

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

**Network on Early Childhood Education and Care**

**DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR THE NEW PROJECT: ENCOURAGING QUALITY IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

**OECD NETWORK ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

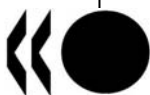
To be held at the OECD Conference Centre, Room CC5  
2 rue André-Pascal, 75016 Paris  
11-12 May 2009

*The Network on Early Childhood Education and Care is invited to:*

- *AGREE on the overarching policy question of the project to be: "How can countries put in place policies that would raise quality in ECEC?"*
- *COMMENT on the dimension of quality and scope of the project.*
- *COMMENT on the new output types.*
- *COMMENT on the financial arrangements.*

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## DRAFT PROJECT PROPOSAL

### Purpose

1. At its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, the Education Policy Committee decided that the Network on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) would be responsible for overseeing the new policy output Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. Last year countries gave this output the highest priority amongst policy outputs and the topic links closely with the other activities of the Network.
2. As a result, the Network is invited to define the scope and output results of the new policy output, which should be of high relevance to OECD member countries. This paper sets out a draft project plan for the project.

### Why quality?

3. Early childhood education and care has been a growing priority in many countries and is recognised as making an important contribution to a wide range of social, economic and educational goals, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning for all, and promoting more equitable outcomes and increased intergenerational mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the quality of ECEC.
4. Earlier OECD work on ECEC-- Starting Strong I & II -- already produced a set of policy orientations (see Annex 1). These are all directly or indirectly related to encouraging quality. The challenge now is to take that work further by focussing on the following overarching policy question "**How can countries put in place policies that would raise quality in ECEC?**"

### Dimension of quality

5. Definitions of quality differ across countries and across different stakeholder groups (Moss and Pence, 1994; Dahlberg et al., 1999) and national definitions should be interpreted with caution and sensitivity when comparing cross-country practices. At its last meeting, the Network agreed that "defining quality" is most challenging and suggested to group quality indicators into: 1) outcome indicators; 2) input indicators, and 3) process indicators. Of the existing quality indicators, the project will need to define and refine the scope of quality that it will investigate.

### *Outcome indicators*

6. Since the 1990s, research has investigated the returns on investment in early childhood services to justify public expenditure. Besides social, economic and labour market returns, educational outcomes have been often found.<sup>1</sup> Such outcomes include: well-being, socio-emotional developments, citizenship, preparation for school, long-term academic achievements, etc. Starting Strong I broadly categorised them into two goals or outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Andersson, 1992; Jarousse et al., 1992; Borman and Hewes, 2002; Mass and Barnett, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2002; New Zealand Council of Educational Research, 2004; Sylva et al., 2003; Belfield et al., 2005.

- Goals in specific developmental areas, e.g. physical and socio-emotional development; and
- Subject and learning areas, e.g. communication and language skills, art, emergent literacy, etc.

7. It will be difficult to separate each of these skills or developments because a child develops such skills in a complex, interactive developmental process. To complete the project within the suggested timeline and with available resources, it is proposed to focus on socio-emotional and language outcomes, leaving aside physical, art, and other developments.

### ***Input indicators (system level) as focus policies***

8. Of the 18 policy orientations of Starting Strong I & II, 10 priority policies (i.e. system-level indicators) to encourage quality are suggested below.

#### Governance, co-ordination and management

1. Take a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation.
2. Provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services.

#### Funding

3. Provide substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure.
4. Base public funding on achieving quality pedagogical goals.

#### Research, evaluation, monitoring and data collection

5. Set up a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.
6. Place systematic attention to monitoring and data collection.

#### Teachers

7. Improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff.

#### Organisation, curriculum and pedagogy

8. Develop broad guidelines and curricular standards with the stakeholders for all ECEC services.
9. Encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services.
10. Implement a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance.

