in line with policies and action plans.

Systematic data-gathering supports implementation and further planning.

Selected example of encouraging/good practice from two Commonwealth member countries

The case study below is an example of governance of ECCE provision in Jamaica under a specially established agency – the Early Childhood Commission.

Case study: governance in Jamaica

In 2003, the Government of Jamaica established the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) as an official agency to govern the administration of ECD (ECC Act 2003). Operating under the MoE, the ECC is responsible for advising the MoE on ECD policy matters. It assists in the preparations, as well as monitoring and evaluation, of ECD plans and programmes, acting as a co-ordinating agency to streamline ECD activities, manage the national ECD budget, and supervise and regulate early childhood centres. It includes a governance arm comprising the officially appointed executive director, a Board of Commissioners and seven sub-committees representing governmental and non-governmental organisations. It also has an operational arm that provides support to the board and sub-committees. The ECC is designed with representation of all sectors, including education, health, local government, community development, labour, finance, protection and planning.

The following selected encouraging/good practice from Pakistan offers an example of how pre-school provision can be formalised into a system of public education. The aim was to increase access for children to pre-school services.

Case study: katchi classes in Pakistan

Pakistan's National Education Policy stated that at least one year of pre-primary education was to be provided by the state through the formalisation of traditional pre-school 'katchi classes', with universal access to ECE to be ensured within the following 10 years. Following this, there was a noticeable increase in the gross enrolment rate for ECE, despite a high number of children still being unreached by pre-school services. The recognition and strengthening of katchi classes as part of the formal public education system undoubtedly represented an advance in the provision of access.

To address issues of poverty and lack of financial means to cover expenses, such as for uniforms and school textbooks, which were leading families to remove their children from ECE, financial and food support was to be made available for children.

Furthermore, to improve the quality of learning, there was a commitment to improving the qualifications of teachers with the introduction of two-year pre-service training for ECE teachers based on the existing National Curriculum for ECE.

The Pakistan example illustrates how access was increased by strengthening the pre-primary sector within the mainstream education system. As described in the main Toolkit, one of the positive effects of investing in ECCE is its effectiveness for school retention and completion. This effect was enhanced by training teachers – an essential aspect for quality improvement.

The clear intention of poverty alleviation and increased ECCE participation for all children is closely aligned to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.



Section 4: Expanding access with quality and equity

In 2020, UNICEF²¹ reported that, while the global rate of enrolment in pre-primary education increased from 32 per cent in 2000 to 50 per cent in 2017, half of the world's pre-primary age children still did not have access to any type of early education programme. In low-income countries, only two in 10 children were enrolled in pre-primary education and, globally, those least likely to attend early learning programmes were children from poor and vulnerable families. Of those children affected by emergencies, only one in three were enrolled in pre-primary education programmes, and data from many countries further revealed major gaps in financing and quality of available services, even when expansion of pre-primary education services was underway. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these figures.^{22,23} Reliable data for the youngest children under the age of three is even harder to come by.

Expanding access to ECCE must go hand in hand with efforts to improve service quality and equity, address existing inequalities, and close development and achievement gaps. Universal access to ECCE affects the entire education system and can reduce the numbers of early school leavers. Expansion of services, however, means that education systems must combine increased access with improved quality and equity.

Recognising the wide range of ECCE services operating in different jurisdictions, and the value-laden notion of “quality”, this section outlines key structural and process variables that are amenable to policy intervention with the aim of expanding access while enhancing the quality and equity of services. It also underlines the importance of strengthening the resilience of education systems and having protocols in place to reduce the impact of unexpected national and global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

21 UNICEF (2020) *Build to Last: A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-Primary Education*. New York: UNICEF.

22 Kenny, C. and Yang, G. (2021) *The Global Childcare Workload from School and Preschool Closures During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Washington, DC: CGD. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/global-childcare-workload-school-and-preschool-closures-during-covid-19-pandemic>

23 UN (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Children*. Policy Brief. New York: UN. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf

Key messages – Section 4

Expanding access with quality is an achievable goal for countries that already have pre-primary in place.

Realising the right to equitable education for all is a question of social justice.

Investment in children and families with targeted support is of paramount importance to securing social and human capital development.

