



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Commission and OECD boost co-operation on improving education and care for Europe's youngest

Brussels, 24 January 2012 – The European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are stepping up their co-operation on policy initiatives to improve the quality and accessibility of early childhood education and care across Europe. One of the first examples of their enhanced collaboration is a high-level meeting taking place today in Oslo (Norway), where politicians, policy-makers and researchers will explore how to make policies for the youngest work in practice.

The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, said: *"I very much welcome the fact that the Commission is reinforcing its cooperation with the OECD to help our Member States improve education and care for our youngest children and make it more equitable. Investing in our youngest citizens is the best investment that we can make for our children and for Europe's future."*

The Commission is represented at today's meeting, which is jointly hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the OECD, by the Commission's Director-General for Education and Culture, Jan Trzuszczński.

Compulsory education for youngsters starts at the age of 5 or 6 in most EU countries, though earlier in Cyprus, Luxembourg and Northern Ireland (UK). The level of services provided for young children up to the start of compulsory education varies considerably across Europe in terms of funding, governance and staffing.

Given the complexity of the different systems and rules currently governing early childhood education and care, the European Commission and the OECD intend to jointly look into ways of identifying best policy practice from their member countries, which include non-European states such as the US, Canada, Japan and South Korea.

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Through the new ["Erasmus for All" programme](#), proposed by the Commission for 2014-20, there would be more opportunities for support to innovation and quality improvement at all levels of education across the EU. The programme will also support projects and partnerships in the field of early childhood education and care.

Next steps

Later this year the Commission will launch a new expert policy group that will look into ways of improving the quality and accessibility of early childhood education and care in Europe. Set up at the request of EU Education Ministers, the new group will work initially for two years and will report back in the first half of 2014. As part of its enhanced cooperation with the Commission on this issue, the OECD will join the new group.

Background

In May 2011, EU Education Ministers backed the European Commission's proposals for early childhood education and care in which it called on EU countries to work together for:

- Universal access to quality pre-school education, based on stable funding and good governance
- An integrated approach to education and care, taking account of children's needs in a holistic way
- Age-appropriate curricula with the right balance of hard and soft skills
- More focus on the professionalization of staff with appropriate qualifications, salaries and working conditions
- Quality assurance systems and standards to monitor progress.

More information:

European Commission: [Early Childhood Education and Care](#)

European Commission: "[Early Childhood Education and Care - providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow](#)" [COM(2011) 66, February 2011]

OECD-Norway roundtable "[Starting Strong: Implementing Policies for High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care](#)", Oslo, 23-24 January 2012

Commissioner Vassiliou's website: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/vassiliou/index_en.htm