### ***Input indicators (programme level)***

9. Programme-level quality indicators could be useful information to accompany policy tools. The project will aim to answer what constitutes "quality programmes" and what are the common features of quality programmes. The commonly used criteria in Starting Strong I include:

- Sufficient duration and intensity of programmes,
- Appropriate size and composition of children's groups,
- Favourable adult-child ratios,
- Factors linked to the physical design of settings such as the quality of indoor and outdoor-environments, etc.

***Process indicators***

10. Quality may be also defined in terms of process (i.e. what is occurring in programmes and to a child) and Starting Strong I reports process indicators such as:

- Health and safety features,
- Interactions between children and adults,
- Partnerships with parents,
- Learning and social opportunities offered, etc.

11. Due to the limited time, the project will include "partnerships with parents" as a priority process indicator.

***Target levels***

12. Several delegates expressed an interest in focusing on quality initiatives "under age 3"; however, others stated that it is very difficult to collect data. Early childhood services for this age group are under-regulated in many countries and policy approaches are changing rapidly due to the increased public spending, expanding access, changing parental leave policy, etc. as Starting Strong II points out.

13. Structurally, some countries regard the age range from 0 to 6 as "a continuum" and the main responsibility is delegated to one ministry, either under education ministry (e.g. New Zealand, Sweden, England) or under social welfare, health and family services (e.g. Denmark, Finland). Others see the spectrum as a dichotomy between 0-3 and 3-6 and different arrangements are put in place such as for governance, regulations, curriculum, pedagogy, and costs for these age groups (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Japan, and France). Moreover, some countries have different regulations for regional entities concerning "under age 3" (e.g. Australia, Canada, the United States, etc.) (Table 4.1 and 4.2 of Starting Strong II).

14. The arrangements are complex to cover age 0-6; however, the project will aim to cover the age spectrum in order to further uncover the complex arrangements and add value to international comparison. The project will also seek added value by collecting information on "under age 3" to investigate quality such as the duration and licensing of the services and qualified staff.

***Proposed new output types***

15. To address the challenges in early childhood education and care effectively, the new project would incorporate two new output types: policy tool box and policy dialogue.

***Rationale for diversifying the output results***

16. The Education and Training Policy Division has been carrying out thematic reviews since 1998.<sup>2</sup> The typical output results of such reviews are policy recommendations, options and orientations. Starting Strong I & II, the thematic review on ECEC, concluded with 18 policy orientations all of which are directly or indirectly related to Encouraging quality in ECEC. The new project would be expected to deliver something new, useful and relevant for countries drawing on what we already know and taking it further. In particular, the real challenge is how to move from policy analysis to successful implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> The themes include: tertiary education, teaching workforce, equity in education, school to work transition, adult learning, guidance and counselling, school leadership, recognition of non-formal and informal learning, vocational education, migrant education, and early childhood education and care (See Annex 1 of [EDU/EDPC(2007)4]).

17. Experiences of high-level officials could guide the project in some new directions. Chief executive officers of the education ministries of OECD member countries met in Korea in 2008 to discuss challenges of policy implementation in education [EDU/EDPC/M(2008)2]. They noted that:

- Evidence is most helpful when it is fed back to institutions along with information and tools about how they can use the information.
- Policymakers need to build consensus on the aims of education reform and actively engage stakeholders...in formulating and implementing the policy responses.

### ***Policy tool box***

18. The policy tool box will aim to be a "practical approach" for policymakers. First, the box will pool the evidence and policy orientations in Starting Strong I & II that are most relevant to encouraging quality. Second, the evidence and policy orientations will be translated or transformed into practical policy tools.

19. For instance, one policy orientation of Starting Strong II is "Implement a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance: define, ensure and monitor quality in a participatory manner that engages staff, parents and children". This is a very broad and somewhat aspirational policy orientation, which allows countries to find their own ways to achieve the goal. The policy tool box would provide information and tools about how to achieve the goal, including options found in Starting Strong II such as:

- Rating systems: rating scale or guidelines that can be used as instruments for self-evaluation and quality improvement. (e.g. Australia, the Flemish community in Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States).
- Formative evaluation in centres: regular self-evaluation by early childhood education and care centres may help encourage discussion and reflection by staff; the self-evaluation is supported and validated by external trained professionals (e.g. Australia, the United Kingdom).
- Documentation: documentation of work sampling, child portfolio, observations on the child, etc. by staff and parents serves not only as artefacts or trace for parents of what their children have been doing but also a way to bring research into classrooms (e.g. Italy, Sweden).
- Parental involvement: channels between teachers and parents to communicate about child; for teachers to provide information about programmes and services to parents; for teachers to visit homes; for parents to visit ECEC centres/ kindergartens; etc.

