

The early years: what practitioners and policy makers need to know

Early years briefing

BRIEFING PAPER 7

HOW THEY DID IT: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN SLOVENIA AND NORWAY.

"We will set out the steps we need to take to increase childcare support here in Scotland to match the best elsewhere in Europe."
 Scottish National Party manifesto

European research¹ has found that countries with the lowest levels of child poverty and the highest levels of child wellbeing are defined by having universal, high quality and integrated² systems of Early Childhood Education and Care. The basis for this investment is a recognition that high quality universal services are the best means to improve the lives of all children, with the understanding that some children and families will need additional support above and beyond that possible through universal provision.

This briefing summarises the experience of two very different European countries that have invested, and have achieved the kind of 'transformational change' in early years provision to which Scotland aspires. This underscores the reality that such improvements are not merely desirable, but attainable.

The European countries that have blazed the trail for Scotland have done so using a universalist, rights-based approach. This briefing should be read in conjunction with Children in Scotland's special report on how integrated Early Childhood Education and Care can be achieved in Scotland,³ and *Early Years Briefing No. 6*.⁴

This briefing focuses on the legislative and investment approaches used to develop early years provision in Slovenia and Norway, in order to inform the Scottish Government's consideration of legislation to "increase childcare support in Scotland to match the best elsewhere in Europe."⁵

Universal provision

UNICEF's Report Card 8,⁶ published in 2008, examined policies and provision for the rights and wellbeing of young children in the most economically advanced countries in the world.

In common with the OECD Starting Strong reviews (I and II),⁷ *Report Card 8* emphasises the need for an integrated and universal approach to Early Childhood Education and Care. It highlighted research showing that targeted programmes for disadvantaged children, such as Head Start (US) and Sure Start (UK), reach only one-third to one-half of their intended target groups.

Universal early childhood services have many of the same advantages as universally available, government-funded primary and secondary school: bringing together children from different backgrounds, commanding broad and sustainable public support and engendering greater public concern for quality.

It suggests that the way forward lies in "universal services with flexible financing systems that can give priority to the disadvantaged by increasing per capita expenditure where need is greatest."⁸

Young children's rights

High quality investment in Early Childhood Education and Care from birth is essential to ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is implemented for young children. The 2005 UN special early years report *Implementing child rights in early childhood*⁹ urged countries to recognise young children's right to have government investment in education, to construct high-quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes and services and to support the central features of positive child rearing and early childhood development.

The Committee emphasised that it saw the right to education as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to benefit from a standard for living adequate for healthy child development (Article 27).

Slovenia – in profile

Slovenia established its first national programme for children from 1 to 6 in 1979. During the 1990s, Slovenia began to invest in the early years workforce, and develop a national curriculum. Slovenia now has a fully integrated early years system with a legal entitlement for all children to a subsidised full day place in a service following the end of paid maternity/paternity care at 12 months.

**Population: 2 million
 GDP: 89% of EU average
 Child wellbeing: 7th in Europe
 % of Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 10.9%
 Source: Working for Inclusion.¹⁰**

How did Slovenia do it?

Universal framework. When Slovenia formed part of the former Yugoslavia, pre-school services were intended to provide care for the children of employed parents and equalise educational opportunities for men and women. In 1993, as part of a wider process of educational reform and investment, responsibility for pre-school services was transferred from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Sport, which has overall responsibility for services. This had the beneficial effect of shifting the focus from parents' needs to children's rights to education and social development, regardless of parental status, income or residence.

In 1995, a number of Curricular Commissions were established in Slovenia for different levels of education, including pre-school. A Curricular Commission for Pre-school Institutions, with a broad membership including psychologists, educationalists, researchers and other experts, developed a new democratised curriculum and delivery framework. This had universal children's rights at its heart, recognising the need for flexibility and respecting individual differences, rather than the previous 'same for all' approach to equality. The curriculum was holistic, covering all activities that take place in early childhood centres, including such daily routines as eating and sleeping.

National funding formula, local mechanisms.

Local authorities are the main funders and direct providers of services under regulation provided by two Acts; the 1996 Organisation and Financing of Education and Training Act 1996 (which regulates all levels of education), and the 1996 Preschools Institutions Act, which covers both public and private pre-school institutions.