An “equity first” approach requires education systems to mobilise a wide range of partners, including the private sector.

Complementing the public pre-primary model with additional programme approaches will make the universal target achievable.

Working with parents as partners is essential to understanding their needs and supporting them in their role as first nurturers of their children.

Quality ECCE is associated with a play-based pedagogy, which is the basis of curricula in the early years.

Assessment *for* learning has a powerful impact on teaching practice, and assessment *as* learning builds learner identities that can set children up for success at school.

Selected example of encouraging/good practice from two Commonwealth member countries

The encouraging/good practice case study below highlights the expansion of the ECCE system in Sri Lanka, driven by a strong equity principle, so that ECCE services can remove barriers to participation.

Case study: expanding with equity in Sri Lanka

As the ministry responsible for the provision of quality education services to all children, the MoE developed a Preschool Development Plan aimed at creating a quality “child friendly” pre-school system based on equity principles and with a focus on provision for the most disadvantaged groups in society. This included provisions to upgrade the physical facilities of pre-schools; lift the professionalism of pre-school teachers; and ensure a common approach in every pre-school in Sri Lanka. In order to ensure the achievement of SDG Target 4.2, the Government of Sri Lanka incorporated several strategies within their early childhood education policy, including the following:

- 1. Facilitate the expansion of services in unserved and underserved areas to improve equitable access to quality centre-based ECCE.*
- 2. Take a positive discrimination approach in promoting the expansion of ECCE services focused on essential support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.*
- 3. Promote awareness of the importance of ECCE for optimal development of the child and the impact of ECCE on the development of human capital among policy-makers, officials and the general public.*
- 4. Promote and facilitate collaboration among public, non-governmental and private sector organisations to expand centre-based ECCE.*
- 5. Strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure the quality of centre-based ECCE to foster physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development of children through implementing developmentally appropriate (age-appropriate as well as individually appropriate) practices.*
- 6. Facilitate development of a national core curriculum/national curriculum guide.*
- 7. Facilitate the ability of all national and provincial authorities to promote compliance by ECCE centres with standards related to structural and process features of centre-based ECCE as well as early childhood development standards.*
- 8. Promote and facilitate capacity-building and career development of personnel involved in ECCE (early childhood development officers/assistants, other relevant officers and pre-school teachers).*
- 9. Promote and facilitate capacity-building of personnel involved in centre-based ECCE to adopt inclusive practices in centres.*
- 10. Promote systematic use of valid assessment techniques to gauge children’s learning, development and readiness for schooling.*
- 11. Promote mechanisms to safeguard the quality of professional development programmes offered to pre-school teachers and other ECCE staff.*
- 12. Facilitate measures for early detection of children’s developmental delays and disabilities to ensure early interventions.*
- 13. Promote and facilitate QA mechanisms for ECCD information, education and communication materials to ensure they are developmentally appropriate and nurture children’s learning and development.*

14. *Promote and facilitate interactions in the children's first language in centre-based learning environments.*
15. *Promote community involvement in centre-based ECCE.*
16. *Promote and facilitate initiatives in capacity-building of parents and families to improve home-based learning environments.*
17. *Promote and facilitate programmes and services targeting families of children at risk for multiple reasons (socioeconomic conditions, illiteracy, migration, separation, disability, etc.) to ensure favourable home environments for ECCE.*
18. *Facilitate relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure children in early childhood continue their education in emergency and disaster situations.*

The next selected encouraging/good practice case study relates to securing quality learning outcomes. The case of Rwanda shows how to pilot test a model ECCE centre with a view to going to scale.

Case study: securing quality of learning and development outcomes in Rwanda²⁴

In 2012, the MoE provided financial subsidies to 30 districts in Rwanda to support the development of infrastructure for one model ECD centre per district; it also started advocating that the existing "basic education" schools should each open a pre-primary section.

In addition, and to strengthen delivery of quality ECCE, the training of teachers specialising in the early years was introduced as a career option in training colleges of education. This official recognition aimed to attract people to ECCE training.