20. Countries have adopted some or all of the policy orientations suggested in Starting Strong I & II. But while some considerable efforts have been made, countries are still at different stages of implementation and new initiatives have emerged. Regardless of which stages they are in, countries might find it useful to know about available tools and the steps other countries have taken towards each goal. It would also be useful to complement the tools with evidence, if any, of which tools are working well and under what conditions.

21. The policy tool box will aim to go beyond presenting evidence and policy suggestions. The new project will aim to shift from 'what' to 'how' and deliver a set to policy tools that will help implement policies to encourage quality.

### ***Policy dialogue as an output in itself***

22. The OECD has become increasingly aware of the importance of dialogue and engagement of stakeholders for making change happen. Indeed, Starting Strong II concluded by noting that:

“A major underlying lesson from the OECD reviews is that sound policy cannot be a quick fix from outside but more a matter of democratic consensus generated by careful consultation with the major stakeholders. Official policy in the early childhood field can meet resistance or be ignored unless it is based on prior consultations with the major stakeholders, and provides a pace for local initiative and experimentation.”

23. At the same time, the OECD’s relevance and value-added increasingly comes not from desk-based analysis and policy recommendations, but from working alongside countries in developing good policy design and successful implementation plans. This includes the active engagement of key stakeholders and facilitating the process of identifying priorities and drawing up action plans in each country or jurisdiction. This approach extends further the methodology used for the review of Migrant Education and the insights gained on where the OECD can add value (see Box).

#### **Box. Policy Review of Migrant Education**

The importance of careful consultation and consensus building may be a common issue to any theme and country experience with a recent review on migrant education may imply that policy dialogue as a new output type in and of itself. Some countries pointed out that there were few surprises in the findings of the OECD policy review visit on strengths, challenges and possible policy options, however, the process of the OECD review visit itself was an added value [EDU/EDPC/MI/M(2009)1].

First, the visit helped to identify relevant stakeholders and created rare opportunities for the Ministry to meet with them. It was noted that the visit sparked new interest among certain groups, provided a new area for discussions among those who would not meet with each other or the Ministry if it was not for the OECD. A visit of an external body would be critically important when a debate on the theme is highly politicised or remains sectoral. The OECD could give equal status to different stakeholders.

Second, the visit helped to highlight key issues, among those already known, as a result of a consultation with key stakeholders. It helped countries to crystallise priorities and get them firmly on the policy agenda.

Third, the visit helped to carry forward the strategy and justify research. The OECD could facilitate evidence based discussions drawing on international research and country experiences and could hopefully help raise awareness of the issues in the immediate community and in society.

24. Highlighting the positive country experiences with the visit process in Migrant Education, the policy dialogue in ECEC will aim to facilitate focused dialogue among those key stakeholders in each country or region, and crystallise priorities, bringing into the dialogue, international perspectives and evidence. In each country or region, participants would develop their agreement of priorities or action plan to take policies forward.

25. The OECD policy dialogue in each country would be developed in conjunction with the authorities. It would involve a preparation phase, where the OECD team would tailor materials and tools to the specific country circumstances, one or more policy forums conducted in the country and a write-up of the action plan.

#### **Planned outputs, expected tasks and suggested timeline**

26. The project is intended to comprise the following four stages (with an optional follow-up activity). Each phase will have specific outputs and tasks.