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring adequate numbers of places in pre-school services, providing funding and subsidising fees. They decide the level of fees locally, taking account of national regulations on pricing and parental income. Support from government funding has recently been increased as a proportion of the national budget.

Since 2000, parents have been required to pay no more than 80%, but no less than 10%, of the cost of the early years services received. Families with low incomes, or with other disadvantages may be exempt from payment or receive further subsidies and have priority in accessing services.

Investment and specified funding. Slovenia has made a substantial investment in workforce development. All pre-school teachers must now hold a 3-year degree qualification in pre-primary education or a 4-year university degree in another field with a specialisation in pre-primary education. Social pedagogy has spread through Slovenia with many more pedagogues now working in Early Childhood Education and Care settings.¹¹

Local authorities fund services, but additional funds are provided for specialist services for children in hospitals, for children with additional support needs and to provide extra investment in local Italian and Roma communities.

Attendance rates and evaluation. Long-term evaluation is ongoing, but initial findings suggest early entry into education and care has contributed to positive outcomes; for example, reducing the differences in language competence of children whose mothers had lower levels of education.

High numbers of Slovenian women work, which suggest families continue to use informal support or a combination of care providers. However, 49% of children aged 1 to 3 are enrolled in an Early Childhood Education and Care setting, and 90% of 3-5 year olds access an education setting (with 81% attending 30 hours or more a week).

Norway - in profile

Over the 15 years since the 1995 Kindergarten Act, Norway's pre-school services have developed into a fully integrated Early Childhood Education and Care system with (from 2009) a legal entitlement to all children to a subsidised full day place in a service following the end of paid maternity/paternity care at 12 months.

Population: 4.6 million
GDP: 179% of EU average
Child wellbeing: 4th in Europe
% Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 6.7%
Source: Working for Inclusion.¹²

How did Norway do it?

Universal framework. The 1995 Day Care Institution Act set out a national curriculum and described the characteristics of a good kindergarten; a service offering education and care for all children from the age of one. A 1999 White Paper, *Kindergarten for the good of children and parents*, set out the aim of offering a full day kindergarten place to every child with priority given to children with additional support needs. As with Slovenia, it should be understood that parents are not required to send their young children to such settings, but that they are entitled to if they wish, and that what is on offer is of a high quality.

The Norwegian Government's White Paper recommended services be close to where families live, that they be flexible and have a holistic approach to education and care. This was to be implemented, not remain an aspiration.

Accordingly, a 3-year period of quality development was initiated and resources allocated to research and development. In

If you have any comments about this briefing or suggestions about professional practice or strategy, then please contact Sara Collier at scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk or on 0131 222 2412.

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References

- (1, 10 and 12) Children in Scotland (2008-2010). *Working for Inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*. www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi
- (2) Integrated systems: One government department has responsibility for all aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care (funding, regulation/inspection, data collection, curriculum/service planning, and staff education and professional development, pay and conditions). Entitlement to provision dovetails with the national entitlements to paid maternity and paternity leave.
- (3 and 14) Children in Scotland (2011) Special Report: *Integrated Early Childhood Education and Care in Scotland*. www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/hom_poly.htm
- (4 and 15) Children in Scotland, (2011) *Early Years Briefing No. 6 Legislating to improve outcomes for children in Scotland*.
- (5) In depth descriptions of each country's structure and provision for Early Childhood Education and Care is available free online www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi
- (6) Unicef, (2008) *Innocenti Report Card 8: The Child Care Transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries*, http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8_eng.pdf
- (7) OECD, *Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care* http://www.oecd.org/document/3/0,3746,en_2649_39263231_27000067_1_1_1_1_00.html
- (8) IBID 4, p18
- (9) United Nations (2005) General Comment no. 7 (2005) *Implementing child rights in early childhood* UN special report <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>

2003, a legislative amendment to the existing Day Care Institution Act made the provision of early years services a legal duty of local authorities and, in 2004 an expert group was appointed to prepare for a new Kindergarten Act.