To complete the review of all elements impinging on the quality of ECCE service delivery, in 2015 the MoE conducted a full revision of the ECD curriculum framework with the intention of incorporating important concepts, such as going beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge to focus also on the development of competences, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as thinking skills. The Competence-Based Curriculum, issued in 2015 by the Education Board, now covers pre-primary to secondary education.²⁵

By the end of pre-primary education children should be able to:

- *Explore and discover their surroundings and show awareness and respect for the environment;*
- *Demonstrate basic mathematical skills through different educational games and songs;*
- *Demonstrate sensory ability, physical co-ordination, and fine and gross motor skills;*
- *Demonstrate self-care skills and good health habits;*
- *Participate in and enjoy expressing themselves through a variety of creative arts;*
- *Demonstrate social skills, interact peacefully with others and work in a team;*
- *Express themselves in Kinyarwanda including using a vocabulary appropriate to their level.*

²⁴ MoE Rwanda (2015) "The Curriculum Framework". https://reb.rw/fileadmin/competence_based_curriculum/pre_primary_syllabuse.html

²⁵ MoE Rwanda (2011) "Early Childhood Development Policy". White Paper.

Expanding quality comprises aspects of structure and process. These cases show that addressing both can secure quality. In addition, the quality of learning outcomes has been ensured within a clear curriculum framework and with explicit threshold competences on completion of the pre-primary phase.

Both cases show a clear connection to SDG Target 4.2 in the provision of quality pre-primary education.



Section 5: Data, monitoring and evaluation for a quality ECCE system

This final section presents processes of data-building, monitoring and evaluation as integral to strengthening multi-sectoral ECCE systems oriented to ensuring children's right to quality ECCE services. It also discusses quality assurance and whole-system indicators of quality.

Monitoring and evaluation processes can be an influential force to foster quality in early ECCE programmes by establishing facts, trends and evidence about how countries are progressing towards SDG target 4.2, with regard to provision of quality and equity. In addition, monitoring and evaluation processes enable changes or adaptations during implementation to ensure that the outcomes and goals are in sight and achievable.

Monitoring is understood as the process of systematically tracking aspects of ECCE services, staff, child development and curriculum implementation, with a view to strengthening data collection, accountability and enhancing effectiveness or quality.²⁶ A careful selection of indicators can help in monitoring implementation of programmes and the employment conditions and performance of the workforce, increasing access with equity (targeting underserved groups), improving practice and child outcomes, and overall strengthening ECCE and the education system.²⁷ Information on structure and process indicators contributes to increased knowledge on the level of quality provision.

26 OECD (2015) *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233515-en>

27 OECD (2018) "Data and Monitoring to Improve Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care?" in OECD (ed.) *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.

Key messages – Section 5

Building integrated and multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation must be based on a rights-based and common-good approach to quality ECCE.

The purpose of integrated and multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation systems is to establish and improve the quality of the ECCE system.

As lead agencies for ECCE policy, MoEs must ensure data, monitoring and evaluation systems combine diverse sources of information and are compatible across sectors and government departments.

Systematic collection of data is crucial for understanding and improving system performance at every level.

Systematic monitoring of all aspects of ECCE services requires careful selection of indicators at all levels of the ECCE system.

Indicators to monitor ECCE system quality are based on elements of structural quality, process quality and ECCE governance with a focus on policy input, outputs, outcomes and impact.

Quality assurance processes and tools must be culturally appropriate to validly monitor and evaluate outcomes across the ECCE system.

Selected example of encouraging/good practice from a Commonwealth member country

The selected encouraging/good practice case study below presents an example of monitoring and evaluation processes and structures (quality assurance and regulation) in an approach to strengthen existing ECCE programme evaluation systems in Jamaica.

Case study: ECC regulation in Jamaica²⁸

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) was established by the ECC Act 2003, in keeping with the strategic goal of the Government of Jamaica to improve the quality of early childhood care, education and development within the early childhood sector.

The ECC, which is an agency of the MoE, co-ordinates all activities, development plans and programmes within the early childhood sector. This integrated approach is critical, as it serves to reduce fragmentation and duplication and has placed under one institutional umbrella the regulations, standards and policies that govern the sector.

The operations of the ECC are undertaken primarily by three departments – Regulation and Monitoring, Sector Support Services and Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination – which seek to ensure the effective implementation of policies and programmes within the early childhood sector.