***Phase I: Developing the Knowledge Base (Q4 2009 – Q1 2010)***

27. Phase I will aim to establish a solid knowledge base on quality in ECEC, building on existing work and research on quality. The knowledge base will include most relevant policy options that will encourage quality and factors that affect quality. It also aims to lay out the project's analytical and logistical framework.

28. There are three intermediate outputs in this phase:

- The analytical framework
- The knowledge-base on quality ECEC
- The guidelines for policy dialogue and for communication strategy

29. The expected tasks in this phase will include:

- Developing an analytical framework, linking:
  - policies and programmes that encourage quality;
  - factors that affect quality;
  - quality in outcomes.
- Stock-taking of existing research (e.g. indicators, literature reviews, existing policy recommendations, etc.)<sup>3</sup>
- Refining 'quality' indicators (input, process and outcomes)
- Updating country profiles and collecting additional country information through the Network
- Refining policy options that will encourage quality in ECEC
- Developing the guidelines for the organisation of the preparatory country visits and the policy dialogue forum and for the effective communication strategy
- Inviting countries to select the most important issue(s) to be tackled in their policy dialogue forum

***Phase II: Developing the Policy Tool Box (Q2 2010)***

30. Phase II will aim to translate and transform the knowledge base into a box of practical policy tools for policy makers (See section on Policy tool box.) The Policy Tool Box will be one major output of the project.

31. The expected tasks in this phase will be identifying effective policy tools (with any evaluative information, if any, on the tools).

***Phase III: Facilitating Policy Dialogue (Q3 2010 – Q2 2011)***

32. In this phase, the OECD will aim to work with individual countries in collaboratively analysing policy design and implementation. This collaboration would include all the major stakeholders, recognising that their involvement is critical to both finding the best policy design and getting the buy-in necessary for successful implementation.

33. In some countries quality in ECEC, in part or in whole, often falls in regional rather than national level responsibility. Subject to the approval of national authorities, it may make sense for the region(s) rather than a country to participate in the exercise and be the subject of policy dialogue(s).

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3. It will aim to bring together the work carried out by the OECD (e.g. *Starting Strong I&II*, *Babies and Bosses*, *Family Database*, *Child Database*, *Wiki-Child* and other work on families and child well-being, etc.) as well as the work done by other organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, EU, etc.)



34. In each country that opts for a policy dialogue, one or more policy dialogue forums will be organised in the country, facilitated by the OECD. These national (or state) forums would be tasked with building consensus on the policy goals and objectives, agreeing on priorities, and/or developing a concise, action-oriented policy plan to underpin the decision-making or policy implementation process in the country.

35. There are two outputs in this phase:

- The policy dialogue forum(s)
- The action-oriented summary of the forum (Action Plan, Agreement of Priorities, etc.)

36. The expected tasks in this phase would be carried out in three steps.

*Step 1: Planning with Country*

37. The country and the OECD will mutually agree on the focus (key policy issue) of policy dialogue, target stakeholders, logistics and timeline. The OECD will:

- Conduct a preparatory country visit and carry out a needs assessment with the country;
- Discuss the OECD's preliminary diagnosis (building on country profiles);
- Clarify country context (political dimensions, stakeholder involvement, etc); and
- Prepare country-specific workshop tools and materials (using the policy tool box) and a policy dialogue strategy plan, based on the agreed focus and timeline.

*Step 2: Conducting one or more policy dialogue forums.*

38. Each forum would typically be a two-day event with a maximum of around 100 participants (the details to be mutually agreed with the country). Some countries may wish to hold only one policy forum, while others may wish to hold more than one, aiming to build consensus or establish networks at different levels (national or state), with different target groups (policymakers, kindergarten/centre owners, researchers unions, etc), or conduct repeat events to widen coverage and include more participants. Depending on the stage of policy development and country-specific context, countries might wish to concentrate on building consensus on one or all of the items below:

- Principles and goals;
- Priorities to tackle;
- Action plan

*Step 3: Delivering a post-forum action-oriented policy plan.*

39. The OECD would prepare a summary of the discussions at the forum(s) and deliver a concise, action-oriented policy plan. It can be an agreement of priorities, summary of points of agreement and differences, and/or an action plan for implementation.