The 2005 Kindergarten Act (or Day Care Institution Act no. 64) stated that kindergartens should be "pedagogical/educational undertakings", while offering support for families in the care and upbringing of their children. It summarises the many purposes served by Early Childhood Education and Care including offering children "opportunities for play, self-expression", "imparting values and culture" and helping to ensure that "all children experience joy and the ability to cope in a social and cultural community."¹²

Responsibility for the entire early childhood sector was transferred to the national Government's Ministry of Education and Research in 2006.

National funding formula, local mechanisms. The Act makes kindergartens responsible for ensuring that there are a sufficient number of places for children under compulsory school age, but still allows for development and modes of operation to be adapted to local conditions and local needs.

The local authority keeps a register for use by national insurance offices for calculating and disbursing cash benefits; administers grants for private and voluntary kindergartens; and, is responsible for a co-ordinated admissions policy and process intended to ensure "equal treatment of children and equal treatment of municipal and privately-owned day care institutions."

The Act prescribes levels of parental fees and discounts for siblings, income-based differentiation of payment and maximum payments, including a cap on parental contributions to childcare costs. Local authorities must have subsidy schemes for low-income parents and offer reductions for second, third and subsequent children.

The Act provides for children having the right to participate: "expressing their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten" and for active parent councils and coordinating

committees. There is also a national framework plan for kindergartens covering the range of expected activities.

Investment and specified funding. Funding to develop services was ring-fenced, gradually becoming part of a block grant determined by local authorities in 2010, once services were well established. National government monitors levels of provision and new developments through local authority representatives.

Attendance rates and evaluation. Norway has invested considerably in its children's workforce and has begun to invest in more university-led research into the impact of kindergarten experiences. Many research studies and surveys are carried out to monitor the quality of education and care.

Norwegians continue to use families and informal service, but 75% of children aged 1 to 2 years are cared for in ECEC regulated services offering flexible part-time and full-time care. 96% of children aged 3 to 5 attend these settings, with 52% attending for more than 30 hours per week.

Scotland - in profile

33% of children under 3, in the UK, attend formal services with only 5% attending for more than 30 hours. For children aged 3 to 5, the numbers are 89% for part-time and 24% for full-time, respectively.

Population: 5.2 million
GDP: 114% for UK, Scotland is just under the UK figure (REF)
Child wellbeing: 24th in Europe for UK, with Scotland considered similarly low and lower in aspects such as child poverty.¹³
Households with children aged 0-6 in poverty: 22.6% (UK)

Further details of the situation in Scotland are outlined in the special report: *Integrated Early Childhood Education and Care in Scotland*.¹⁴

How Scotland can match the best in Europe is discussed in Early Years Briefing Paper 6.¹⁵

- (11) Alenka, (2005) *An evaluation of training in social pedagogy in Slovenia*, The Journal of Child and Youth Care, 20 pp83-92 <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0408-kobolt.html>
- (12) Government of Norway, 2005, Day Care Institution Act no.64 www.ub.uio.no/ujur/ulovdata/lov-20050617-064-eng.pdf
- (13) Barnado's Scotland, (2007) *Index of Wellbeing for Children in Scotland*, http://www.barnardos.org.uk/wellbeing_for_children_in_scotland.pdf

Further reading

- Children in Scotland, (2011) *Early Years Briefing No. 4, Scotland's new government and its promises for young children and their families* http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/EYFbriefingpaper4v3_EYBrief.pdf
- Children in Scotland, (2011) *Early Years Briefing No. 3, The European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care* <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/EYFbriefingpaper3v3.pdf>
- Children in Scotland, (2010) *The Costs of Childcare* https://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/members/docs/Costsofchildcarereport_Layout1.pdf
- Save the Children and the Daycare Trust conducted research into parents' views of the costs of childcare. A report will be published in September 2011. www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland
- Children in Scotland, Working for Inclusion country profiles series:
Norway http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/WFINORWAYA4Report_000.pdf
Slovenia <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/WFISloveniaA4Report.pdf>
Sweden <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/WFISwedenA4Report.pdf>
Denmark <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/WFIDENMARKReportA4.pdf>