The Regulation and Monitoring Department has responsibility for the registration of early childhood institutions, and monitors their operations, to ensure compliance with the regulations and standards governing the sector. The Sector Support Services Department provides developmental support to early childhood institutions and early childhood practitioners. The Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Department collaborates with government ministries and sector partners to co-ordinate ECD programmes, as well as to provide support for community intervention initiatives.

Currently, there are just under 2,800 early childhood institutions in operation in Jamaica. Under the Early Childhood Act 2005, such an institution is defined as any place that cares for four or more children, under the age of six, for up to six hours per day. This includes nurseries, daycare centres, basic schools, kindergartens, infant schools and infant departments.

The Early Childhood Act and the Early Childhood Regulations 2005 describe the requirements that an early childhood institution must meet in order to be registered by the ECC as a legally operating institution. The laws ensure that all ECIs provide the services that children need to grow and develop well. To guide compliance with the Act and Regulations, the ECC has developed a detailed document called “Standards for the Operation, Management and Administration of Early Childhood Institutions”, which is distributed to early childhood institutions upon registration.

This case has provided an example of how a monitoring and evaluation system works in practice. The example also shows that monitoring and evaluation of learning is part of the role of the ECC, which is the central body for ECCE in Jamaica.

In monitoring and evaluating all aspects of provision, there is a clear connection to SDG Target 4.2.

²⁸ <https://ecc.gov.jm/about-us/>



Key resources

The following documents and articles represent key resources; these are presented with corresponding hyperlinks where possible, for ease of access.

- Early Learning Partnership (2016) “Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Programs”. Guidance Note, August. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/474431473958525937/pdf/108285-REVISED-PUBLIC-ELP-GN-MeasuringQuality-CEP.pdf>
- EU (2021) “Early Childhood Education and Care and the Covid-19 Pandemic. Understanding and Managing the Impact of the Crisis on the Sector”.
- Gustaffson-Wright, E., Smith, K. and Gardiner, S. (2017) *Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development: The Role of Publicly Funded Private Provision*. Washington, DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
- Kenny, C. and Yang, G. (2021) *The Global Childcare Workload from School and Preschool Closures During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Washington, DC: CGD. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/global-childcare-workload-school-and-preschool-closures-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- Neuman, M. and Devercelli, A. (2013) *What Matters Most for Early Childhood Development: A Framework Paper*. SABER Working Paper. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20174>
- OECD (2018) “Data and Monitoring to Improve Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care”. in OECD (ed.) *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- Pearson, E., Hendry, H., Rao, N. et al. (2018) “Reaching Expert Consensus on Training Different Cadres in Delivering Early Childhood Development at Scale in Low-Resource Contexts”. London: DFID. <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/reaching-expert-consensus-on-training-different-cadres-in-delivering-early-childhood-development>
- UN (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Children*. Policy Brief. New York: UN. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf
- UNESCO (2016) “Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Asia-Pacific Region:

A Resource Pack”. Bangkok: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246050>

- UNESCO (2021) *Recovering Lost Learning: What Can Be Done Quickly and at Scale?* Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377841>
- UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*. Global Report. New York: UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/>
- Urban, M., Cardini, A., Costin, C. et al. (2020) *Upscaling Community Based Early Childhood Programmes to Counter Inequality and Foster Social Cohesion During Global Uncertainty*. T20 Policy Brief. https://t20saudiarabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF4_PB5
- WHO, UNICEF and World Bank (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential*. Geneva: WHO.
- *The Lancet Series: Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale*. <https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016>
- The Heckman Equation: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>
- The Standardized Early Childhood Development Costing Tool: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/standardized-ecd-costing-tool.pdf>

Further reading

- “Laying the Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka”. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/laying-foundation-early-childhood-education-sri-lanka>
- Further reading of other examples of Commonwealth member countries (e.g. Australia). <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>
- Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes tool. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248053>
- National Quality Standard, Victoria, Australia. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/regulation/NQSDescriptorTable.pdf>
- “Quality Education for Confident Futures”. Malta. <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/qa.aspx>
- New Zealand Education Review Office. <https://ero.govt.nz/>



The Commonwealth