***Phase IV: Roundtable and synthesis***

40. After a round of national policy dialogues had been held, the OECD could hold a roundtable among countries to exchange country experience and draw out general lessons that would benefit all countries. These could be synthesised into a short publication.

***Optional: Phase IV: Follow-up***

41. If countries wish, a follow-up exercise may be designed in the future to assess progress on implementing their action plans.

**Participation and costs*****Participation***

42. All OECD countries are encouraged to participate in the meetings of the Network, respond to questionnaires, when requested, to update country profiles and share country practices, and help disseminate the results from the work as the work proceeds.

***Budget***

43. As the project is highly rated by the Education Policy Committee, appropriate assessed contributions have been allocated to carry out the core part of the desk-based work (i.e. establishment of the Knowledge Base and the policy tool box). However, a more comprehensive tool box could be developed if countries made voluntary contributions to support its development. For example, 15 countries contributing 10 000 EUR each would finance an additional senior analyst to work on developing and refining the tool box.

44. Countries may also request a policy dialogue in their country at a cost of 50 000 EUR for one policy forum (including a contribution towards the development of the tool box). An illustrative budget, based on assumptions about the level of country participation, is set out in Annex 2. If a country wished to have several forums in their policy dialogue then the cost per forum would be lower depending on the scope to realise economies of scale (see Table below). Countries will be expected to bear the travel costs to accompany the preparatory visit and the visit of policy forum(s). In-kind contributions may be appropriate to host a policy dialogue forum(s).

	<b>Total contribution per country</b>
<b>Option 1: One forum</b>	EUR 50 000
<b>Option 2: Two forums (organised in a series)</b>	EUR 65 000
<b>Option 3: Two forums (organised separately)</b>	EUR 80 000
<b>Option 4: Three forums (organised in a series)</b>	EUR 80 000
<b>Option 5: Three forums (organised separately)</b>	EUR 110 000

## ANNEX 1: POLICY ORIENTATIONS FROM STARTING STRONG I & II

Eight policy orientations from the first round of thematic review on early childhood education and care Starting Strong I, completed in 2001.

1. **Take a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation:** It is important to set a clear vision for children from birth to 8; co-ordinated policy frameworks at centralized and decentralised levels; and strong links across services, professionals, and parents also promote coherence for children.
2. **Build a strong and equal partnership with the education system:** it will supports a lifelong learning approach from birth, encourage smooth transitions for children, and recognise ECEC as an important part of the education process. Strong partnerships with the education system provide the opportunity to bring together the diverse perspectives and methods of both ECEC and schools, focusing on the strengths of both approaches.
3. **A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support:** while access to ECEC is close to universal for children from age 3, more attention to policy (including parental leave) and provision for infants and toddlers is necessary. It is important to ensure equitable access, such that all children have equal opportunities to attend quality ECEC, regardless of family income, parental employment status, special educational needs or ethnic/language background.
4. **Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure:** while ECEC may be funded by a combination of sources, there is a need for substantial government investment to support a sustainable system of quality, accessible services. Governments need to develop clear and consistent strategies for efficiently allocating scarce resources, including investment in an infrastructure for long-term planning and quality enhancement efforts.
5. **Implement a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance:** defining, ensuring, and monitoring quality should be a participatory and democratic process that engages staff, parents, and children. There is a need for regulatory standards for all forms of provision supported by co-ordinated investment. Pedagogical frameworks focusing on children's holistic development across the age group can support quality practice.
6. **Provide appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision:** quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector. Initial and in-service training might be broadened to take into account the growing educational and social responsibilities of the profession. There is a critical need to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable.
7. **Place systematic attention to monitoring and data collection:** it may require coherent procedures to collect and analyse data on the status of young children, ECEC provision, and the early childhood workforce. International efforts are necessary to identify and address the existing data gaps in the field and the immediate priorities for data collection and monitoring.
8. **Establish a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation:** as part of a continuous improvement process, there needs to be sustained investment to support research on key policy goals. The research agenda also could be expanded to include disciplines and methods that are currently underrepresented. A range of strategies to disseminate research findings to diverse audiences should be explored.

Ten policy orientations from the second round of thematic review on early childhood education and care Starting Strong II, completed in 2006.

9. **Place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies:** Rather than ECEC being an adjunct to labour market policies with weak development agendas or an under-resourced "Cinderella" education service, it needs to have the child and its well-being and learning at the core.
10. **Aspire towards ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy:** The touchstones of a democratic approach are to extend the agency of the child and right of parents to be involved in the education of their children; learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn, and learning to live together are the critical elements to be promoted in each child.
11. **Provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services:** Within the parameters of system-wide goals and guidelines, educators and services should have the autonomy to plan and to choose curricula for the children in their care; policy should provide the means for staff to exercise such autonomy and participatory approaches.
12. **Develop broad guidelines and curricular standards with the stakeholders for all ECEC services:** Guiding frameworks – especially when they have been developed together by the key stakeholders - help to promote a more even quality across ECEC, to guide and support professional staff, and facilitate communication between staff and families.
13. **Base public funding on achieving quality pedagogical goals:** Most countries need to double their annual investment per child to ensure child-staff ratios and qualified staff on some parity with the primary sector; the investment should be directed to achieving quality pedagogical goals rather than simply aiming to create sufficient places.
14. **Improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff:** the OECD reviews found a number of common weaknesses that need attention: Low recruitment and pay levels, particularly in child care services; lack of certification in specialist early childhood pedagogy; excessive feminisation of staff; lack of diversity of staff to reflect neighbourhood diversity.
15. **Create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance:** These include such elements as strong expert policy units, data collection and monitoring capacity, an evaluation agency, and a pedagogical advisory or inspection corps.
16. **Attend to the social context of early childhood development:** Well organised services should work towards a broad but realistic vision to which the other stakeholders can subscribe, serving at the same time to support parents in child-rearing, facilitate women working, and help social inclusion for low-income and immigrant families.
17. **Encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services:** The continuity of children's experience across the different ECEC environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff members share information and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning; communities are important both as providers and as offering space for partnerships.
18. **Reduce child poverty and exclusion through upstream fiscal, social and labour policies and increase resources within universal programmes for children with diverse learning rights:** research indicates the effectiveness of universal programmes for children with different disabilities and disadvantages, combined with enhanced funding and investment in quality services, rather than targeted programmes which serve to segregate and stigmatise.

## ANNEX 2: PLANNED EXPENDITURES ON COUNTRY POLICY DIALOGUES

Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) will be financed by a combination of the assessed contributions of the OECD Part I Budget and voluntary contributions of 50 000 EUR from countries that will participate in organising one policy dialogue forum.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 below provides a typical breakdown of how the voluntary contributions of 50 000 EUR per country will be spent. It is assumed that countries requesting a policy dialogue will also make a voluntary contribution of 10 000 EUR towards the development of the tool box, which is included in the 50 000 EUR. A revised full budget for the project will be circulated once the number of participating countries has been finalised.

**Table 1. Total estimated costs and breakdown of tasks and costs required for each output  
Per country review (EUR)**

<b>Output 1: Policy Tool Box</b>		
Contribution towards development of toolbox		<b>10,000</b>
<b>Output 2: Policy Dialogue (OECD staff costs, overhead and direct costs for the production of materials produced for the country prior to and after each forum)</b>		
Developing policy dialogue framework for the national/state forum through pre-visit consultation, country specific needs assessment	15,000	} <b>40,000</b>
Prepare seminar material (tools tailored to the country) prior to the forum	10,000	
Facilitating the forum	9,000	
Preparing and disseminating the output of the forum	6,000	
<b>Total</b>		<b>50,000</b>

4. Two forums (organised in a series) will cost 65K; two forums (separate), 80K; three forums (in a series), 80K; and three forums (separate), 110K.

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